

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 13 July 2023 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

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

COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Cessford, T.	Lee, S
Dunn, L.	Reid, J.
Flux, B.	Stewart, G.
Grimshaw, L.	Wilczek, R.

PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

Bewley, D.	Varley, A.
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ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Beswick, A.	Independent Person
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OFFICERS

Bennett, Mrs L.M.	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Gerrard, S.	Director of Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer

1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference were noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D. Towns and Independent Persons K. Milner and S. Openshaw.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Friday, 21 April 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

4. INDEPENDENT DESKTOP REVIEW UPDATE

Members were updated on work to address the recommendations of the Independent Desktop Review presented to the Standards Committee on 21 April 2023.

It was reported that a Monitoring Officer Toolkit would be brought to the next meeting of the Standards Committee and would include a flow chart showing the process and a list of the criteria to be applied sequentially used to ensure that matters that required investigation were investigated. It was also intended that complaints would be dealt with more quickly in future. The Deputy Monitoring Officers would be trained to enable them to carry out assessment of complaints.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the action plan be noted.
- (2) the Monitoring Officer Toolkit be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee for endorsement.

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.

It was reported that the number of complaints being received had started to decline and this was a good picture for Northumberland County Council. Further consideration would be given as to how this information was presented in future to enable identification of trends.

It was not possible to control the number of complaints relating to Parish Councils. It was suggested that consideration be given to producing a six monthly newsletter which would be sent to Members and Parish Councils highlighting issues they may wish to think about going forward. Members were interested in seeing examples of such newsletters from other Local Authorities.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. SECTION 32 OF THE LOCALISM ACT 2011 - DISPENSATIONS

Following a number of concerns raised by Members in relation to the requirements relating to the publication (on the Council's website) of Members addresses on the Declaration of Interests Register, this report considered the current position following consultation of all Members of the Council.

It was reported that it was not possible to give a blanket dispensation to Members to allow the removal of their home address from the public Declaration of Interests Register. However, Members could request this dispensation from the Director of Law and Governance on an individual basis.

RESOLVED that Members note the position as set out in the report.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 12 October 2023 at 2.00 pm.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....