

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **17 February 2012** at **10.00 am**

Members of the Standards Committee:

Chairman: Mrs D Winter

County Councillors J Armstrong, E Bell, P Charlton, J Shiell, D Southwell, W Stelling, M Williams and S Zair.

Mr J Hitchman and Mrs T Naples.

Councillors T Batson, F Duggan, M Goyns and D Liversidge.

Apologies:

Councillors A Bainbridge, C Carr and G Holland
Mr JG Armstrong, Mr D Balls, Mrs D Balmer Mr W Ault and Mrs E Davies.

Also in attendance:

Councillor B Myers and Mr P Thompson.

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 November 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 Performance Report for Quarter 3, 2011/12: Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services, the purpose of which was to present performance in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions for quarter 3 of 2011/12 and to highlight any learning outcomes resulting from them. In addition the report provided an update in relation to developments in the collection, monitoring and management of complaints (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Service Development Manager was in attendance to deliver the report and an overview presentation of the statutory, non statutory and Local Government

Ombudsman complaints received throughout the period (for copy of slides see file of Minutes)

The Chair advised that having taken a regular quarterly visit to the Corporate Complaints team she had again been concerned in relation to the level of complaints made to the Council resulting from the harmonisation of the Council's benefits systems. However it was to be noted that the production and circulation of an information leaflet which had been distributed to all Housing Benefit recipients, demonstrated that progress with the situation was being made.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

4 Children and Young People's Services Annual Representations Report 2010/11 (Compliments, Suggestions, Comments and Complaints)

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services, which detailed the performance of Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services' Representations Procedure (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Quality Performance and Planning Manager and the Representations and Quality Officer, Children and Young People's Services, were both in attendance to present the report.

It was reported that the Annual Report indicated positive improvements and achievements in performance in relation to the handling and consideration of representations, including complaints, during the year 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011. Members were further advised that the Annual Report had been shared with Ofsted, who in turn had made a number of positive references to the procedures used and had given an outstanding rating to the Service.

The Committee congratulated the Service on the achievements and improvements which had been made.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Progress of the Localism Act Provisions relating to Standards

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update on the progress made in relation to establishing a new ethical framework for Durham County Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Litigation Manager presented the report and advised that a report on the establishment of a new ethical framework would be considered by Council in due course.

In response to a query the Litigation Manager clarified that any serving independent members of the Durham County Council Standards Committee could not be appointed to serve as the authority's independent person for a period of five years.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Request for Dispensation from Eldon Parish Council

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which sought approval of a request for a dispensation under the Standards Committee (Further Provisions)(England) Order 2009, in respect of a member of Eldon Parish Council (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Litigation Manager advised that the request was appropriate and a similar dispensation had previously been granted to 3 other members of Eldon Parish Council.

Resolved:

That a dispensation be granted to Councillor R Scaife of Eldon Parish Council who is affiliated with the Eldon Community Partnership, permitting her to participate and vote on any future Parish Council business concerning the Eldon Community Partnership and that the dispensation shall continue until the next Parish Elections in 2013.

7 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.

Prior to commencement of the remainder of business the Chair advised of a letter which had been received earlier that morning. In summary the letter referred to a complaint previously made to the Council by the author and requested that the Standards Committee pursue the matter further.

The Chair advised that she would acknowledge receipt of the letter and handle the matter accordingly.

8 Report of the Outcome of a Conciliation Meeting on Complaint LA163

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided details of a conciliation meeting which had been held further to direction by an Assessment Sub Committee in relation to complaint LA163 (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the outcome of the conciliation meeting be noted and acknowledged as the conclusion of action to be taken in relation to complaint LA163.

9 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).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Review of Completed Complaints

Members of the Committee inspected a sample of completed complaints, comments and compliment files for the review period in question.