

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 22 March 2018 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor B Kellett (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors T Henderson, E Huntington (Vice-Chair), M McGaun, M McKeon, J Nicholson and A Savory

Co-opted Members:

Town Councillor T Batson and Parish Councillor R Harrison

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bell, J Bell, J Clark and M Clarke.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the Agenda.

Mr Batson informed the meeting that he had recently joined an organisation called Confor and this was not yet included on his Register of Interests Form.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Code of Conduct Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided Members with an update on activity since the last meeting in respect of complaints received by Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

Mr Harrison referred to the complaints listed at Appendix 2 of the report and asked why the Subject Matter and detail of Council were anonymised when previously they were not. The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections replied that previously the report had been in the closed part of the Committee agenda, but to

increase public knowledge of complaints which had been submitted, the report had been anonymised and brought into the open part of the agenda.

Mr Harrison considered that it was important for the Committee to be provided with details of both Councillors and Council's so that trends could be identified if any particular Councillor or Council was regularly the subject of a complaint. The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections informed the Committee that this information was available on Decision Notices which were issued for each complaint and these were public documents. However, she would discuss this with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to see what could be done to add value for the Committee.

The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections added that the Executive Director of the County Durham Association of Local Councils is consulted when problems arose with Parish Councils.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Standards Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided Members with an update on national developments, consultations and court cases which related to the work of the Committee (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted and Officers be requested to monitor the progress of the matters referred to and update the Committee as appropriate.

6 Review of the Members Code of Conduct

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which sought approval of a revised Code of Conduct for Members of Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections informed the Committee that the revised Code of Conduct had been considered by the Council's Constitution Working Group and was as a result of a review of the County Council's Constitution.

Councillor Kellett considered the revised Code of Conduct to be clearer and more concise and informed the Committee that it was well received by the Constitution Working Group.

Resolved:

It be recommended to Council that the revised Member Code of Conduct be adopted as part of the Annual Review of the Constitution.

7 Protocol on Member/Officer Relations

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided Members regarding a revised protocol on Member and Officer relations (for copy see file of Minutes).

Mr Batson informed the Committee that the revised protocol was a comprehensive, well-written document and praised those involved in its production.

Resolved:

It be recommended to Council that the revised protocol on Member and Officer relations be adopted as part of the Annual Review of the Constitution.

8 Social Media Guidance

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which proposed draft Social Media Guidance (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections informed the Committee that the Guidance was intended for those who wished to use Social Media. Comments on the Guidance had been sought from the Council's Corporate Communications Team and these would be incorporated into the Guidance and brought to a future meeting of the Committee, prior to being consulted upon.

Resolved:

That the draft Social Media Guidance be approved in principle, reflect comments from Corporate Communications and brought to a future meeting.

9 Review of Local Government Ethical Standards: Stakeholder Consultation

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services regarding the review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) of local government ethical standards (for copy see file of Minutes)

The Legal Manager – Governance and Elections informed the Committee that the issues raised by CSPL were outlined at paragraph 8 and Appendix 2 of the report. It was proposed that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services prepare a collective response in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services prepare a collective response in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.