

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 11 January 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

#### **PRESENT**

Mr J. Jackson  
(Independent Chair, in the Chair)

#### **COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

Armstrong, E.  
Dungworth, S.

Gallacher, B.  
Webb, G.

#### **PARISH COUNCILLORS**

Owen, B.

Wallace, A.

#### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Common, Mrs J.  
Davies, G.

Roughead, G.

Independent Person  
Clerk to Berwick upon Tweed Town  
Council  
Councillor

#### **OFFICERS**

Henry, L.  
Bennett, Mrs L.M.

Monitoring Officer  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

The Chair welcomed Parish Councillors Bryn Owen and Alex Wallace to the meeting.

#### **7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors C. Homer, A.H. Murray, L.J. Rickerby and Parish Councillor A. Tebbutt.

#### **8. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday, 26 October 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

## 9. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

### 1. Hoey Ainscough Associates - Berwick upon Tweed Town Council

Members received a report from the Clerk to Berwick upon Tweed Town Council. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**). Mr. Gareth Davies, Clerk to the Town Council, was in attendance.

Mr. Davies made a number of points in connection with his report:-

- He had become interim Clerk and then permanent Clerk after the Hoey Ainscough report was produced.
- The standards regime was largely ineffectual in terms of its powers and sanctions available to it.
- The public may not agree with the view of the importance of good and high standards of behaviour in public life. If the public re-elected a Councillor there was little that could be done.
- Audits were now being successfully carried out and Town Council meetings were now orderly and well managed.
- Documents were published before the meeting and the minutes were not a source of dispute.
- The financial regulations were not ideal and needed to be amended.
- There was a strong sense of grievance in Berwick as people believed that their views were not being heard and that governance was too remote. The sense of change was constant leaving local people fearful and confused.
- The Berwick Regeneration Commission was an effort to ensure that County and local Councillors sat around the same table and that officers were clear about what policies had been agreed.
- The Nolan Principles were now dated and needed to be updated for modern life. Social media was part of everyday life and the way Councillors were trained and educated should be updated accordingly.

The Chairman commented that guidance on social media was being taken up at regional level. The Hoey Ainscough report had helped to develop themes of change. Mr. Davies' report was very positive and it was clear that the Standards Committee's requirements for monitoring had been fulfilled. He thanked Mr. Davies for his report and for attending the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted and to agree that the need for monitoring had now been fulfilled the Committee being satisfied that good progress had been made by Berwick upon Tweed Town Council

## 2. **Appointment of Parish Council Representatives to the Standards Committee**

Members were updated members of the progress made with the appointment of the three Parish Council representatives to the Standards Committee. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**).

The Monitoring Officer reported that interviews had been held and the Panel's recommendation that the following Parish Council Representatives be appointed had been approved by Council on 3 January 2018:-

Councillor Bryn Owen, Craster Parish Council  
Councillor Andrew Tebbutt, Morpeth Town Council  
Councillor Alex Wallace, East Bedlington Parish Council

The Chair thanked Judith Common and Councillors Cath Homer and Susan Dungworth for sitting on the interview panel.

**RESOLVED** that the appointment of the Parish Councillors to the Standards Committee be noted.

## 3. **Gifts and Hospitality - Guidance for Councillors**

Members discussed the merits of adopting certain guidance relating to the receipt of gifts and hospitality. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**).

The Monitoring Officer reported that this was an area which sometimes caused confusion for Members and the guidance was an effort to clarify the procedures.

**RESOLVED** that Council be recommended to

- (1) adopt the guidance as an appendix to the Members' Code of Conduct and;
- (2) agree that a breach of the guidance, if adopted, would constitute a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct .

## 4. **Promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct**

Members considered the report and were asked to decide upon what, if any, action the Committee wished to identify to be undertaken in pursuit of the fulfilment of the statutory duty in relation to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix D**).

Members considered how this duty could be met taking into account the large number of Parish/Town Councillors in Northumberland and the

limited resources both at Officer and Member level. It was suggested that it would be worth approaching the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to include information about standards of conduct in its electronic newsletter. The use of a training DVD/podcast /webinar was supported as it would allow a consistent message to be put across. The message should be kept fairly simple and remind Councillors of their primary obligations under the Code of Conduct.

Contact with Parish Clerks was also suggested via the Society of Local Parish Clerks. Parish Clerks were in the best position to know the strengths and weaknesses of their Members.

**RESOLVED** that NALC be approached for discussions about how to move this matter forward.

**5. Code of Conduct Complaints – Progress Report**

Members received a report on the progress with complaints received by the authority under the new arrangements adopted by the authority for dealing with standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011 on caseloads. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**).

The Monitoring Officer reported that the list of complaints now indicated which geographical area the complaint originated from.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 26 April 2018 at 2.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

Ch.'s Initials.....