

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1A - County Hall, Durham on **Monday 10 December 2018 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor B Kellett (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Atkinson, A Bainbridge, J Clark and M Clarke

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bell, J Bell, E Huntington and A Savory, and Parish Councillor R Harrison.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2018 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4 Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed the Committee of progress against the Work Programme agreed in December 2017 and proposed a new Work Programme for 2019 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Members noted that the majority of the Work Programme had been completed. The Code of Practice for Members and Officers dealing with planning matters had not been reviewed in accordance with the expected timescale in 2018, and was included in the new Work Programme for completion in the Spring of 2019. However, in view of the extensive work involved in reviewing the Code, the Committee was asked to agree to the extension of this deadline to Autumn 2019.

Councillor Clark made a general point that some applications submitted to Planning Committees were submitted in the name of the Agent rather than the Applicant and Members may therefore be unaware of a disclosable interest in a particular application under consideration. Councillor Clark asked that an applicant's identity

be also included in reports so that Members were clear about whether a declaration of interest was required.

Resolved:

That

- a) the progress against the Work Programme approved in 2017 be noted;
- b) the proposed Work Programme for 2019 be approved.

5 Code of Conduct Update

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

The Governance Solicitor advised that as requested at the last meeting of the Committee further detail regarding the outcome of complaints had been included in Appendix 2 of the report. Going forward it was proposed that Decision Notices, which were available for public inspection, would be published on the Council's website.

Members were informed of training provided in the period in response to specific complaints. The Monitoring Officer had also offered training to Parish and Town Councils where queries/issues had been raised but no formal complaints had been received. Two such sessions were being arranged for early 2019.

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.

6 Standards Committee Hearing Panel - Alleged Breaches of Durham County Council's Code of Conduct - COM 134

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the outcome of a Standards Committee Hearing Panel (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Governance Solicitor informed Members that the sanctions determined by the Standards Committee Hearing Panel, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, had been completed, with the exception of training in the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, including the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations. The Monitoring Officer had agreed to postpone the training due to unforeseen circumstances of the Councillor, but it was expected that this would be completed by March 2019. The Committee would be informed when the training had taken place.

The Committee was asked to consider whether procedural training on Standards Committee Hearing Panels would be useful, following a request by some Members.

Members discussed the value of training and noted that Panels were infrequent, however did feel it was important to be familiar with the process. Councillor Clark made the point that Members asked to sit on a Hearing Panel were briefed about the procedure in advance of the hearing by the Governance Solicitor, but acknowledged that a training session in addition to this may also be useful.

Resolved:

That

- a) the outcome of the Standards Committee Hearing Panel attached at Appendix 2 of the report, be noted;
- b) a training session on Standards Committee Hearing Panels be arranged.

7 Standards Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the 'national picture' on standards issues affecting Local Government (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted and Officers monitor the progress of the matters referred to and keep the Committee updated.

8 DCLG Consultation - Disqualification Criteria for Councillors

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the outcome on the consultation by the Department for Communities and Local Government on updating disqualification criteria for local authority members (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the Government's response to the consultation be noted.