

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

10 March 2025

Present:-

Councillors J Hart (Chair), T Adams, I Chubb, C Slade, R Hodgins and A Mayes

Apologies:-

Councillors I Hall, J Bailey, A Connett and R Saltmarsh

63 **Declarations of Interest**

Details of Councillor membership of other authorities can be viewed here – [County councillors who are also district, borough, city, parish or town councillors.](#)

There were no further interests declared.

* **64** **Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Chubb, **SECONDED** by Councillor Slade and

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

* **65** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* **66** **Annual Report of Customer Feedback**

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (LDS/25/14) on the summary of the detail contained within the annual reports for Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care covering the reporting period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Much of the detail that was contained within the reports was brought before the committee as part of a wider feedback report in October 2024.

Local authorities are required to publish two separate annual complaints reports for Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care, in accordance with statutory legislation. This distinction reflects the differing legal frameworks,

statutory duties, and regulatory oversight governing complaints in these two service areas.

The requirement to publish separate annual reports ensures that each service area's performance in handling complaints is monitored, evaluated, and reported in line with its respective statutory obligations.

A total of 232 compliments were received regarding Integrated Adult Social Care services between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. Devon supports approximately 11,500 people at any one time and around 20,000 people per year. The number of compliments per year is therefore about 1.2% of the population served annually.

Several teams received positive feedback, including Social Care Reablement, Dementia Care Homes, and the Autism and ADHD Service.

A total of 197 local complaints were received regarding Integrated Adult Social Care services between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. As context Devon supports approximately 11,500 people at any one time and around 20,000 people per year. The number of complaints per year is therefore just under 1% of the population served annually. The most commonly upheld complaints related to:

- Communication issues (e.g, delays in responses, unclear information).
- Delays in service provision (e.g, delays in assessment, this covers Financial, Occupational Therapy or Care Act assessments and care delivery).
- Quality of care (e.g, concerns about the adequacy of care received). The majority of complaints in this area relate to experience within our providers

A total of 22 compliments were received regarding Children's Social Care services between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

A total of 360 complaints were received under the statutory three-stage complaints process between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

Key upheld complaint themes included:

- Delays in response times and poor communication.
- Errors in assessments and lack of clear planning for children in care.
- Lack of staff training in mental health and neurodiversity.
- Insufficient involvement of children in decisions affecting them.

The Customer Relations Manager is working directly with Children's and Adult Social Care Senior Managers to identify improvements to reporting, to include the capturing of learning from complaints and more detailed analysis of themes and trends, which will help to identify areas that require improvement and ensure the delivery of high-quality services.

Members questions and discussion points raised included: turnover of staff, engagement with the public regarding feedback, the various methods and ease of access for the public to be able to make a complaint, ability to hold the council to account, small percentage of complaints, more work needed to educate staff on receiving compliments, looking at ways to improve complaint handling, the importance of getting the basics right such as grammar and spelling, concerns on response times, recognising that small figures can skew percentages.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee note the contents of the Report.

* **67** **Ethical Governance Framework: Monitoring**

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (LDS/24/40) summarising feedback from Co-opted Members of this Committee on their attendance at meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees since the previous meeting monitoring compliance by Members and Officers with the Council's ethical governance framework.

Members had, since the report to the previous meeting in October 2024, attended the following meetings of Farms Estate, Procedures, Devon Education Forum, Land and Property, Development Management, and Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee, both virtually and in person, and their views/feedback are summarised below.

- People spoke clearly and demonstrated papers had been read.
- Questions were thoughtful and relevant.
- Thoughtful consideration.
- Meeting was well attended by all members of the committee.
- Microphones working well and no difficulty in hearing contributors either in the room or remotely.
- Good contribution to the debate.
- Helpful if there was more direction on what was being discussed by the Chair.
- The meeting was well chaired, inviting a spirited and lengthy discussion and consideration of amendments.
- There was little on the agenda that created much debate: much of the time was spent scrutinising the way in which the requested deferment was handled.
- The meeting started slightly late.
- The view of the meeting was very small – the rest of the screen taken up with the initials of those attending remotely. It was therefore hard to see who was talking.
- The discussion was friendly and informative.
- The sharing of screens went very well and the presentations were clear and informative.

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, acknowledging also that steps would continue to be taken to address practical and procedural matters in light of Member's comments arising from both this and the previous monitoring reports in future training sessions.

The Report was noted

* **68** **Standards Committee Annual Report**

The Committee considered the Standards Annual Report for 2024/25 prepared in line with best practice commenting on work and developments during the year and on any issues for consideration or development in the future.

The Committee met three times in 2024/25, which were all ordinary meetings and there were no convened Assessment Sub Committee to assess complaints.

Co-opted Members also attended several other meetings of Committees to observe and monitor compliance with the Council's ethical governance framework.

The Governance Working Group (GWG) which was established in summer 2023, continued with its work to review various aspects of governance and had explored several areas in depth including improving communication and responses to councillors questions which has led to work to create a Member Portal, amend the process around public participation particularly around Development Management and Highways and Traffic Orders Committee, reviewing the recording and publication of officer decisions, amendments to standing orders around notices of motion, proposing changes to working practices around site visits and pre-agenda meetings, reviewing the committee structure and recommending changes to a number of internal and external committees.

Much of this work had resulted in new policies, guidance or constitutional amendments which have gone through the democratic processes and been agreed and implemented.

The Report also covered Annual Review of the Code of Conduct and review of Complaints Processes, complaints Against Councillors, and Customer Complaints.

With elections on 1st May, the new Council, may also have its own views on the priorities for the next year and there is also the challenge around local government reorganisation and important issues to consider and address around this huge area.

The outcome of the consultation on 'Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England' is awaited which aims to introduce measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England and ensure consistency of approach amongst councils investigating serious breaches of their member codes of conduct, including the introduction of the power of suspension.

Discussion points included: the range of topics covered in the Governance Working Group, the small amount of member complaints, the change to the Cabinet Member Reports process which would be reviewed shortly.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that the Annual Report for 2024/25 be approved, published on the Council's website and promoted via Inside Devon.

* **69** **Local Determination of Complaints**

The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported that, since the last meeting, there had been three complaints concerning alleged breaches of the Members Code of Conduct.

The Complaints raised included allegations of a defamatory and insulting social media post, defamatory statement made in a County Council meeting and poor communication.

As shown in the table on the Report one complaint had been determined as requiring no further action and two have been acknowledged and are awaiting determination.

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 2.00 pm and finished at 2.41 pm