

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 November 2022

Annual Report of the Standards Committee

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the Authority with an Annual Report on the work of the Standards Committee from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Standards Committee was established in 2012 as part of the ethical framework for local government introduced by the Localism Act 2011.
- 2.2 The Committee has previously agreed that it would be helpful to publish an Annual Report on its work to the Authority in order to raise the profile of the Committee and strengthen awareness of its work and ethical standards generally. An Annual Report also assists in discharging the Authority's statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and also ensures that the Authority has an overview of work undertaken by the Committee in discharging the Authority's standards responsibilities.

**3.0 THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 The ethical framework introduced under the 2011 Act includes:
- i. **The Standards Committee:** The Committee usually meets twice per annum. During the period in question, the Committee met informally remotely (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) on 17 September 2021 and 11 March 2022, with any formal decisions required being taken by the Chief Executive Officer under his emergency decision making powers. The Committee is responsible for:
    - standards;
    - standards complaints handling issues;
    - the granting of dispensations; and
    - also has a role in relation to issues raised by or in relation to persistent and/or vexatious complainants.
  - ii. **Independent Persons for Standards:** Each relevant authority must appoint at least one "Independent Person". In 2012, the Authority approved the appointments of Mrs Hilary Gilbertson MBE and Mrs Louise Holroyd as Independent Persons for the Authority. The Independent Persons are invited to all meetings of the Standards Committee and are consulted on all key standards matters.
  - iii. **A statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct**
  - iv. **Members' Code of Conduct**
  - v. **Register of Members' Interests** (hard copy and online)
  - vi. **Complaint Handling**
  - vii. **Ethical Statements**

### viii. Standards Bulletin

- 3.2 The **Monitoring Officer** supports the Committee in its work, including maintaining the Register of Members' Interests and dealing with any complaints made against Members under the local standards regime.

## 4.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The work undertaken by the Standards Committee between the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 is set out below:

- (a) Review of ethical framework developments: the Committee has considered developments in the national standards regime and provided guidance to Members, for example in relation to:
- i. new Model Code of Conduct for Members: the Committee considered and responded to the LGA's consultation on a new Model Code and subsequently considered the new national voluntary Model Code published by the LGA and proposed amendments to the Council's current Members' Code of Conduct in light of the new model .A revised Code was adopted by full Council at its meeting on 16 February 2022;
  - ii. documents published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, for example its Reviews, Annual Report 2020/21, Report on the Regulation of Election Finance and its findings from its "Standards Matters 2" Review "Upholding Standards in Public Life";
  - iii. the Online Safety Bill;
  - iv. proposed complaint review role by Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman;
  - v. LGA Call for Evidence - Civility in Public Life: Abuse and Intimidation of Councillors.
- (b) Training: The Committee ensures that Members receive appropriate training to maintain their awareness of ethical standards. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, standards training for Members during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 mainly took place via guidance in the Standards Bulletins.
- (c) Register of Members' Interests: The Register of Members' Interests is also published on the Authority's website. The Committee monitors the operation of the Register. Following the adoption of the new Code in February 2022, the Members' registration of interests form has been reviewed to reflect the revised registration and declaration of interests' regime.
- (d) Standards Bulletin: The Committee has issued two Standards Bulletins during the period covered by this Report, aimed at keeping Members and Officers apprised of developments in the ethical regime. Copies of the Bulletin are published on the website and have also been requested by, and circulated to, other authorities.
- (e) Complaints: The Committee receives a Complaints Update report at each meeting. During the period covered by this Report, there were two complaints received that a Member may have breached the Authority's Members' Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer assessed the complaints in consultation with the Independent Person for Standards and no action was required to be taken in either case.
- (f) Liaison with neighbouring authorities: The Monitoring Officer has continued to liaise with the neighbouring authority Heads of Legal/Monitoring Officers.

(g) Standards Committee Annual Report: an Annual Report of the Committee covering the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 was presented to full Council on 17 November 2021.

4.2 The Committee will continue its work in the promotion of high ethical standards and further involvement in training of officers and Members at an appropriate stage.

## **5.0 RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 That the Authority receives and notes the Annual Report of the Standards Committee.

COUNCILLOR CLIVE PEARSON  
Chair of NYCC Standards Committee

Background Papers:  
Minutes of and reports to the Standards Committee

16 September 2022