

Contact Officer: Nicola Sylvester

KIRKLEES COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Tuesday 15th March 2022

Present: Councillor James Homewood (Chair)
Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Alison Munro
Councillor Mohan Sokhal

In attendance: Mike Stow – Independent Person

Observers: Councillor Susan Lee-Richards

Apologies: Councillor Erin Hill (Chair)
Councillor Lesley Warner
Councillor Michael Watson

1 Membership of the Committee

Councillor Homewood was appointed as Chair of the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hill, Warner and Watson.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED-

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be held in public session.

5 Deputation/Petitions

No deputations of petitions were received.

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 15 September 2021. The Committee was informed that the report looked at complaints received from 15th September 2021 to end of February 2022 and gave a breakdown. The report advised that since 15 September 2021 the Monitoring Officer had received 12 complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. This figure included a complaint about one member, that was made by two separate members of the public and had been recorded as two complaints. It also included one complaint that was against two members. All 11 related to Kirklees Councillors (a total of 11 Councillors). There was one complaint that related to Town or Parish councillors. Of these 12, 5 were not progressed after the initial assessment process. The remaining 7 complaints were currently being investigated before being considered under the initial assessment process. The Committee were advised that the process for making a complain had been amended slightly since the last report, with a web-based form for complainants to complete.

During consideration of the complaints update, Members of the Committee discussed issues raised at planning meetings regarding members of the public and Ward Members. It was suggested that a guidance document be provided to members of the public at planning meetings and that general planning training was provided to all Ward Members. There was also a request from the Committee that complaints received from Officers and Parish/Town Clerks were noted separately.

RESOLVED- That the report be received and noted.

8 Cases and News Update

The Committee received a report which provided an update on matters arising in terms of local government ethics, including relevant case law and decisions of other local authorities or any existing standards boards.

The report also provided an update on the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life that followed on from the report on 'Ethical Standards in Local Government.

The Committee noted the report and discussion took place with regards to the Code of Conduct. It was suggested that a training session on the Code of Conduct should be compulsory with follow up training sessions arranged which would provide examples of cases received.

RESOLVED- That the report be received and noted.

9 Survey analysis and workshop feedback update

The Committee received a report on the survey analysis and outcome of the standards workshops held in November 2021 and February 2022 which provided recommendations arising from the survey and workshop findings. The Committee had considered the LGA Code of Conduct at the Standards Committee meeting 15th September 2021 and recommended that the Council adopted a new hybrid Code of Conduct combining some of the best of the existing Kirklees Code with the LGA draft. The Council adopted the hybrid code in December 2021. Three workshops brought together elected members, both from Kirklees Council and Town and Parish Council, with officers, including the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officers, plus the Kirklees Independent Person.

During consideration of the recommendations, a discussion took place regarding training for Planning Chairs, Case Law, and the new Code of Conduct.

In response to a question concerning the submission of an amendment to the standards process, introducing a “fast track” process to address repeat complaints, the Monitoring Officer undertook to explore options to bring this to the committee before the scheduled September meeting.

RESOLVED-

- (i) That the report be received and noted.
- (ii) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated to draft an amendment to the standards process to introduce a “fast track” process to address repeat complaints and to report to this Committee.
- (iii) That the Monitoring officer works with Town and Parish councils to consider options for increasing involvement at Town and Parish Council level in the Standards process and to report back to this Committee in September with proposals.
- (iv) That this Committee working with NALC and the LGA (as appropriate) to raise the issue of the delay in the government response to the CSPL report write as a Council (or jointly with NALC and/or LGA) to the Minister highlighting the need for a formal response.
- (v) That work be undertaken with Members and Officers to update and refresh and raise awareness to the Member Officer protocol and the importance of that to the efficient and effective working of the Council.
- (vi) That more regular workshop and engagement sessions with Members and Officers to discuss issues of common concern about behaviours are arranged.
- (vii) That further actions and training support be considered including training for Planning Chairs, Case Law, and the new Code of Conduct.
- (viii) That the new code of conduct be emailed to all Members with a requirement of a received and read confirmation.