

Report of the Monitoring Officer

(Approved by Joint Standards Committee on 20 January 2021)

Draft Annual Report for 2019/2020

Foreword from the Chair of the Joint Standards Committee

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Members on the Committee and the Independent Persons for their continued hard work and support in the work of the Committee during the year. The work of the Standards Committee remains central to the ethical and governance responsibilities of the Council which are an essential element in local government continuing to retain the trust of the public which it serves.

Membership of the Committee

The Committee would like to thank all of its Members for supporting and attending the meetings during this year. The Committee appointed Councillor Claire Douglas as the Chair and Parish Councillor Siân Wiseman as the Vice Chair.

City of York Council:

- Councillor Claire Douglas
- Councillor Rosie Baker
- Councillor David Carr
- Councillor Tony Fisher
- Councillor Martin Rowley

Parish Councils

- Councillor Christopher Chambers
- Councillor Stuart Rawlings
- Councillor Siân Wiseman

Independent Persons

- Angharad Davies
- David Laverick

The Committee also welcomed Janie Berry, Director of Governance & Monitoring Officer following her appointment on 19th December 2019, and took the opportunity to thank Suzan Harrington, Interim Monitoring Officer for the support and advice she had offered the Committee prior to her departure in March 2020.

Complaints

During the municipal year 2019-2020, the Council received 22 complaints.

Of these, 14 complaints related to 20 City of York Councillors and 8 complaints related to 11 Parish Councillors.

1 complaint was upheld;

2 complaints were not upheld; and

16 complaints did not meet the published criteria for investigation, 10 of these complaints were determined by a sub-committee formed by the Joint Standards Committee.

3 complaints are yet to be concluded, this is due to the fact that another party investigation is still taking place.

All of the complaints received have been reported to meetings of the Joint Standards Committee throughout the year.

Other work

Annual Review of Procedures for dealing with Council Code of Conduct Complaints

In 2019 the Committee reviewed proposals suggested by the previous Joint Standards Committee in relation to the procedures for dealing with code of conduct complaints in York. This review finalised the work previously done ahead as part of a regular review for the Committee.

Committee for Standards in Public Life

The Committee also considered the findings of the report of the Committee for Standards in Public Life (“CSPL”) which was published in January 2019. The terms of reference for CSPL included examination of structures, processes and practices across England around Codes of Conduct, investigation of breaches to ensure they are dealt with fairly and with due process, sanctions and enforcement of Codes, conflicts of interest and declaring interests and whistleblowing.

The CSPL made 26 recommendations and identified 15 areas of best practice to improve ethical standards in local government. The Joint

Standards Committee considered these recommendations and suggested best practice alongside practices adopted in York.

Review of Council's Constitution

The Joint Standards Committee reviewed parts of the Constitution as part of the wider Council review which were of relevance to the work of the Committee during this municipal year. The Committee also provided a response to the consultation.

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Whistleblowing

Veritau conducted a review of the Council's Whistleblowing policy in 2018-2019. On 6 February 2019 the Head of Internal Audit at City of York Council asked the Audit and Governance Committee to consider a new draft policy. The document was being shared with the Committee for comment before being taken forward for approval. It was suggested that the views of the Joint Standards Committee should be sought, because a whistleblowing report may involve a Councillor.

The Joint Standards Committee convened a Task Group in order to discuss the draft policy and the Committee's views were fed back to Veritau. The policy was again considered by the Audit and Governance Committee on 4 December 2019. The views of the Joint Standards Committee were taken into account and minor amendments were made to the draft policy.

The national lockdown in response to COVID-19 on 23rd March 2020, meant that the Joint Standards Committee was unable to complete its intended work programme for this particular year but it is hoped that this can be resumed and concluded during 2020/21.

Author & Chief Officer responsible for the report:

Janie Berry

Director of Governance &
Monitoring Officer

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