

Minutes of the meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 25 September 2013 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor B W Butcher

Councillors: M A Russell
L A Keen
S C Manion
K Mills
C J Smith

Also Present: Mr B P S Dowley

Officers: Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer
Solicitor to the Council and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Corporate Complaints and Resilience Officer
Democratic Support Officer

227 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P J Hawkins.

228 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there were no substitute members appointed.

229 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

230 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 March 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

231 COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Director of Governance on formal complaints received by the Council that had been investigated by the Corporate Services Team.

The Corporate Complaints and Resilience Officer (CCRO) advised that ten complaints had been investigated at stage two between the last meeting of the Standards Committee and the end of August. In respect of complaint number WST112, Members were advised that there had been a breakdown in communication and it was acknowledged that the Council could have done better. In respect of complaint number CTX079, it was explained that the Chief Executive's PA had asked EK Services (EKS) to draft a letter for his signature, but EKS had mistakenly sent the letter out themselves. Complaint number WST117 related to a waste e-mail alert sent to numerous recipients over the Christmas period. The e-mail had disclosed the recipients' e-mail addresses to one another. The Director of Governance advised that, due to the Council's swift action in apologising to those affected and its introduction of new procedures to prevent a recurrence, the

Information Commissioner had decided not to take any further action. The CCRO reported that six decisions had been issued by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) who had found no cases of maladministration.

In response to a query from Councillor C J Smith, the CCRO advised that the LGO's annual report gave comparative data for local authorities. The Director of Governance added that this information only covered complaints which had been referred to the LGO, and providing comparative data for complaints handled at local level would be more difficult since each authority had its own method of categorising and dealing with complaints.

Councillor L A Keen stated that comparative data would be useful and requested that statistics relating to the number of complaints received by EKS and East Kent Housing (EKH) be provided. Although no longer directly within the Council's control, it was still responsible for what happened in these services. It was suggested that the complaints at Appendix C of the report should be grouped together by service for easy comparison, and an additional column added to indicate which body the service belonged to.

The Solicitor to the Council advised that EKS was directly accountable to the EK Joint Arrangements Committee, but this committee met infrequently. The CCRO reminded the Committee that, at its last meeting, it had resolved that EKH complaints would be reviewed on an annual basis. It was clarified that EKS was responsible for responding at stage one of the complaints process. However, where a complaint progressed to the second stage, the CCRO would investigate, working closely with EKS. The Council received reports of complaints from EKH and could call a complaint in, referring it to the LGO if this was considered appropriate.

The CCRO encouraged staff to report any compliments received, but only where these related to Officers going above and beyond the normal level of service that would be expected.

- RESOLVED:
- (a) That the complaints report be noted and the actions taken endorsed.
 - (b) That an annual report be provided for each service (including EK Services and EK Housing) showing trends.
 - (c) That complaints and compliments statistics be included in the annual State of the District report.
 - (d) That Appendix C of the report be annotated to indicate which body the service belongs to (ie DDC, EKS, EKH).

232 REVIEW OF KENT MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

The Solicitor to the Council apologised that, owing to other pressing priorities, it had not been possible to produce a report for the meeting. However, a review of the Kent Model Code of Conduct had been undertaken which had recommended only minor changes. A report would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Members were advised that the Department for Communities and Local Government had updated its guidance on interests. The principal change was the

need for Members to declare trade union membership. The guidance would be e-mailed to Members and parish clerks.

RESOLVED: That the Department for Communities and Local Government's updated guidance on interests be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.38 am.