

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 3 September 2014 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Armstrong (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors E Bell, J Clark, M Dixon, B Graham, E Huntington, B Stephens and M Williams (Vice-Chairman)

Co-opted Members:

Town Councillor T Batson and Parish Councillor R Harrison.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Holland, I Jewell and W Stelling.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 May 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 May 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest, if any

Councillor Clark queried a possible interest in agenda item 7, the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed it was not necessary for her to declare an interest.

4 Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the Meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

The Chairman advised that on 19 September 2014, accompanied by the Vice Chair and the Council's Governance Solicitor, he would be attending the Regional Meeting of Chairs and Vice Chairs of Standards Committees. The meeting was held several times during the year and the forthcoming meeting was being hosted by Northumberland County Council at the County Hall in Morpeth. The Chair invited Members to advise of any issues or items of business they would like to see raised at the meeting.

Councillor E Bell suggested that it would be useful for each authority to report on the number of Code of Conduct complaints which had been dealt with during 2013/14 and the current year to date, including an analysis of those complaints, such as how they were all resolved and how many were against Parish, Town or County Councillors.

Councillor E Bell also asked that the regional authorities be canvassed to see whether they experienced repeated complaints from a handful of authorities, as was the case in the Durham County Council area. Should problem Councils have been identified elsewhere in the region, Councillor Bell suggested it would be interesting to know how the relevant principal Authority was handling those Councils.

It was further suggested that information be sought from the regional authorities as to what work was being undertaken to promote ethical frameworks and the Code of Conduct.

The Chairman agreed to take all the suggested queries to the Regional Meeting and report back to the Committee.

Further to a concern from Town Councillor T Batson, the Chairman and Councillor Clark clarified that all members of the Council would be getting the opportunity to attend briefing sessions to raise awareness of sexual exploitation cases. It was clarified that it may be possible to extend the attendance at those sessions to lay members of Council Committees.

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

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 Complaints involving Members of Peterlee Town Council - Report on Other Action by the Monitoring Officer

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an overview of the action taken following the submission of several complaints regarding four Members of Peterlee Town Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Deputy Monitoring Officer gave an overview of the training session which he had delivered to Peterlee Town Council as a result of the four complaints and the topics which had been raised therein.

Councillor Batson took the opportunity to commend officers for the work undertaken to thoroughly consider and assess all Code of Conduct complaints in order to arrive at fair conclusions.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Update on the handling of Current Complaints

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 Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report, which demonstrated to Members the rate of business which was being dealt with in relation to Code of Conduct complaints.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.