



Standards Committee

Date **Monday 24 November 2014**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham**

Business

Part A

Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's agreement.

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 September 2014 (Pages 1 - 4)
2. Declarations of Interest, if any
3. North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chair of Standards/Governance Committees and Independent Persons Meeting - Report of Head of Legal & Democratic Service and Monitoring Officer (Pages 5 - 8)
4. Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the Meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
5. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

Part B

Items during which it is considered the meeting is not likely to be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)

6. Update on the handling of Current Complaints - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer (copy attached). (Pages 9 - 18)
7. Such other business as in the opinion of the Chairman of the Meeting is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Colette Longbottom
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
14 November 2014

To: The Members of the Standards Committee

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

Parish and Town Council Representatives – Town Councillor T Batson and
Parish Councillor R Harrison

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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 Standards Committee:

Councillors E Bell, J Clark, M Dixon, B Graham, E Huntington B Stephens and M Williams.

Town Councillor T Batson and Parish Councillor R Harrison.

Apologies:

Councillors G Holland, I Jewell and W Stelling.

1 Minutes of the Meeting held 16 May 2014

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

2 Declarations of Interest

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.

3 Other Business

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.

4 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 3 of Schedule 12A to the said Act.

5 Complaints involving Members of Peterlee Town Council

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.

6 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.

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Standards Committee

24 November 2014



North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chair of Standards/Governance Committees and Independent Persons Meeting

Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members following the meeting of the North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs of Standards/Governance Committee and Independent Persons.

Background

2. On 19 September 2014, the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor J Armstrong and the Governance Solicitor attended a meeting of the North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs of Standards/Governance Committee and Independent Persons at County Hall, Morpeth.
3. The regional meeting convenes twice a year to discuss Standards issues.

Summary of business

4. A number of local authorities spoke at the regional meeting about operating different practices for managing Code of Conduct complaints. For example, at Sunderland City Council, the independent person is involved in the assessment of complaints. Both Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council's Standards Committees are chaired by independent persons. North Tyneside Council has also retained a review mechanism as part of their local assessment procedure. It was agreed at the meeting that it is unlikely that a regional approach to dealing with Standards will be possible due the difference in local arrangements. The Governance team have reflected upon the different practices around the region but have found no reason to change the procedures which have worked efficiently in Durham since the new Code of Conduct and Standards regime was introduced in July 2012.
5. A discussion was held regarding the way to deal with Councils which experience high numbers of complaints but no new ways were identified.

6. A view will be sought from the regional Monitoring Officers Group on the expansion of the Code of Conduct to include provisions regarding contravention of the Equalities Act like the provisions that were included in the old Code of Conduct.
7. The regional Monitoring Officers Group will explore whether a Code of Conduct training U Tube clip / DVD could be developed.
8. The regional Monitoring Officers Group will continue to develop a Social Media Policy for members working with members of the regional meeting.
9. Durham will be hosting the next meeting of the regional group in March 2015 at County Hall.

Recommendations and Reasons

10. Standards Committee is invited to note the content of this report.

Contact: Clare Burrows Tel: (03000) 260548

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance: None specific in this report

Staffing: None specific in this report

Risk: None specific in this report

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty: None specific in this report

Accommodation: None specific in this report

Crime and Disorder: None specific in this report

Human Rights: None specific in this report

Consultation: None specific in this report

Procurement: None specific in this report

Disability Issues: None specific in this report

Legal Implications: None specific in this report

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