

Standards Committee
12 SEPTEMBER 2018

Present: **Councillors:** David Coldwell (Chairman), Mike Morgan (Vice-Chairman), Peter Burgess, Brian Donnelly, Godfrey Newman, Michael Willett, Mary Jagger, Philip Baxter and Val Court

Apologies: Councillor Paul Marshall and John Donaldson

SC/9 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 June were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC/10 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/11 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that Mary Jagger was resigning from the role of Independent Person and this would be her last Standards Committee. Members of the Committee joined him in thanking her for her exemplary service of many years and for her helpful and wise advice.

SC/12 **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2017-2018**

The Feedback Officer reported on the number, nature and outcomes of complaints about the Council that had been made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in 2017/2018. There had been 26 complaints, which was an increase on the 14 complaints made in 2016/17.

Members noted details of the complaints as set out in the report: 13 had been closed without investigation after initial enquires; six had been referred back to the Council for local resolution; four had not been upheld; and three had been upheld. The three upheld complaints were minor in nature, with no injustice found and no financial remedy sought.

Committee Members congratulated officers for their work and considered that the Ombudsman's summary of investigated complaints reflected well on the Council.

The Customer Services Manager said that there were about a dozen persistent complainers who took up a significant amount of officers' time. Members discussed the impact of persistent complainers and vexatious complainers.

The Monitoring Officer advised that legal advice was being sought, with the backing of the Chief Executive, on what actions could be taken to address this issue, in particular on how to address offensive and vexatious complainers. With regards to Code of Conduct complaints, this could include a collective approach with some Parishes where necessary.

The Chairman requested that the Monitoring Officer report back to the Committee on the outcome of these discussions.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

REASONS

To ensure that the Committee has the necessary information to ensure that complaints can be made to the Council with ease and complaints are dealt with appropriately. In addition the Council uses its complaints process to improve services delivery.

SC/13 **STANDARDS UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2018**

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on recent developments in matters of interest relating to ethical standards and the code of conduct. The report focussed on training and awareness, and local assessment and investigations.

Training for Parish and District Councillors was being arranged by the Monitoring Officer. This would be facilitated by a leading public law barristers chambers and include training on Declaration of Interests, Code of Conduct matters and using social media. The Committee agreed with the Monitoring Officer that the training, which has been offered for free, should be arranged for November. The Parish Representative requested that Parish Clerks be invited to attend.

Members noted the report from NALC that advised that a majority of councils would support a single mandatory code of conduct and new powers to impose additional sanctions. The NALC Chairman's statement regarding the need for a national training programme and concern that the current ethical standards arrangements were not working well was also noted.

The NALC report broadly reflected the views expressed by the Standards Committee in its response to the Local Government Ethical Standards consultation carried out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Monitoring Officer advised that the report following this consultation should be available by the end of the year.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that she was intending to update the published information on the Council website regarding the complaints

assessment process. This was to make it clearer by removing potentially conflicting advice and ensuring it was in line with the provisions of the Localism Act. The Committee agreed with this approach.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

REASONS

- (i) To ensure that the Committee, the Members of the Council and others to whom the report is circulated are kept up to date with developments in the ethical framework.
- (ii) To promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst Members.

SC/14 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN