

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2018 - 2019

1. THE LOCALISM ACT 2011 - THE STANDARDS REGIME

The new standards regime came into effect on 1 July 2012. The Council, at its meeting on 4 July 2012, agreed the membership of eight Councillors and three Town and Parish Council non-voting co-optees. An Independent Person was also appointed by Council on 4 July 2012. This appointment was renewed for three years in 2015, with a further extension being agreed by Council on 6 September 2017 for two years. The postholder is not a member of the Committee but does attend its meetings and hearings. The Independent Chair of the Standards Committee was appointed by Council on 4 September 2013 for a two year period with an option to extend for a further three years. A three year extension was agreed by Council on 7 October 2015 and will continue while an appointments process to identify a replacement is concluded.

The Standards Committee has met twice during the Council Year 2018-2019 on 25 October 2018 and the 18 April 2019.

2. APPOINTMENT OF TOWN AND PARISH REPRESENTATIVES

One of the newly appointed Parish representatives on the Standards Committee, Councillor Bryn Owen of Craster Parish Council, resigned leaving a vacancy on the Committee. In order to fill the vacancy, expressions of interest from existing Parish Councillors were sought and two applications were received. An Interview Panel comprising the Independent Person and Councillors Mrs C. Homer and S. Dungworth was appointed with delegated authority to make a recommendation to Council on the appointment.

Following the interviews, Councillor Russ Greig of Prudhoe Town Council was recommended to and appointed by Council on 9 January 2019.

3. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE – REVIEW OF ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The Committee on Standards in Public Life report on their review of the local government ethical framework was published in January 2019 and reported to the Standards Committee for their consideration at its meeting on the 18th April 2019.

4. R. (HARVEY) V LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL - POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

The Committee was informed of a case in which Ledbury Town Council had used its internal grievance procedure rather than the Herefordshire Council's Code of Conduct in dealing with a complaint of bullying, harassment and intimidation made by the Town Clerk against a Councillor. This had led to the Councillor self-referring to the Monitoring Officer. The Town Council's procedures had resulted in sanctions against the Councillor, whereas the Monitoring Officer's investigation found that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct. The Councillor then initiated Judicial Review proceedings against the Town Council, which ultimately found in her favour on all grounds. As a result of the judgement, Councils will now (generally) not be able to use their council's' grievance procedures if the subject of their grievance is a complaint about a councillor.

In Northumberland, the Chief Officer of the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) has, following the issue of the judgement, made all of his member councils aware of the decision and made available further details to any Councils wishing for more information.

The Committee agreed that its comments and suggestions about the potential implications of the decision for the Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer in the operation of the ethical framework under the Localism Act 2011 be raised by the Monitoring Officer with the NALC Chief Officer.

5. CASELOAD

The Monitoring Officer, in conjunction with the Independent Person has dealt with **23** complaints this year, **8** of which were related to Parish and Town Councils exclusively, **1** of which concerned dual hatted members and **14** of which concerned members of the County Council exclusively

No action required	15
Investigation	2
Apology Requested	2
Apology Requested but not received	0
Ongoing	6
Withdrawn	0

Mediation recommended	0
Other action	0

Mr. J. Jackson
Independent Chair