

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1 September 2008

Complaints and findings/guidance from the Standards Board

0.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the development of the ethical agenda and any complaints received about County Councillors.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members of the Standards Committee previously agreed it would be helpful to have a standing item on each agenda setting out developments in relation to the ethical framework and any complaints received or pending against Members of the County Council. This is to ensure that Members are up to date with developments and aware of the type of issues that are being raised.

3.0 DEVELOPMENTS

Local Ethical Framework

3.1 Most parts of the new local ethical framework are now in place, along with the supporting legislation and Guidance. Members will be kept informed of developments. This is the subject of a separate report to the Committee's meeting.

4.0 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

- 3.1 The new locally based complaints regime is now in place. During the period since the last meeting of the Committee, the Monitoring Officer has received no new complaints against County Councillors that they may have breached the Code.

5.0 OTHER COMPLAINT MATTERS

Standards Board Monitoring

- 4.1 As a national regulator responsible for monitoring and promoting ethical standards the Standards Board monitors local ethical framework arrangements via an online information return system. Returns are made by authorities on a quarterly basis. The Monitoring Officer has submitted a nil return for the County Council for the reporting quarter April to June 2008.
- 4.2 The Standards Board has released information about the first reporting period for the new locally based complaints regime: the first returns covered the period 8 May - 30 June 2008 and showed that 164 English local authorities had 360 cases 'in the system'. A further 279 authorities said they had no cases to report in this first few weeks.
- 4.3 By way of comparison, an average of 295 complaints a month were handled by the Standards Board last year, who referred around one case in every seven for investigation, weeding out vexatious or politically motivated complaints.
- 4.4 Dr Robert Chilton, Chair of the Standards Board, has said: "We can see that a good proportion of local authorities are now gaining first hand experience of their new

role in receiving complaints and we wait with interest to see whether the change to a local framework will bring a change to the pattern of cases referred for investigation both locally and to the Standards Board.

“The Standards Board is working closely with local authorities and government agencies to ensure good standards of member conduct are at the heart of local government. We want to make sure there is a transparent, effective local standards system, backed up by effective local investigation and principled decision making, which will make a big contribution towards building confidence in local democracy.”

- 4.5 To complement the quarterly return, the Standards Board is currently considering the introduction and content of an Annual Return, which would set out information/criteria regarding wider ethical standards within an authority other than purely case handling. Members will be kept informed of developments.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Members note the contents of this report.

CAROLE DUNN

Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) and Monitoring Officer

Author of report: Moira Beighton

Telephone: 01609 532458

Room 15

Background Documents:

Standards Board for England website at www.standardsboard.gov.uk

County Hall
NORTHALLERTON

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