

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in County Hall, Durham - County Hall, Durham on **Friday 25 June 2021 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor J Nicholson (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors M Abley, J Atkinson, L Maddison, T Smith, A Savory, D Stoker, T Stubbs, F Tinsley (Vice-Chair) and C Varty

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Mavin, and Parish and Town Council representatives Councillors T Batson and R Harrison.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

4 Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which asked members to consider progress against the Work Programme for 2020/2021 and sought agreement to the proposed Work Programme for 2021/2022 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That

- a) progress against the Work Programme for 2020/2021 be noted;

- b) the proposed Work Programme for 2021/2022 as attached at Appendix 3 of the report, be agreed.

5 Appointment of Independent Persons to Standards Committee

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on the recruitment of two new Independent Persons to the Standards Committee (for copy see file of Minutes).

Following a question from Councillor Stubbs, the Governance Solicitor confirmed that the term of office of the Independent Persons had been due to come to an end in September 2020 but had been extended by a further year due to the pandemic.

In response to a question from Councillor Atkinson regarding the attendance of the Independent Persons at two of the four meetings of the Standards Committee per year, the Governance Solicitor advised that this was not a requirement but was considered good practice. The Independent Persons would be encouraged to attend more than the minimum number of meetings, but there was an expectation that they would attend at least two.

Resolved:

That

- a) the recruitment process undertaken for Independent Persons be noted;
- b) Council be recommended to agree the appointment of Alan Fletcher and Kayleigh Louise Wilkinson as Independent Persons to the Standards Committee with effect from 22 September 2021 for a term of two years;
- c) Council be invited to delegate authority to the Standards Committee to consider whether to extend the appointment of the Independent Persons for a further two years in 2023, and that any such extension be reported to Council as part of the annual report of the Standards Committee.

6 Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2020/2021

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which presented the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2020/2021 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The report provided an overview of the work carried out during 2020/2021 and set out the future direction which the Committee intended to take during 2021/2022.

Councillor Tinsley made reference to the proposed change to the way complaints were recorded for future reporting. Complaints had historically been recorded as one complaint irrespective of the number of members subject to the complaint and it was proposed that this figure would be broken down further in future reports. The Councillor emphasised the need to highlight this change as it would appear as a spike in the number of complaints received when compared to the previous year's figures. The Governance Solicitor confirmed that the change in the recording system would be explained in future reporting.

Resolved:

That

- a) the Annual Report for 2020/2021 be noted;
- b) the report be presented to the Council meeting in July 2021.

7 Standards National Picture Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which informed members of the national picture on standards issues affecting Local Government (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 keep the Committee updated.

8 Code of Conduct Update

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on activity since the last meeting in respect of complaints received by Durham County Council against Councillors, and training to members of both Durham County Council and Town and Parish Councils (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the contents of the report be noted.