

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the Standards Committee** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 28 February 2008 at 10.00 a.m.**

### **PRESENT:**

**Mr E Marchant** in the Chair

### **Members of the Standards Committee:**

Councillors Southwell and Williams.

### **Other Members:**

Councillors Priestley and Wright.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Bell.

### **A1 Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute A6 (Ethical Standards Survey) Members were advised that the action point around raising the awareness of Senior Officers about the role and effectiveness of the Committee was being addressed. The remaining points would be picked up in the Induction Programme being planned for Members immediately following the elections on 1 May 2008.

### **A2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received from members in relation to the business on the agenda.

### **A3 Consultation on Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of Local Authority Members in England**

The Committee noted a report of the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer about the publication of a Communities and Local Government (CLG) Consultation Paper relating to the introduction of a revised, more locally-based ethical Standards regime for the conduct of local councillors in England (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The consultation paper had been published in early January 2008 and addressed the detailed arrangements needed to allow the Standards Board and local Standards Committees to undertake their new roles. These arrangements needed to cover:-

- the operation of standards committees' power to make initial assessments of misconduct allegations;
- the operation of other functions by standards committees and the Adjudication Panel in issuing sanctions;
- the operation of the Standards Board's revised strategic role to provide guidance, support and monitor the regime; and
- the rules on providing dispensations, the issue of exemptions of posts from political restrictions and the pay of local authority political assistants.

A joint response, on behalf of the County Council, Fire and Rescue and Police Authorities, detailed in Appendix 1, had been agreed by the three Standards Committee Chairmen and sent to the CLG to meet the deadline of 15 February 2008.

The new provisions would most likely necessitate an increase the size and composition of the Standards Committee and as a starting point it was intended to seek approval from the three parent authorities to appoint the six Independent Members to all three Standards Committees.

Members discussed the likely impact of these changes and in particular the extra workload for the Standards Committee and they discussed the need to have Parish Council representation when the Unitary Authority came into being.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the action of the Chairman in agreeing the response sent to the CLG on behalf of the County Council, Fire and Rescue and Police Authorities, be endorsed.

**A4 Complaints Handling for the Period October to December 2007**

The Committee noted a report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer which provided details of complaints handling in the Council during the period October to December 2007 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the report be noted.

**A5 Exclusion of the Public**

**Resolved:**

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds

that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

**B6    Review of Completed Complaint Files**

Members of the Committee inspected a sample of completed complaint files for the review period in question.