

**SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

**Standards Committee**

**Meeting held 17 September 2015**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Alan Law (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, Mary Lea, Vickie Priestley, Colin Ross and Peter Price (Substitute Member).

Co-opted Members

John Atkinson, Alan Casbolt and Edward Fleming.

Officers in attendance:

For Item 5 - Andrew Fellows (Customer Services Manager) and Jenny Callaghan and Dave Luck (Complaints Managers)  
Gillian Duckworth (Director of Legal and Governance)  
Dave Ross (Principal Committee Secretary)

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ben Curran, Bryan Lodge and Pat Midgley and Councillors Michael Appleby, Nigel Owen and Karen Southwood (Parish/Town Council Co-optees).

**2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 There were no items identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest from Members of the Committee.

**4. MINUTES**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 June 2015 were approved as a correct record.

**5. ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN REPORT 2014/15**

5.1 Andrew Fellows, Customer Services Manager, introduced a report of the Interim Director of Customer Services that (a) provided an overview of the complaints received and formally referred and determined by the three Ombudsmen (Local Government Ombudsman, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman) relating to services provided by the City Council both directly and through partners from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 and (b) identified future developments and areas for improvement in complaint management. In particular he referred to:-

- The number of complaints investigated by Council services was 684 in 2014/15 compared with 906 in 2013/14.

- There had been an increase in the number of enquiries received from the three Ombudsmen and full details of the enquiries/complaints raised by the Ombudsmen were set out at Appendix A of the report.
- Of the 123 enquiries recorded by the Council's Complaints Team in 2014/15, 43 were formally investigated compared to 36 in 2013/14.
- The Ombudsman found that there was maladministration in 19 complaints that were upheld and with injustice in 16 of the cases. No formal reports were issued against the Council during the year, compared to one in 2013/14. Details of these complaints were included in Appendix B to the report.
- In terms of the cost of the complaint handling, £16,380 was paid to complainants in financial remedies, compared to £19,507 in 2013/14.

5.2 The Customer Services Manager explained that he was seeking to improve and strengthen the learning from dealing with complaints. In terms of the national agenda, the Government was to create a single Public Service Ombudsman but there was no timetable for the establishment of the new organisation.

5.3 Officers responded to questions from members of the Committee and agreed to confirm the number of complaints that had exceeded the 28 days' response time target.

5.4 In respect of a question about housing complaints, officers indicated that they were dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman and this included non-Council providers. There was currently a backlog of housing complaints. The Housing Ombudsman produced an Annual Report but this tended to have less information than the report from the Local Government Ombudsman.

5.5 In response to a comment from a Member of the Committee that the £10 cost for the handling of a complaint resolved through problem solving seemed low, the Customer Services Manager indicated that it was based on a nominal figure calculated by the National Audit Office in 2005. The costs were based on the management time in handling a complaint, except where a payment was made or an independent investigation was used.

5.6 **Resolved:** That (a) the Annual Ombudsman Report is noted; and

(b) the Customer Services Manager would confirm with members of the Committee the number of complaints that had exceeded the 28 days' response time target.

## 6. UPDATE ON STANDARDS COMPLAINTS

6.1 The Director of Legal and Governance introduced a report informing members that one formal complaint that had been received under the Procedure for Dealing with Complaints Regarding City, Parish and Town Councillors and Co-opted Members that was adopted by Full Council in March 2015.

6.2 **Resolved:** That the Committee notes the contents of the report.

**7. WORK PROGRAMME**

- 7.1 The Director of Legal and Governance submitted a report giving details of the proposed work programme for the Standards Committee and members were asked to consider the programme and identify any additional items for inclusion.
- 7.2 **Resolved:** That the Committee approves the Work Programme for December 2015 to June 2016.

**8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 8.1 It was noted that meetings of the Committee would be held on 10 December 2015 and 17 March and 16 June 2016 at 2.00 p.m.