

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 11 November 2013 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Williams (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Bell, J Clark, B Graham, G Holland, E Huntington, I Jewell, W Stelling and B Stephens

Town Councillor T Batson and Parish Councillor R Harrison.

Mr J Dixon-Dawson – Independent Person

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Jackson and Councillors J Armstrong and M Dixon.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 September 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 September 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Committee on Standards in Public Life - Annual Report 2012/13 - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Consideration was given to the 2012/13 Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL)(for copy see file of Minutes).

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the Annual Report, focusing on the section which related specifically to Local Government Standards. Members were advised that in relation to the new local government standards regime, while the

CSPL recognised that the new system was still in its infancy, it did highlight several concerns.

One of the concerns raised by CSPL was a lack of meaningful sanctions now available to Standards Committees under the new regime, as such the report suggested that the internal discipline procedures within political parties might offer more scope for stronger sanctions.

Members queried how this could be applied to Independent members who did not belong to a political party, given that Durham County Council did have a significant proportion of such members. The Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that the report looked to identify different options for how standards could be maintained in a regime which offered less sanctions. In the absence of a political party, then that particular avenue would not be an option.

Members agreed that it was still early days for the new standards system, therefore it would be wise to continue to observe how it developed over time.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

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 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

6 Update on the Handling of Current Complaints - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an update report in respect of complaints of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.