

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 1 May 2015 at 9.30 am**

#### **Present:**

**Councillor J Armstrong (Chairman)**

#### **Members of the Committee:**

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

#### **Co-opted Members:**

Parish Councillor R Harrison

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Dixon-Dawson, Councillor M Dixon and Councillor M Williams.

#### **2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 February 2015**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 February 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **3 Declarations of Interest, if any**

In respect of agenda item 6, Councillor J Clark declared an interest as a Member of Horden Parish Council and Councillor B Graham declared an interest as her husband is a Member of Spennymoor Town Council.

#### **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 (copy attached).**

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.

In response to a question from Councillor I Jewell, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that there was limited redress for any Councillor wrongly accused of breaching the Code of Conduct. Complaints made without malice enjoyed qualified privilege in defamation law. The only real means of redress for a Member in such a situation would be through local media if they considered that would give an opportunity to set the record straight.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.