

Contact Officer: Leigh Webb

KIRKLEES COUNCIL
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Monday 23rd October 2023

Present: Councillor Harry McCarthy (Chair)
Councillor Itrat Ali
Councillor Mohan Sokhal
Councillor Jo Lawson
Councillor Alison Munro

In attendance: Julie Muscroft, Service Director, Legal, Governance and
Commissioning
David Stickley – Senior Legal Officer
Michael Stow – Independent Person

Apologies: Councillor James Homewood

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Councillor James Homewood.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 March 2023 and 24 May 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

3 Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Admission of the Public

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

5 Deputation/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 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 23 March 2023. The Committee was informed that the report looked at complaints received from 1st March 2023 to end of August 2023 and gave a breakdown. The report advised that since 1st March 2023 the Monitoring Officer had received 24 complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. 16 of the complaints related to Kirklees Councillors (a total of 17 Councillors) whilst the remaining 8 related to Town or Parish councillors (4 named Councillors). It was reported that of these 24, 8 were

Standards Committee - 23 March 2023

not progressed after the initial assessment process, with 4 complaints (both multiple complaints) found to be breaches of the Code of Conduct. The remaining 12 complaints are currently being investigated, being considered under the initial assessment process.

With regard to the 8 complaints that were carried forward from the previous report as ongoing, it was reported that 3 had been dismissed at the initial stage, 2 were not pursued by the complainants, 2 were finalised informally and 1 remained unresolved and carried forward.

The report set out details of the nature of the complaints and provided a comparison with the previous report submitted to this Committee. Comparison between the two reports showed that the overall number of complaints has risen by 17. In percentage terms, this was a 340% rise in the number of member complaints from the last reporting period. It was explained that if the comparison was extended to earlier periods, it can be seen that there was a general downward trend to the number of complaints being made, from a high of 32 complaints about Kirklees members in 2020 (the exceptional number of complaints about one member of a Parish Council having been discounted). The number of Councillors complained about had also risen, to 21, from the previous period's total of 6.

The report set out a simple summary table informing members of standards decisions that had been published on the Kirklees website. In line with the decision of this Committee, the published decisions only relate to complaints that have been upheld. Members were asked to consider whether any complaints that do result in a finding of a breach but which are resolved informally, should also be recorded on the Kirklees website.

During consideration of the complaints update, Members of the Committee suggested that the number of complaints could be shared anonymously across political Groups through Group Business Managers.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be considered and noted,
- (ii) That complaints that do result in a finding of a breach, but which are resolved informally, should not be recorded on the Kirklees website.

7

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 report also made reference to a recent LGA survey regarding virtual and hybrid meetings. During discussion of this issue, Committee Members noted the value of in

Standards Committee - 23 March 2023

person meetings but acknowledged the flexibility that technology provided in respect of hybrid meetings.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and noted.