



Northumberland

County Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

21 APRIL 2023

Independent Desktop Review of the way in which the Council dealt with a number of Code of Conduct complaints

This is a covering report from the Monitoring Officer

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The LGA Advisory Challenge Board requested an independent desktop review (the 'desktop review') of the way in which Northumberland County Council had dealt with a number of complaints about Councillors.
- 1.2 The review scope of the review was to cover the processes carried out and whether there are any lessons to be learned about the Council's procedures. The scope of the review was not to review the outcomes of the complaints.
- 1.3 The Advisory Board engaged Simon Goacher Partner from Weightmans LLP.

Mr Goacher's report is appended at Appendix 1.
- 1.4 Mr Goacher and a Member of the LGA Advisory Challenge Board will be attending the committee meeting to present his report and proposed recommendations.

2. Recommendations

The Standards Committee is requested to:

- 2.1 To receive the Independent Desktop Review of the way in which the Council dealt with a number of Code of Conduct complaints which, is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2.2 To decide whether

- (i) To accept the findings (lesson learnt) and recommendations of the Desktop Review report, which are set out in paragraphs 42 to 56, pages 15 to 22; or
- (ii) Not to accept the findings (lesson learnt) and recommendations of the Desktop Review report, which are set out in paragraphs 42 to 56, pages 15 to 22.

2.3 If the recommendations are accepted to agree a timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the review.

3. **Link to Corporate Plan**

3.1 This report is relevant to the “We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone” priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2021-2024.

4. **Key issues and Background**

4.1 In June 2022, the Council received the Independent Governance Report undertaken by Max Caller and a team from SOLACE (“the Caller report”). In response to the Caller report, the Leader of the Council asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to establish an external Advisory Challenge Board of experienced local government Elected Members and Officers to advise the Council on its improvement journey as a “critical friend.”

4.2 As part of their work, the Challenge Board commissioned an independent lessons learnt review of matters relating to the Council’s Code of Conduct.

Implications

Policy	The local determination of alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct is a statutory requirement
Finance and value for money	There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.
Legal	The Localism Act 2011 states that local authorities must put in place arrangements for the Council to consider code of conduct complaints.
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None

Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	The Code of Conduct supports the Council's policies on equalities in service delivery
Risk Assessment	The procedures in relation to the local assessment of member conduct complaints are designed to support fair and efficient handling of those complaints by the Council with the aim of avoiding challenge or dissatisfaction with that process.
Crime & Disorder	The locally based system of assessment, investigation and determination of complaints supports compliance with the Code of Conduct which in turn supports the Council's general aims in relation to crime and disorder.
Customer Consideration	The Code of Conduct is consistent with and reinforces the Council's approach to customer relations.
Carbon reduction	None
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Wards	All

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Weightmans report - Desktop Review of the way in which the Council dealt with a number of code of conduct complaints

Background papers

N/A

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