

Contact Officer: Leigh Webb

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 September 2020

Present: Councillor Paul Davies (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor Mohan Sokhal

In attendance: Mike Stow – Independent Person

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Munro and Pandor.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on the 11 March 2020 be approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

It was noted that Councillors Armer, Bolt and Davies were Members of either a Town or Parish Council.

4 Admission of the Public

It was noted that agenda items would be considered in public session.

5 Deputation/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were considered.

6 Public Question Time

The following question had been sent in form Mrs G Humphries:

"Does the standards committee only deal with matters concerning councillors? Has any complaint that has been sent ever been upheld or are they just a way of appearing to listen to the public and then ignoring or dismissing a complaint? After a statement sent to me about a recent complaint from the monitoring officer which stated....

There is a possibility that he may have been mistaken in his recollection of the precise route given the time period that has elapsed" which I find totally unacceptable. It could have just as easily said "It does not matter what a councillor says at a committee meeting whether it is true or not, as long as they say that they thought it was true" Just another way to dismiss a complaint. This is one of the reasons that people do trust the complaints procedure. And why are any complaint that are sent about the planning and highways reports presented to a planning committee simply ignored and get no response at all? Who is responsible for the

complaint about these departments? As officers or departments working for Kirklees surly someone must be responsible for the inaccurate and misleading information, they present to committees. Or again doesn't it matter if people and committees are not given the full facts and only receive a sub-standard and misleading report?"

A verbal response was provided by the Chair, Cllr Davies, with an undertaking that a full written response would be sent to Mrs Humphries including the terms of reference for the Committee and the complaints procedure

7 Code of Conduct - Complaints Update

The Committee received a report which provided an update on complaints that had been received since the previous meeting of the Committee on the 11 March 2020. The Committee was informed that the report is prepared every six months and gives a breakdown of complaints received.

Since the 11th of March 2020 the Monitoring Officer has received 60 complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. This figure includes multiple complaints relating to 4 councillors. 32 relate to Kirklees Councillors (a total of 13 Councillors) and 28 relate to parish councillors. The number of identified Town or Parish councillors complained about is 3, from 3 Town or Parish Councils. Of these 60, 24 were not progressed after the initial assessment process and 1 was reported by the complainant as being resolved. A further complaint was dealt with as a staffing issue rather than as a standards issue. Of the remaining 34, 2 were resolved informally, 18 were progressed through the formal standards process (along with 3 carried forward from the previous reporting period) and findings were made. The remaining 14 complaints are relatively recent and are currently being investigated before being considered under the initial assessment process. It was reported that there are a number of interrelated complaints involving one Town or Parish Council.

Of the 13 complaints recorded in the previous report as then ongoing, these have mostly now been concluded. 3 of these were taken through the formal standards process with the 18 complaints referred to 1 complaint was dealt with as a staffing issue, rather than as a standards issue. 1 complaint is on hold, pending further clarification from the complainant. 4 complaints were not taken forward. 4 were referred back to the Town / Parish Council for resolution by mediation.

RESOLVED - That the report be received and noted

8 Cases and News Update

The Committee considered a report which provided information on developments, news and matters of local government ethics, including relevant case law.

RESOLVED - That the report be received and noted

9 COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE FOLLOW UP

The Committee considered a report which provided information on the current review being undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

The CSPL had indicated, when their report was originally published, that they would review the implementation of their best practice recommendations with local authorities to measure their progress.

The Cabinet Office has now written to the Chief Executives of local authorities in England reminding them of this and advising that they will be following up progress on the implementation of the recommendations in the Autumn of 2020. A copy of the letter was appended to the report along with a reminder of the recommended best practices

With regard to Kirklees progress on the 15 best practice recommendations, the report set out the recommendations together with-a summary of what we are doing in Kirklees in response to the recommendations. It was reported that Kirklees are already meeting most of the recommendations or have taken steps to do that.

RESOLVED - That the report be received and noted