

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 16 January 2020 at 2.00pm.

#### PRESENT

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

#### COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Dungworth, S.  
Gallacher, B.

L.J. Rickerby

#### PARISH COUNCILLORS

Tebbutt, A.

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Milner, K.

Independent Person

#### OFFICERS

Henry, L.  
Bennett, Mrs L.M.

Monitoring Officer  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

#### 6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors E. Armstrong, A.H. Murray, M. Swinburn, Mrs J. Common and Parish Councillor A. Wallace.

#### 7. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday, 10 October 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

#### 8. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

##### 1. Application for Dispensation - Councillor J.G. Watson

Members were asked to consider granting a dispensation to Councillor J.G. Watson who had submitted an application by the date of the Committee in

relation to his position as a Partner Fund Nominated Non-Executive Director on the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership. (Report attached as **Appendix A**).

Further clarification was sought as to why it was felt necessary for a dispensation for Councillor Watson's pecuniary interest to be granted and why it was so important the law regarding Members' interests should be overturned. It was also queried why another Member or Officer, who would not need to seek a dispensation, could not take the role of Non-Executive Director instead.

Whilst not wishing to speak on Councillor Watson's behalf, the Monitoring Officer explained that the Localism Act made provision for such dispensations to be granted. He stressed that the dispensation would not allow Councillor Watson to be involved in any business relating to the rate of remuneration he would receive. It would, however, allow him to use his years of experience to the benefit of the Council and, ultimately, be in the interests of the Pension Fund Members. Without this dispensation, Councillor Watson who was also the Chair of the Pension Fund Panel, would be unable to sit on the Panel when any matters relating to the Partnership were discussed and so would be restricted in his activities. Legal Opinion had been sought from a QC and the advice received was that there was no reason not to grant the dispensation in these circumstances. It was unlikely that Councillor Watson would remain the representative indefinitely as it was expected that the position would rotate around the 12 member authorities.

A Member of the Committee who was also a former Member of the Pension Fund Panel, provided some background to the creation of the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership. It was also pointed out that it was an honour for Councillor Watson to have been invited. He was a highly skilled member of the Pension Fund Panel and this dispensation was needed to allow him to do his job effectively. Another Member, who had also previously been a member of the Pension Fund Panel, whilst sharing some of the concerns already expressed, commented that it did take members of the Pension Fund Panel a long time to develop the in depth knowledge required and that this post required someone with a lot of experience.

In response to a query from a Member, the Monitoring Officer commented that the post was restricted to Councillors and could not be taken by an Officer. It also only lasted for two years.

The Chair reminded members that only Councillors Dungworth, Gallacher and Rickerby were permitted to vote.

Councillor Rickerby proposed that the recommendation be approved and that Councillor J.G. Watson be granted a dispensation in relation to his position as Partner Fund Nominated Non-Executive Director on the Border to Coast Pensions Partnership.

There was no seconder, therefore, no vote was taken.

## 2. Appointment of Independent Chair and Independent Person

The Monitoring Officer reported that the appointments had been considered by Council on 8 January 2020. It had been agreed that Mr. Joe Jackson remain as Chair of the Standards Committee and Mrs Karen Milner be appointed as Independent Person. Both posts were for four years with a review after two years.

The Chair welcomed Karen Milner to the meeting and hoped that she enjoyed her time as Independent Person. He also informed Members that Judith Common, the outgoing Independent Person, had informed him that she had been grateful for the opportunity and wished Members of the Committee well. She held all Members and Officers in high regard.

Members requested that their gratitude to Judith Common be recorded in the minutes.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 3. Code of Conduct Complaints – Progress Report

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

In response to a query from the previous meeting, the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that in 2018/19 out of 22 complaints, 10 had been Member against Member complaints and in 2019 out of 7 complaints, only 1 had been Member against Member.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 16 April 2020 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

Ch.'s Initials.....

*Standards Committee, 16 January 2020*