

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a Meeting of **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 1 September 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor B Kellett (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors M Clarke, T Henderson, M McGaun, M McKeon and J Nicholson

Co-opted Members:

Parish Councillor R Harrison and Town Councillor T Batson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E Bell, J Bell, J Clark, E Huntington and A Savory.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2017 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

4 Annual Report of the Standards Committee 2016/2017

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the work of the Standards Committee during 2016/17 and set out the future direction which the Committee intended to take during 2017/18 (for copy see file of Minutes). Members were advised that the report would be presented to the County Council on 20 September 2017.

In discussing the Annual Report Members noted the increase in complaints relating to social media. Councillor Kellett advised that this had been raised as an issue of concern at the regional meeting of Standards Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs in July 2017.

Following a question from Councillor McGaun about the complaints received about the use of social media and the findings that no further action be taken, the Governance Solicitor advised that the subject Members had been found to be engaging in political debate or had been acting in a private capacity when the posts were made.

New County Councillors had received training on the Code of Conduct in May 2017 and a session had been arranged for Parish and Town Councils on 3 October 2017, to which all Parish and Town Councillors were being encouraged to attend. The session would include the use of social media.

Councillor Nicholson appreciated that under the current regime sanctions were limited, and was informed that this was under review by a Parliamentary Committee but until such time as changes were made the merit of referring complaints to Local Investigation may be disproportionate.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and presented to County Council on 20 September 2017.

5 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

6 Code of Conduct Complaints

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer which provided an update in respect of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct since the last meeting (for copy see file of Minutes).

An increase in the number of complaints received about County Councillors was noted by Members who were advised that this may be attributed to the recent local elections.

Following discussion it was **Resolved:**

That the content of the report be noted.