

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee was held on 13 September 2011.

PRESENT: C Nestor, (Chair)
Councillors Davison, Hudson, McPartland, Rostron and Taylor
Independent Member: Prof B Footitt
Parish Council Member: Councillors R Macmillan

OFFICERS: M Braithwaite, C Davies, R G Long, G Rollings and M Pickering.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Hobson, Hussain, Ms J Kidd and Cllr C Morrish.

****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 14 June 2011 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

NOTED**CORPORATE COMPLAINTS – MONITORING - CFL**

Further to the previous meeting Members received an update from the Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning in regard to the reasons for the year on year increase in complaints for the service which had arisen in part, as a result of a significant increase in referrals, specifically in the areas of safeguarding and child protection and to assure the committee that lessons learnt from investigations were disseminated across the service to appropriate staff.

The Executive Director reported that the increase in the number of complaints was not a particular cause for concern as it showed that those using the service were aware that they could complain and that they were aware of how they could complain. Where the service had been at fault, they were prepared to acknowledge that error and, as the statistics showed, most of the complaints received were addressed to the complainant's satisfaction at stage 1. Where progressed to later stages the complaints tended to be those where parents were unhappy with what the authority was required to do in order to meet its statutory duties.

The service shared learning from complaints across a range of areas with partner agencies and where complaints were not upheld Team Managers were given an opportunity to review the issues and explain the reasons for decisions to complainants. The committee was advised that due to a tightening up of issues around school placements it was likely that there may also be an increase in complaints next year.

NOTED**LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN: ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2010/2011**

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 2010/2011 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 to the way in which statistical data was presented direct comparisons with past years was difficult, comparison was provided where possible. Although there had been slight variations in each of the last five years the number of complaints for the year at 17, was particularly low and outside the average 25 – 35 average. The 17 complaints were categorised as: 1 provision of advice, 4 premature complaints referred to the Council to investigate, 1 resubmitted premature complaints forwarded to the investigation team and 11 new complaints

forwarded to the investigation team. There were no cases of maladministration and the Council made 3 local settlements. Response times for the year averaged 22 days, although up on the previous year's 1.3 days this was still within the 28 day limit.

It was reported that the power granted to the Ombudsman's Office in 2009 to deal with complaints made by pupils and parents about state school introduced on a phased basis in the previous year was currently being reconsidered as part of the Education Bill presently before Parliament. If approved, the proposals would remove the new power.

ORDERED that the report be noted and approved.

REGISTERS OF INTEREST – REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services presented a report providing Members with a copy of the Internal Audit report of the review undertaken in April 2011 which examined the strength of current processes and procedures relating to the register and recording of gifts and hospitality. Details of entries made in the Members' Register of Interests and of the gifts and hospitality recording for Members and Officers during 2010/2011 were also submitted.

NOTED

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR OFFICERS

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services presented a report advising Members of the publication of a revised version of the current Code of Conduct for Officers originally introduced in April 2002. The policy included information in relation to general conduct, disclosure of information, private paid and unpaid work, interests in contracts etc., The policy had also been updated to take account of social media and gifts and hospitality policies.

NOTED

ABOLITION OF STANDARDS REGIME

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported that no further information was yet available regarding the above the proposals for which within the Localism Bill were progressing through Parliament. The item would be placed as a standard item for forthcoming meetings in order to report on future progress.

NOTED