

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Conference Room 4b, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 16 May 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Bell, J Clark, M Dixon, B Graham, G Holland, E Huntington, I Jewell and M Williams (Vice-Chairman)

Town Councillor T Batson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Jackson, Mr J Dixon Dawson, County Councillor B Stephens and Parish Councillor R Harrison.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 February 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 February 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

4 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.

5 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).

The Chairman took the opportunity to advise the Committee of a training session which had recently been delivered to 2 local Parish Councils. The training had been delivered following a request from the 2 Parishes and had covered topics relating to the Code of Conduct and Member/Officer relations.

Members of the Committee expressed concerns about the lack of sanctions available to them when dealing with possible breaches of the Codes of Conduct. It seemed that there continued to be a steady flow of complaints against elected Members, yet there was very little that officers or the Standards Committee could do should a breach of a Code be proven.

The Chairman reiterated the importance of training to local Councils, especially those that appeared to have recurring issues. Members were also advised that in areas where there appeared to be issues between elected Members and their staff, the County Council would promote the adoption of a Member/Officer protocol.

The Chairman advised that he would be attending the next Regional Meeting of Chairs and Vice Chairs of Standards Committees in July. The meeting was scheduled to be hosted by Northumberland County Council and the Independent Persons, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer were also invited to attend. At the request of the Committee, the Chairman agreed to express the concerns of Members at that meeting regarding the lack of sanctions, with a view to a regional submission being made to Central Government, calling for a review of the current sanctions.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.