



Northumberland

County Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

13th July 2023

Independent Desktop Review - Update

This is a report of the Monitoring Officer

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update members on work to address the recommendations of the Independent Desktop Review presented to Standards Committee on the 21st April 2023.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Standards Committee is requested to note the attached action plan

3. Link to Corporate Plan

- 3.1 **Achieving Value For Money** – The improvement in processes and procedures will ensure more efficient use of resources. The report is about ensuring good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public.

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.
- 4.3** 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.
- 4.4** The 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.
- 4.5** The Advisory Board engaged Simon Goacher, a Partner from Weightmans LLP. Mr Goacher’s report was presented to Standards Committee on the 21st April 2023.
- 4.6** At that Meeting standards Committee resolved to accept the recommendations in the independent report and that an update on progress be report to the next Standards Committee. An action plan to attend to these recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.

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

Desktop Review – Action Plan

Background papers

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

<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s13980/03.1%20Weightmans%20Report%20-%20Lessons%20learnt%20report%20Appendix%201.pdf>

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