

**At a meeting of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on MONDAY, 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2008 at 2.15 P.M.**

**Present:-**

Mr. G.N. Cook in the Chair

Councillors Charlton, M. Forbes, Gofton, Wakefield and Wares, together with Mr. C. Stewart and Councillors G.W.K. Hepple and A.R. Wilkinson (Hetton Town Council)

**Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Colin Stewart, the newly appointed third independent Member and Councillor A.R. Wilkinson, the second Member representative from Hetton Town Council, who were attending their first meeting of the Standards Committee.

**Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence was submitted to the meeting on behalf of Mr. Paterson.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2008 (copy circulated) were submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

1. RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

## **Procedure for the Local Assessment of Complaints**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching draft procedures for the local assessment of complaints for consideration by the Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The City Solicitor briefed the Committee on the report, drawing attention to the topics the procedures covered as detailed at paragraph 2.1 including a delegated power to him in relation to the appointment of the Sub-Committees. He pointed out that they followed closely the guidance issued by the Standards Board but could be developed further in the light of the Committee's own experience. He advised that the Complaint Form had been modified to include a section to assist with equality monitoring. He invited the Committee to endorse the procedures. In conclusion, the City Solicitor informed Members that once all the policies and procedures for the Standards Committee had been endorsed and revised, where necessary, he intended to compile a handbook for ease of reference.

Councillor Gofton enquired as to what information would need to be disclosed under a Freedom of Information (FOI) request in relation to a complaint considered by the Assessment Sub-Committee.

The City Solicitor advised that the Assessment Sub-Committee was required to produce a written summary after making its decision. The normal access to information rules entitling the public to inspect the papers did not apply to the Assessment Sub-Committee and the Review Sub-Committee. There were a series of exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act and in preparing a response to a FOI request there was a need to consider the applicability of any exemptions.

In response to Councillor M. Forbes' enquiry as to whether the Standards Committee would be informed in relation to the complaints received, the City Solicitor advised that he would submit a quarterly report to the Standards Committee informing Members of the number of complaints considered. The report would, however, not include details of the cases. The Standards Committee would receive a full report on a complaint only where it was to determine a case.

Mr. Stewart referred to Section 2.2 of the report and enquired whether a Member would be given the reasons as to why he was not informed of a complaint made against him.

The City Solicitor confirmed that the reasons why a Member was not informed initially of any complaint could be included at a later date when writing to inform him or her that a complaint had been made against him or her and the outcome of this.

Full consideration having been given to the report and procedures, it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the draft procedures be endorsed and adopted without modification.

(Signed) G.N. COOK,  
(Chairman).