

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **7 September 2012** at **10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor P Charlton (Chairman)

Members of the Standards Committee:

Councillors A Bainbridge, E Bell and J Shiell.

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, C Carr, D Farry, D Southwell and M Williams.

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 May 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 Overview of the Standards Regime

The Committee received a presentation from the Deputy Monitoring Officer which detailed the changes to the Standards regime in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 (for copy of slides see file of Minutes).

Following the presentation Members discussed the changes to the procedure through which Code of Conduct complaints would now be handled and the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that Councillors Batson and Cooke had very recently been selected as the 2 co-optees from Parish and Town Councillors..

4 Performance Report for quarter 1, 2012/13: 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 1, 2012/13 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).

Members raised concerns regarding complaints relating to the efficiency of the Council's telephone service and the length of time it appeared to take for telephone calls to be handled. In response, the Service Development Manager advised that steps were being taken to increase resources at peak times when a higher volume of calls could be expected.

The Committee was advised that there was a queue system in place on the Council's main telephone lines, which indicated the position a caller was in a queue and also had a restriction on the queue size. Attempts had been made previously to implement an answerphone service, however that had been unsuccessful due to complaints being received if messages weren't responded to the same day.

Members suggested that there should be an expectation that complaints against the Council could increase in areas where services were being reduced, for example, the changes which had recently been made to the provision of free school bus passes. The Service Development Manager agreed that an increase in complaints would be inevitable where service delivery was changing, and advised that all comments from Members would be fed back accordingly.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Annual Report Statutory Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments 2011/2012

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director, Children and Adults Services, which provided information regarding the management of Statutory complaints. The report also included details about the compliments and comments received from service users and carers during the year (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Manager, Quality Assurance, was in attendance to deliver the report and in doing so, highlighted to the Committee key areas of the Annual Report. In concluding, the Strategic Manager, Quality Assurance, advised that the Report indicated the positive achievements made by the service in relation to the handling and consideration of complaints and compliments. It was felt that the approach taken by the service was successful and would continue to be developed to make further improvements.

The Committee congratulated the service on the Report and the Chair commented that it was pleasing to see the number of compliments which the service had received during 2012/13.

In response to a query from a Member, the Strategic Manager, Quality Assurance, clarified the control measure, known as Capacity Testing, which was in place to ascertain whether a client was capable of pursuing a complaint.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, which invited Members to note the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG), Guide for Councillors on Openness and Transparency on Personal Interests (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report, advising that the DCLG document was a good guide for Members and useful as a first point of reference in relation to the declaring and registering of Personal Interests.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

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.

8 Appointment of Independent Persons to Assist with the Standards Process

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, which sought approval from the Standards Committee to recommend to the Council the appointment of two people as Independent Persons to assist with the Standards process (for copy see file of Minutes).

Resolved:

That the report's recommendation be accepted.

9 Local Investigation – Case Reference LA186

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which detailed the investigation conducted into an allegation that a Town Councillor contravened the Code of Conduct (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Investigating Officer's report concluded that there was no breach of the Code of Conduct.

Resolved:

That the report's recommendations be accepted.

10 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.