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**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE 2016 AT 10.00 A.M.  
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES, THORPE ROAD, WEELEY**

**Present:** Councillors Heaney (Chairman), Honeywood (Vice-Chairman), Baker, J A Brown and Cawthron

**In Attendance:** Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings) and Democratic Services Officer (Katie Sullivan)

**Also in Attendance:** John Wolton (Independent Person)

**5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Nicholls (with Councillor Baker substituting).

**6. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 12 MAY 2016**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 12 May 2016, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

**8. STANDARDS COMMITTEE – ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME**

There was submitted a report (A.1) by the Monitoring Officer which sought to agree the Committee's work plan for the 2016/2017 Municipal Year.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that the elements of the Standards Framework were:

- The Members' Code of Conduct (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- The Monitoring Officer Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- The Independent Persons' Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet);
- Member and Officer Relations Protocol (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet); and
- The Complaints Procedure (contained within the Members' Constitution Booklet).

The overall approach of the arrangements was to seek:

- Information and training for Members and Officers to increase awareness and support good standards of behaviour;
- Proportionality – responses to complaints which were proportionate to their seriousness;
- Timeliness – with clear timescales for the various stages of complaints to be progressed;
- Checks, balances, reporting requirements and delegation to the Monitoring Officer of key elements of the process to maximise independence from the political process; and

- Early and informal intervention to resolve complaints wherever possible (including an expectation that Group Leaders would play a key role).

The Monitoring Officer stated that the arrangements had been adopted by full Council in November 2013, and that elements had been reviewed in 2014, 2015 and 2016 to ensure that the procedures and protocols were robust, up to date and fit for purpose. The Members' Code of Conduct and the Monitoring Officer Protocol had not been reviewed since their adoption.

Members were informed by the Monitoring Officer that she believed that there might be some merit in undertaking a light touch review of the Code and to consider removing the distinction between "Other and Non Pecuniary Interests" by joining them together and reviewing the definitions. The three different types of interest had caused confusion with Members and the public and therefore, could be made simpler. In addition, it had been raised whether the provisions on declarations of interests had gone far enough and questions had been asked whether the Council should be retaining a register of interests. Matters such as membership of various groups or organisations had caused concerns with elected Members and the public that those were not registered, and whilst this was not required on a statutory basis, provisions could be included within the local Code. Members discussed the advantages of a register of interests, beyond the statutory minimum which is required by the legislation and welcomed further exploration in this area.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that nationally, a number of Councils had reviewed their codes since adoption, some in response to feedback on definitions or areas which were missing, or due to the lack of sanctions available if the obligations were compromised. New ideas such as a voluntary acceptance of suspension and a recall scheme were emerging and information on those could be presented to the Committee for information through the review of the Code. Members agreed that this would be a good idea for their next meeting. The Committee discussed reviewing the Code in a working group style and this would be arranged when necessary.

The Monitoring Officer also believed that it was appropriate and reasonable for the Protocol, which set out how the Monitoring Officer role should be performed, to be also subject to a review, in order to ensure that Members remained content and confident with the roles and responsibilities as set out.

To enable the Committee to focus on promoting high standards of conduct as well as reacting to complaints it was considered appropriate to discuss and agree a work plan for the Committee for 2016/17. Members referred to Appendix 1 of the Monitoring Officer's report.

It was moved by Councillor Heaney, seconded by Councillor Baker and **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) The contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) The Annual Work Plan for 2016/2017, as set out in Appendix 1 to the Monitoring Officer's report, be approved, subject to:

- The inclusion of a review of the Monitoring Officer Protocol at the September 2016 meeting.

## **9. DISCUSSION TOPICS AND/OR UPDATES FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER**

### Quarterly Complaints Update

The Monitoring Officer circulated to the Committee the quarterly schedule, which gave general details of complaints received, without providing any names, and went through it with the Committee. The Monitoring Officer also highlighted a number of other matters which included:

- (1) There had been an increase in the number of complaints received from members of the public against District and Parish Councillors, however, there had been no cause for concern as no re-occurring theme existed.
- (2) Requests for a Dispensation had been received from Councillor I Henderson and also Councillor J Hones. Both requests had been granted.
- (3) The Monitoring Officer informed Members that a Councillor had asked if the Standards Committee would consider recommending to Council that Group Leaders should be allowed to sit on the Standards Committee.

Following discussion by the Committee, it was moved by Councillor Heaney, seconded by Councillor Baker and **RESOLVED** that the Committee does not agree to recommend to Council that Group Leaders should be allowed to sit on the Standards Committee.

- (4) During a discussion between the Committee on recent Political Group changes the Monitoring Officer informed Members that the Council would soon be using modern.gov and that District Councillors' profiles would show the Political Group they belonged to on the Council and only the Political Party they stood for when elected.

Members asked questions and raised concerns in regards to those District Councillors who were not part of a Group being put into the category 'Others', as the term 'Independents' which was used by other authorities had been used for a Political Group.

Following discussion by the Committee, it was moved by Councillor Heaney, seconded by Councillor Honeywood and **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that:

'In order to clarify/reduce confusion with members of the public, all District Councillors who are not part of a Group on this Council should no longer be put into the category 'Others' and instead there should be a category with the name 'Non-Aligned' for those'.

The meeting closed at 11.26 a.m.

Chairman