

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1A - County Hall, Durham on **7 November 2012** at **10.00 am**

Present: **Councillor J Shiell (Chairman)**

Members of the Standards Committee:

Councillors J Armstrong, E Bell, G Holland, D Southwell and M Williams

Town Councillor T Batson; Town Councillor A Cooke.

Apologies:

Councillor P Charlton.

Also in Attendance:

Mr J Dixon-Dawson; Mr P Jackson

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2012 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 Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions: Quarter 2, 2012/13

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services, the purpose of which was to present performance and information in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions for quarter 2 of 2012/13 and to highlight any learning outcomes resulting from them (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance 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 of the Committee expressed concerns regarding the level of complaints were received regarding planning issues. During the period, 32 Stage 1 complaints had been received by the Planning and Assets service.

The Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that planning was very important and that more detailed work would be done in the future to look to reducing the number of planning related complaints.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that planning was an area which would inevitably always generate complaints, as planning was a contentious area, and people were likely to make complaints should a planning application not be determined the way they had wished. Furthermore, Members were advised that as Central Government had introduced an expectation that a high percentage of planning applications would be now determined under delegated authority, it was likely that a lot less applications would be brought before planning committees for Member determination.

In response to a query from a Member, the Customer Relations, Policy and Performance Manager advised that in relation to complaints regarding missed bin collections and other such issues, these would be initially recorded as service requests. For example if a resident made contact to notify that their bin had not been collected, that would not be logged as a complaint unless the resident specified that they wished to make a complaint. Such service requests were usually dealt with at the first point of contact and were not therefore recorded as complaints.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

4 Annual Representations Report, Children and Young Peoples Services

Consideration was given to the sixth Annual Representations report in respect of services to children, young people and their families, for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Representations and Quality Officer, Children and Young Peoples Services, was in attendance to present the report. Members were advised that the aim of the report was to provide performance information in a concise manner and detailed information, such as the aims of and procedures for complaints handling, could be supplied to Members upon request.

Members were advised that a range of factors would influence whether a complaint was classed as complex. For example, complaints where multiple children were involved, or where numerous issues were raised within one complaint, then such instances would be classed as complex.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5 Parish and Town Council Briefing Session Feedback

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which informed Members of the feedback which had been received from a recent briefing session which had been delivered to delegates from the County's Parish and Town Councils, addressing topics such as changes to the Standards regime, Code of Conduct and Registerable Interests (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report and advised Members that the event had been very well attended and that all feedback received had been extremely positive.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 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.

7 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.