

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 3 OCTOBER 2023 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Paul Oatway QPM (Chairman), Cllr Allison Bucknell (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Matthew Dean, Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Bill Parks, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Iain Wallis, Cllr Derek Walters, Gordon Ball and Julie Phillips

78 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies.

79 **Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 June 2023 were presented for consideration.

It was;

Resolved

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

80 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

81 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman noted that two Standards Hearing Sub Committees were due to take place in the coming months.

82 **Public Participation**

The Chairman noted a request for information which had been submitted by Mr Gantlett which related to questions asked at the previous Standards meeting and an informal meeting the Chairman had attended earlier in the year. A response would be provided following the meeting.

83 **Wiltshire Council Annual Report Complaints 2022-23**

The Committee received the Annual Report on Complaints for the period of 2022-23

Key points regarding complaints activity compared with 2021-22:

- 12% increase in formal complaints on the previous year
- Rise in complaints relating to the SEND and Inclusion Service
- 35% rise in complaints resolved as 'service requests'.
- A decrease in the percentage complaints resolved at Stage 1
- 43% increase in complaints resolved at Stage 2.

The Committee noted the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2022-23, provided as Appendix 1 to the report. There had been a 2% reduction in complaints upheld by the Ombudsman. A breakdown of all Ombudsman's investigations and findings for the year were set out in the Letter.

If a service area showed a sudden spike in complaints, the Director would be made aware.

A number of actions would be put in place to improve the complaint handling procedure, including wider training across multiple service areas. In addition, a new IT system for complaints was currently being developed in house which would enable a wider range of data to be collated and used to analyse performance and speed the process up.

Stage 1 complaints were responded to by the relevant service area. Stage 2 was managed and responded to by the Complaints Team.

The Committee commended the work of the Complaints team for the progress in dealing with complaints.

It was;

Resolved:

To note the Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2022-23, and

To note the actions to further improve the council's complaints handling function over the next 12 months.

84 **Status Report on Code of Conduct Complaints**

The Committee received the status report, updating on the number and outcome of Code of Conduct complaints received since the last meeting on 20 June 2023 and providing a summary of the complaints considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee (ASC).

There had been 15 Code of Conduct complaints received by the Monitoring Officer during the period of 12 June – 22 September 2023. Of these, 3 were determined No Further Action (NFA) by the Monitoring Officer, 2 were determined NFA by the ASC, 1 was dismissed as 'out of time' by the Monitoring Officer, 9 were assessed by the ASC at its next meeting on 28 September

2023, 7 (linked complaints) of those were referred to Investigation and 2 were dismissed as no further action. There have been a further 5 complaints received since the publication of this agenda.

The report included a new section which detailed the speed of the investigation process. An Investigation Report was aimed to be completed with 35 days, with a further 10 days allowed for the parties to comment.

Previously the team had one officer to write Code of Conduct investigation reports, now all Complaints Officers had been trained to carry out the investigations, which it was believed would result in improved timescales.

A table of current cases had been provided to the Chairman on 14 June, 12 July, 8 August and 13 September 2023 for a dip sample of cases to be undertaken to enable oversight.

The Monitoring Officer noted that as the Complaints team was relatively small, he had taken the judgement to give priority to complaints submitted by members of the public about council services over those submitted about elected members.

It was noted that one complaint which had exceeded the target timescales for completion was being investigated externally, which showed that additional external resources did not always quicken the procedure and incurred a cost to the council. It was also recognised that many of the Complaints received were complex in nature and therefore it was not possible to process every complaint in line with set timescales.

After a discussion, it was,

Resolved:

To note the position on Code of Conduct Complaints.

85 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 2.40 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Alexander of Democratic Services, direct line 01722 434560, e-mail lisa.alexander@wiltshire.gov.uk

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