

Contact Officer: Andrea Woodside

KIRKLEES COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday 29th March 2021

Present: Councillor Mohan Sokhal (Chair)
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor James Homewood
Councillor Alison Munro
Councillor Rob Walker
Councillor Aleks Lukic

In attendance: Mike Stow – Independent Person

Observers: Councillor Paul White

Apologies: Councillor Eric Firth (Chair)

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Eric Firth.

Councillor Sokhal was appointed as Chair of the meeting.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on the 29 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

It was noted that Councillor Bolt and Councillor Munro were a Member of either a Town or Parish Council.

It was noted that, in relation to Agenda Item 7 (Minute No.7 refers) (i) Councillor Lukic had an open complaint about a Member and (ii) Councillor Munro advised that two complaints regarding her conduct had been received within the reporting period.

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

No questions were asked.

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 29 September 2020. The Committee was informed that the report was prepared every six months and gave a breakdown of complaints received.

That report advised that since 29 September 2020 the Monitoring Officer had received 16 complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. This figure included one multiple complaint relating to 6 councillors. All 16 related to Kirklees Councillors (a total of 13 Councillors). There were no complaints that related to Town or Parish councillors. Of these 16, 13 were not progressed after the initial assessment process and 1 was not pursued by the complainant, after further information was requested. The remaining 2 complaints were relatively recent and were currently being investigated before being considered under the initial assessment process.

The Committee were advised that of the 18 complaints that were carried forward from the previous report as ongoing, these had mostly been concluded and that none were taken through the formal complaints process. The report explained that (i) 3 were closed because the member complained of had ceased to be a member and the Monitoring Officer felt there was nothing to be gained by continuing with any of those (ii) 1 was closed due to the complainant failing to respond and (iii) 5 were not found to have been breaches of the Code of Conduct after investigation and closed at the informal stage. It was noted that there were 4 complaints relating to one member of a Parish Council which were repeat complaints and needed to be taken through the formal process, 5 complaints that were still under investigation, 3 of which were multiple complaints about the same issue, and it was anticipated that they would be completed shortly.

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 LGA Model Code of Conduct and Standards Survey

The Committee considered a report regarding proposals relating to the LGA Model Code of Conduct and to report on the Standards Survey.

LGA Model Code of Conduct

Within West Yorkshire, the Model Code had so far been adopted in full by Calderdale Council. Leeds City Council were recommending its adoption. Wakefield Council were recommending its adoption with some amendments.

The report set out that there was not a great deal of difference between the current Kirklees code and Model Code. Kirklees had 3 options with regards to the model code:

- i) adopt the code in full;
- ii) adopt parts of the code;
- iii) retain its own code.

A further report will be provided to the Committee once the full assessment of the Kirklees Standards Survey had been considered in greater depth, and before making any proposals about whether to adopt the GLA Model Code and/or make any other changes to the Code or Standards process.

Kirklees Standards Survey

The standards consultation was conducted by means of an online survey that was widely publicised throughout Kirklees. The survey encouraged responses from Members, officers, members of the public, voluntary organisations and partners, Town and Parish Councillors and their clerks, the independent person, as well as Monitoring Officers from WYLAW.

The survey ran from the 1st of February to the 8th of March and 661 responses were received. The number of responses received were much higher than originally anticipated.

Initial analysis of the survey showed that the understanding of the functions and role of the council, not just in respect of the issue of standards, were unclear to members of the public. This was an opportunity to undertake some work around the role of the council, to reflect its real impact on people's lives, and the work it does to support the people of Kirklees, and for Members to consider their role in that.

Further work needed to be completed to identify any possible changes to the Code of Conduct or standards process and to see how the council could best use the information included in the survey feedback to raise the awareness of Member standards in Kirklees.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the report be received and noted.
- 2) That thanks be conveyed to all who completed the survey.