

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

29 June 2021

### Present:-

Councillors J Trail BEM (Chair) M Asvachin, J Bailey, P Maskell, L Samuel and C Slade

Sir Simon Day, I Hipkin, R Hodgins, A Mayes, R Saltmarsh

### Apologies:-

Councillors A Connett and P Henderson

#### \* 1 **Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

#### \* 2 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

#### \* 3 **Ethical Governance Framework: Monitoring**

The Committee received the Report of the County Solicitor ([CSO/21/12](#)) summarising the feedback from Co-opted Members of this Committee on their attendance at recent virtual meetings of Committees since the previous meeting, monitoring compliance by Members and Officers with the Council's ethical governance framework.

A number of positive comments had been made relating to clear explanations from Officers, a controversial item being handled well, that it was good to see the public taking part, fast publication of the minutes and good preparation by Members for the meeting.

The Committee were pleased to note that there had been no areas of significant concern or any indication of actions or behaviours that might be felt to have resulted in a potential breach of the Code.

#### \* 4 **Customer Feedback Monitoring Report**

The Committee considered the Report of the Strategic Customer Relations Manager on the volumes and themes for all types of customer feedback (Complaints, Representations and Compliments), letters from Members of Parliament (MP Enquiries) and complaints being dealt with by the Local

Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) about Devon County Council (DCC) for the financial year 2020-21 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021).

It also provided information regarding overall response times and issues arising from upheld complaints.

Finally, the Report provided complaint summaries, findings and recommendations on those complaints upheld by the LGSCO in 2020-21.

Members noted that between the 31<sup>st</sup> March and 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic and in line with LGSCO guidance issued at that time, the Council had only accepted complaints that raised high risk or safeguarding matters. However, all complaint correspondence was still logged and dealt with through service areas. Stemming from this, complaint data was not available for the reporting period, but it would be included in future reports.

Appendix 1 – Table 1 contained a summary of customer feedback activity for 2020-21. Members noted that “Stage 1 Complaints” referred to any complaint dealt with locally by the service. “Stage 2 Complaints” referred to any Childrens Social Work complaint escalated to Stage 2, within the Childrens Statutory Complaints Procedure. “Complaints LGSCO” referred to any complaint received by the Council from the LGSCO. It was noted the numbers of complaints that escalated to the LGSCO had been low across the whole organisation.

The number of Stage 1 complaints continued to increase after Q1 through 2020-21 and this reflected the fact that both the LGSCO and DCC’s Customer Relations Team (CRT) were closed for all feedback, bar those items that raised either high risk or safeguarding matters. Appendix 1 – Table 2 provided a breakdown of the number of complaints received by directorate.

Members also noted a new project with Childrens Social Care which promoted a restorative approach to complaints with a focus on early conversations with service users to focus on an early resolution to issues.

Members discussed the future reporting mechanisms for the Committees consideration of this data.

## **RESOLVED**

(a) that the Report be noted; and

(b) that future Reports be brought on an annual basis, reporting on any exceptions on a six monthly basis.

\* **5**      **Local Determination of Complaints**

The Deputy County Solicitor reported that, since the last meeting, two complaints concerning an alleged breach of the Members Code of Conduct had been received relating to Councillors ‘failing to treat others with respect’ ‘acting in a manner that could cause the Council to breach an equalities enactment’ and ‘bringing the office but not the Council into disrepute’.

Following an initial assessment of the complaints and consultation with an Independent Person appointed by the Council it had been agreed that no further action be taken on one complaint on the basis that the Councillor was not acting in the capacity of County Councillor so there had been no breach of the code to warrant further investigation. In relation to the second complaint, it was felt the Councillor had failed to treat others with courtesy and respect, but there had been no breach of any equality enactments. Whilst the Councillor was repeating a published opinion and did not intend any offence, he agreed to apologise.

**NOTES:**

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

\* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 2.39 pm