

At a Joint Meeting of the Standards Committee of Durham County Council, Durham Police Authority and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority held at the County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 27 November 2008 at 10.00 a.m.**

PRESENT:

Mr E Marchant in the Chair

Durham County Council

Councillors Armstrong, A Bainbridge, E Bell, C Carr, G Holland, Jopling, Shiel, Southwell, and Williams.
Mr Balls, Mrs Blythe, Mrs Smith and Mrs Winter.

Durham Police Authority:

Councillor Gray, Mrs E Davies and Mr P Thompson.

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority:

Councillors Campbell and Liddle

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Bell, G Huntington, E Murphy and B Myers.

A1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 August 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

With reference to Minute No. B11 (Local Assessment of Member Complaints) it was reported that the Local Assessment Sub-Committee had met to review the complaints as a result of which Monitoring Officer action would be taken in conjunction with the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

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

A3 Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power – Consultation on Codes of Conduct for Local Authority Members and Employees

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer on the proposed revisions to the code of conduct for local authority members (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

The current code of conduct applied to public or official duties and views were sought to extend this to Members' private lives in certain circumstances. The

consultation paper questions and suggested responses were attached as an Appendix to the report.

The consultation paper also asked whether an employee code of conduct, which would be incorporated into employees' terms and conditions of employment, was needed. This response would be dealt with by the Head of Human Resources in consultation with Corporate Management Team. If there was a need for this to be implemented a further report would be brought to the Committee.

The Committee discussed at length each of the questions and suggested responses outlined in the Appendix of the report. Some concerns were raised in relation to minor public order offences and Members were advised that further guidance on this would be issued by the Standards Board.

Resolved:

That the suggested responses to the consultation paper be agreed and further guidance from the Standards Board be welcomed.

A4 Local Government Reorganisation Update

The Acting Director of Corporate Services provided an update on LGR preparations with an impact on the Committee. The terms of office for Independent Members would expire on 31 March 2009 and a public advert would soon be issued to recruit new Independent Members and a cross party panel would be set up to select new Members. The panel's recommendations would be reported to the Full Council.

Arrangements were also in hand to include Parish Council representatives on the Committee.

A new Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure was being developed and would be shared with members as soon as available.

A5 Annual Report of Representations 2007/2008

The Committee considered a Report from the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services on performance in respect of the handling and consideration of representations as contained in the attached Annual Report on Representations 2007/2008 (for copy see file of Minutes).

In 2007/08 a total of 170 representations had been made, 89 relating to statutory representations. Of these 61 were formal complaints, 26 were compliments and 2 were comments. 81 related to non-statutory representations, 11 of these were complaints and the remainder compliments.

Overall, the performance showed that the number of statutory complaints had reduced and the number of statutory compliments had increased. The number of non-statutory complaints and compliments had increased.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and endorsed for publication and circulation to key stakeholders and the Service be commended for its efforts to improve performance.

A6 Complaints handling for the period July to September 2008

The Committee noted a Report of the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer providing details of complaints handling during the period July to September 2008 (for copy of report see file of Minutes).

Between the first and second quarters of 2008/09 complaints had increased from 65 to 72. Poor service and staff conduct continued to account for the majority of complaints. 285 compliments had been received during the latest quarter, the highest figure recorded since collecting this data.

Members were also advised on reforms to the Statutory Complaints procedure for Adult and Community Services which were intended to be more personalised and outcome-focussed.

B7 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

B8 Review of Completed Complaints

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