

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the proceedings at a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Georgian Room, Kendal Town Hall, on Monday, 10 October 2022, at 10.00 a.m.

Present

Councillors

Chris Hogg (Chairman)  
Matt Severn (Vice-Chairman)

Tom Harvey

Pete McSweeney

Parish Members

Leith Hallatsch

Apologies for absence were received from District Councillors Fiona Hanlon and John Holmes, Independent Member David Tweddle and Parish Member Peter Smillie.

Officers

Lawrence Conway	Chief Executive
Jane McKeon	Case Management Officer (Support Services)
Simon McVey	Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources
Simon Rowley	Director of Customer and Commercial Services
Josie Smith	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist (Solicitor)

**S/1 MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the Chairman be authorised to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2022.

**S/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were raised.

**S/3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUDED ITEMS**

There were no excluded items on the Agenda.

**S/4 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

RESOLVED – That the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee were noted.

**S/5****LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW, COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FROM APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 2022**

The Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources presented the findings of the annual report of the Local Government Ombudsman for 2021/22 and the summary of complaints and compliments received from April 2021 to March 2022.

Following on from May 2020, customer connect, the introduction of a streamlined complaints policy, and the implementation of an online system for logging, monitoring and responding to customer comments, compliments and complaints; the Council has adopted a new approach to ensure that complaints are responded to within the appropriate timeframe and all relevant documents are stored in a central location, and providing a much simpler way for customers to report any complaints.

Over the period of 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 the council received a total of 658 complaints and enquiries through the customer complaints channels. A breakdown of these was provided.

It was reported that the reasons for complaints were wide and varied and that there was no underlying trend, although during 2021/2022, the complexity of a significant amount of complaints made increased based on previous years. The impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic, and the challenges in delivering refuse services were discussed.

A breakdown of the total number of complaints received relating to service areas was provided.

It was stated how the Council recognises the value of complaints made and uses the insight gained to drive service improvements and promote a culture that is open to challenge, with a willingness to change and considering the wider implications. Lessons learned are used to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

In 2021/2022 no decisions were upheld against the Council as the Ombudsman did not find any evidence that the Council acted with maladministration. As a comparison, an average of 51% of decisions for similar councils are upheld.

Members noted the annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2022 and stated that these results were a credit to officers during a very challenging period. Members also addressed the planning complaints and referenced the significant number of those that had been received via Tim Farron's Office. An assessment of these were found to be immaterial and inconclusive. Staff within Tim Farron's office were inclined to be biased towards the complainants' which has not been useful or fair to the Council. Members intend to see that these are handled more effectively and reduced were appropriate.

Members also identified that in improving the ease and accessibility for users to make complaints this will have inevitably increased the number of complaints received respectively also.

Members expressed that they were keen for Council complaints reporting standards and practices to be forwarded on to the new authority for additional consideration and learning. Members indicated that they were looking to make future comparisons with other councils.

**RESOLVED** – That the reports be received and recent decisions of the Local Government Ombudsman be noted.

**S/6 CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – Solicitor, introduced the report and welcomed questions from Members.

The Chairman requested to return to this item with further updates from the report author.

RESOLVED – That the report of the Deputy Monitoring Officer with regards to complaints under the Council's Standards Arrangement from the date of the last update to the Committee on the 14 March 2022 be noted.

**S/7 DISTRICT REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY AND OTHER REGISTRABLE INTERESTS**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – Solicitor, introduced the report and welcomed questions from Members.

The Chairman requested that an email to the appropriate Group Leaders be sent to enquire as to why five Members had not confirmed that they understood the new Code of Conduct.

Members had no further questions.

RESOLVED – That the review of the District Register of Interests be noted.

**S/8 PARISH REGISTER OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY AND OTHER REGISTRABLE INTERESTS**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – Solicitor, introduced the report and welcomed questions from Members.

The Chairman requested that the Public Conduct Training be chased up and for the Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – (Deputy Monitoring Officer) to feedback at a later date to the Committee.

Members requested that the Parish Council training be maintained and kept updated for the new authority. Parish Council Clerk training is recommended to be delivered for newly elected Members.

RESOLVED – That the review of the Parish Register of Interests be noted.

**S/9 EMPLOYEE REGISTER OF INTERESTS AND GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – Solicitor, introduced the report and welcomed questions from Members.

Members discussed the different levels of registration, thresholds and values that must be recorded.

Members had no further questions.

RESOLVED- That the Review of the Employee Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality; and Member Gifts and Hospitality, and appendices be noted.

**S/10****STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist – Solicitor, introduced the Standards Committee Work Programme and welcomed questions from Members.

Members queried if the work of this Committee was being communicated with the new authority and the new Standards Committee set up. The Chief Executive provided an update on progress with the development of a new constitution, policy and performance framework. Complaints were discussed as an ongoing feature and reporting systems are currently being created. Members stated that learning from complaints gleaned across the existing Councils was currently being pulled together to produce the best in class solutions for plans forward.

Members stipulated the importance of handing over the data and associated frameworks from this Committee/Council in an unbiased way for the new authority to make independent decision on how the new set up might work. Officers stated that they were within their remit to put forward best practice. Officers reassured Members that the current reporting processes and systems would remain operating in their current format until handover to the new authority.

The Chairman requested confirmation of the timescales involved for the important work of Standards Committees and the good practices of South Lakeland District Council being incorporated into the arrangements for the new council.

RESOLVED - That the Standards Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.56 a.m.