

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 November 2021

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 2020 to 31 March 2021.

**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 remotely (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) on 18 September 2020 and 4 March 2021. 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 2020 to 31 March 2021 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 Members' Code of Conduct in light of the new model;
  - ii. various blogs published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The blogs aimed to ensure that standards were still kept at the forefront of people's mind whilst authorities were dealing with Covid-19 and its consequences;
  - iii. the intention of the Committee on Standards in Public Life to seek information from local authorities regarding progress made against best practice recommendations regarding local government ethical standards;
  - iv. documents published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, for example its Reviews, its follow up to its Best Practice recommendations, and its consideration of Misconduct in Public Office;
- (b) Members' attendance at Committees: the Committee considered and noted statistical information relating to Members' attendance at meetings of the County Council and its Committees for the period 1 April 2019 until 31 March 2020 and 1 April 2020 to 4 March 2021.
- (c) 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 2020/21 mainly took place via guidance in the Standards Bulletins.
- (d) 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.
- (e) 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.
- (f) Complaints: The Committee receives a Complaints Update report at each meeting. During the period covered by this Report, there was one complaint received that a Member may have breached the Authority's Members' Code of Conduct. The complaint has been referred for investigation.

(g) Liaison with neighbouring authorities: The Monitoring Officer has continued to liaise with the neighbouring authority Heads of Legal/Monitoring Officers' Group and attend meetings of the Group.

(h) Standards Committee Annual Report: an Annual Report of the Committee covering the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 was presented to full Council on 18 November 2020.

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.

CAROLINE PATMORE  
Chair of NYCC Standards Committee

Background Papers:  
Minutes of and reports to the Standards Committee

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