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## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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**Monday, 5th October, 2015**

**Present:** Hyndburn Borough Councillors

Councillor June Harrison (in the Chair), Councillors Joyce Plummer (Vice Chair), Bill Pinder and Kath Pratt

Altham Parish Councillors

Councillors Thomas Fearon, Anthony Hickson and Rennie Pinder

Independent Persons

Ms. Patricia Higginbottom and Reverend John Holland

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### **205 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **206 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

### **207 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Standards Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

**Resolved** - That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

### **208 Annual Ombudsman's Letter**

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) submitted a report relating to the Annual Local Government Ombudsman's Letter for 2014/15. The Letter was attached as Appendix 1 to the report and a comparison between the Council's position and that of neighbouring District Councils over the same period was attached as Appendix 2. The Local Government Ombudsman had received a low level of complaints about Hyndburn which made it difficult to identify trends from the statistical information provided. The low level of complaints might reflect good service delivery and / or a good internal complaint handling process. The Letter had not flagged up any areas of concern about either the Council's services or its procedures for dealing with complaints.

The Executive Director reported in relation to the twelve enquiries and / or complaints received about the Council and the determination of complaints during that period.

**Resolved** - That the Local Government Ombudsman's Letter be welcomed and the report be noted.

## **209 Review of Whistleblowing Policy**

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) submitted a report seeking a review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy prior to presentation to Cabinet for approval. The revised and updated draft Policy was appended to the report. The Committee was charged in the Council's Constitution with monitoring the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and advising on revision to the same. The current Policy had been adopted in 2010 and although the Council was not required by law to have one, most local authorities had and that was recognised good practice endorsed by the National Audit Office.

The Executive Director reported that the Policy was intended to support the Council's employees, councillors and contractors to raise concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice within the Council without fear of harassment or other reprisal. The Committee requested that it be made clear in the Policy who Councillors and Contractors could complain to.

**Resolved**

**- That the revised and updated Whistleblowing Policy be approved, subject to the inclusion of information on who Councillors and Contractors could complain to.**

## **210 Grant of Dispensations**

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) submitted a report seeking the grant of dispensations to five members of Hyndburn Borough Council for a period of four years to enable them to speak and vote on the following matters:-

- An allowance, payment or indemnity given to Members
- Ceremonial honours given to Members
- Setting Council Tax or a precept under the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, as amended from time to time or any superseding legislation
- Setting a local Council Tax reduction scheme for the purposes of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, as amended from time to time or any superseding legislation
- Setting a local scheme for the payment of business rates, including eligibility for rebates and reductions, for the purposes of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, as amended from time to time and any superseding legislation

The five Councillors were Lisa Allen, Loraine Cox, Diane Fielding, Melissa Fisher and Eamonn Higgins who had applied individually for dispensation to speak and vote on the above matters. Their request forms were appended to the report.

A dispensation had already been granted to the remaining 30 Hyndburn Borough Councillors.

**Resolved**

**- That, as requested, a dispensation be granted to the above named five Members of Hyndburn Borough Council to allow them to speak and vote on the issues set out above, the dispensation to expire after a period of four years or earlier if they ceased to be Members of the Council.**

## **211 Training - Dealing with Member Complaints**

The Executive Director (Legal and Democratic Services) provided a training session on how to deal with Member Complaints (Standards Committee - Local Determinations), as follows:-

- Role of Monitoring Officer
- Assessment Panel
- Formal Investigations
- Pre-Hearing Process
- Hearing Process
- Penalties
- Deciding on a Sanction
- Mitigating Factors
- Aggravating Factors

**Resolved**

**- That the contents of the training session be noted.**

Signed:.....

Date: .....

Chair of the meeting  
At which the minutes were confirmed