

Minutes of the meeting of the STANDARDS
HEARINGS PANEL held at 1.00 pm on
Thursday, 9th October, 2014 at Main Committee
Room, Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton

Present

Councillor G W Dadd
B Griffiths

Councillor R Kirk

Independent Person

Mr R C Pennington

Parish Council Representative

Mr E Dennison

SHP.10 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

THE DECISION:

That Councillor R Kirk be elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

(Councillor Kirk in the Chair)

SHP.11 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

THE DECISION:

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items of business at minute no SHP.12 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as the Panel was satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

SHP.12 **COMPLAINT ABOUT HOUSING BENEFITS TEAM**

The subject of the decision:

The Head of Legal and Information Services submitted a covering report regarding a complaint about the Housing Benefits Team.

The Panel heard from the District Council's Head of Service – Resources and the Council's Revenues and Benefits Manager.

The complainant was not present.

Alternative options considered:

Upholding the complaint.

The reason for the decision:

Having considered the Head of Legal and Information Services' report and the accompanying documents, and having heard oral representations from the Head of Service - Resources and the Council's Revenues and Benefits Manager, the Panel made the following findings:-

In 2013 overpayments of Housing Benefit arose because of some delay in processing wage information from the complainant. There had also been delay in relation to the change of circumstances of her son, but the Council had already apologised for this and deducted a figure as "compensation".

Whilst the letter of 6 February could have been better expressed in dealing with the reduction in repayments there was no intention to mislead the complainant. Any misunderstanding on the complainant's part was not the Council's fault.

There had, however, been some delay in providing the complainant with an explanation of how the reduction in repayments had been arrived at.

The Council had not failed to implement the instalment arrangements in January 2014. This had occurred because the complainant had not completed and returned the appropriate form.

There was no evidence that the Council's staff had been unhelpful or threatening.

There had been no requirement for the officers referred to in the complaint to return the calls specified.

The Panel was pleased that lessons appeared to have been learnt from the issues relating to the delay.

THE DECISION:

That:-

- (1) the complaint be upheld in respect of :-
 - (a) the delay in processing the change of circumstances, and
 - (b) the delay in explaining how the reduction in repayments was arrived at;and the Council apologise for those delays, but that the complaint be not upheld in any other respect.
- (2) the complainant be informed that the Panel was disappointed that she had chosen not to attend the hearing, but also that this had not affected their consideration of the matter.

The meeting closed at 2.30 pm

Chairman of the Panel