

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on 7 September 2010.

PRESENT: G Fell, (Chair).
Councillors C Hobson, McPartland, Sanderson and Taylor
Independent Members: Prof. B Footitt and C Nestor.
Parish Council Members: Councillors R Macmillan and C Morrish.

OFFICERS: M Braithwaite, C Davies, R G Long and D Robinson.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Carter, Elder and Junier.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 June 2010 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

CORPORATE COMPLAINTS – MONITORING 2009/2010

The Corporate Complaints Manager presented a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services setting out details of complaints made to the Council during the period April 2009 to March 2010. A total of 358 complaints had been received compared to over 450 the previous year. The report contained a statistical breakdown of the complaints received by department and of those complaints dealt with by other organisations or providers. Whilst in most cases complaints arise as a result of a straightforward service failure such as missed bin collections, more complex complaints may highlight procedural or policy weaknesses. In such cases where found to be necessary, the Council may review its practices, procedures or policies.

Welcoming the overall downward trend in the number of complaints received, Members suggested that the information be publicised further, perhaps through an article in Middlesbrough News. Members also requested that additional information be provided in future annual reports in respect of complaints that are: (a) unable to be processed within the required timescales at Stage 1 and (b) are forward to other agencies.

ORDERED that the report be noted and approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN: ANNUAL REPORT 2009/2010

The Corporate Complaints Officer presented a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services advising Members on the content of the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2009/2010 that commented on the Council's performance in respect of complaints to the Ombudsman. A copy of the annual letter was appended to the report.

Due to changes two years ago to the way in which the Ombudsman's office presented their statistical data direct comparisons with past years was difficult, therefore comparison, where possible, was provided for the last two years. Although there had been slight variations in each of the last five years the number of complaints for the year at 26 was within the 25 – 35 average. The 26 complaints were categorised as: 5 provision of advice, 3 premature complaints referred to the Council to investigate, 5 resubmitted premature complaints forwarded to the investigation team and 13 new complaints forwarded to the investigation team. There were no cases of maladministration and only in 2 cases was the Council asked to make a local settlement.

The Ombudsman in her letter congratulated the Council on the improvements in average response times made over the last 2 years which had reduced from 30.0 days in 2007/8 to 21.8 in 2008/9 to 15.3 days in 2009/10, the lowest for the past five years.

ORDERED that the report be noted and approved.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' APPOINTMENT PROCESS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported that the terms of office of Mr Geoff Fell and Mr Chris Nestor, the present Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, were due to end in the coming weeks and sought instructions regarding arrangements to fill the subsequent vacancies. As the termination date for the appointment of the current Chair in particular, would fall prior to the end of the recruitment process and before the new appointment is approved by Council, as required by legislation, Members were asked to approve a short extension to the existing tenure.

In order to bring future appointments in line with the practice of the majority of other local authorities and, as recommended by Standards England, it was proposed that the term of office for future Independent Member appointments be extended from three years to four years.

ORDERED as follows:

1. That an extension to the term of office of the two Independent Members referred to above be approved, either until 27 October 2010 or until the Chair's appointment is endorsed by the full Council.
2. That all future Standards Committee Independent Members be appointed for a four year term of office.

STANDARDS (HEARINGS) SUB-COMMITTEE SANCTION

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services, in response to a Member query confirmed that the action required in accordance with the sanction imposed by the Hearings Sub-Committee in respect of Case Reference MSC012/2009 had been taken by the Member concerned.

NOTED