

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in the Dunstanburgh Room, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 26 October 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

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

COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Armstrong, E.
Dungworth, S.
Gallacher, B.

Homer, C.
Murray, A.H

IN ATTENDANCE

Common, Mrs J.

Independent Person

OFFICERS

Henry, L.
Bennett, Mrs L.M.

Monitoring Officer
Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors L.J. Rickerby, M. Swinburn and G. Webb.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Thursday, 19 January 2017, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The committee noted the following membership and terms of reference as agreed by Council on 24 May 2017.

Members: 8 Councillors (4:3:1) (1 Lab place to Ind) and 3 Parish Council representatives (Only one member of the Committee can be a member of the Cabinet).

Quorum - 4

Chair – Mr. J. Jackson.

Vice Chair – E. Armstrong

Conservative	Labour	Bedlington Independents	Liberal Democrats	Independents (Non-grouped)
E. Armstrong	S. Dungworth		L.J.Rickerby	
C. Homer	B. Gallacher			
A.H. Murray	G. Webb			
M. Swinburn				

Three non-voting Parish/Town Council Members - names to be confirmed.

Independent Person - Mrs J. Common

Functions:

- (a) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, town and parish councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives.
- (b) Assisting the councillors, town and parish councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.
- (c) Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- (d) Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct.
- (e) Advising, training or arranging to train councillors, town and parish councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct.
- (f) Granting dispensations to councillors, town and parish councillors, co-opted members, church and parent governor representatives from requirements relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct.
- (g) Assessing and reviewing complaints about councillors and conducting determinations' hearings.

- (h) Granting exemptions for politically restricted posts.
- (i) Such other roles as may be given by the Council.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. Berwick upon Tweed Town Council – Hoey Ainscough Review Progress Report

Members were informed of the progress that had been made by Berwick upon Tweed Town Council in relation to the recommendations made to that authority as a result of the Hoey Ainscough Review which concerned the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct among that authority's members. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix A**).

At its last meeting, the Standards Committee had requested that it be updated on progress, six months and 12 months from the review report date. The six monthly report had been received in June 2017 and it was clear that Berwick Town Council had made progress with most of the recommendations of the review report. Work was still ongoing on some outstanding issues primarily the development of a Strategic Plan and working with other Local Authorities. Berwick Town Council had indicated that the development of the Communications Plan would follow on from the Strategic Plan. However, members thought that, in view of the importance of communications, it would be better for that plan to be in place before the Strategic Plan which could take some time to develop.

Councillor G. Roughead, also a member of Berwick upon Tweed Town Council, was present at the meeting and, speaking from his personal point of view, he confirmed that most of the problems at Berwick were historic and positive progress was being made. The membership of the Town Council had changed and new members were becoming familiar with their role and responsibilities. He added that the Town Council was working with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) with regard to best practice guidelines and that he had also been appointed to NALC.

It was suggested that Berwick upon Tweed Town Council be approached and asked if it was agreeable to allowing the Town Clerk to attend the January 2018 meeting of the Standards Committee to update it on progress with the recommendations of the review.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted.

- (2) Berwick upon Tweed Town Council be invited to send the Town Clerk to attend the January meeting of the Standards Committee to update members on progress with the recommendations of the Hoey Ainscough Review.

2. Appointment of Parish Council Representatives to Standards Committee

Members were informed of the progress made with the appointment of the three Parish Council representatives to the Standards Committee.

(Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix B**).

Members were informed that four applications had been received for the three positions on the Standards Committee and so a selection process would need to take place. NALC had expressed an interest in having one of its members on the Interview Panel. However, after discussion, it was felt that, as Councillors Dungworth and Homer were also Parish/Town Council Members, this would be sufficient representation from a local Council perspective. It was suggested that NALC be asked if there were any particular questions it would like to be asked.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the position thus far with the appointment process relating to the vacancies for the three Parish Council representatives to the Standards Committee be noted.
- (2) an Interview Panel be appointed with delegated authority to make recommendation to Council regarding the appointment. The Panel would comprise the following members:-

Councillor S. Dungworth

Councillor C. Homer

Chairman OR Independent Person depending on availability

3. Code of Conduct Complaints – Progress Report

Members received a revised report at the meeting 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. (Report attached to the signed minutes as **Appendix C**).

Members queried whether there were any themes or trends in the types of complaint received and whether that information could be used in terms of preventative work or training. The Monitoring Officer reported that, although the sample size was very small, the use of social media predominated.

It was suggested that it would be useful to identify the geographical area that a complaint came from.

The Hoey Ainscough Review contained many useful points for other Parish and Town Councils and it may be that Northumberland County Council needed to be more proactive in getting the message across.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted.
- (2) for all future complaints, the progress report should indicate the general geographical area that the complaint originated from.
- (3) the Monitoring Officer prepare a report prior to the January 2018 meeting on how the Standard Committee might be more proactive in carrying out its duties and responsibilities especially in relation to local councils.

5. URGENT BUSINESS

Former Parish/Town Council Representatives

The Chair reiterated the Standards Committee's recognition of the work and contribution of the former Parish/Town representatives and stated that they and the former County Council representatives would be contacted again in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee's gratitude be expressed to the recently retired former incumbents of these positions for their contribution to the work of the Standards Committee over the last number of years.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The dates of forthcoming meetings of the Standards Committee which would take place in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth were noted as follows:-

Thursday, 11 January 2018
Thursday, 26 April 2018

CHAIR.....

DATE.....