

## **Standards Committee**

**5 December 2013**

Present: Councillor D Corkey (in the Chair)  
Councillors J Allan, B Caithness, M J Huscroft, C Johnson,  
F Lott, P Mason and L Spillard.

Also Present: Mr P Melia, Chief Executive

### **SC01/12/13 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J McLaughlin and J O'Shea.

### **SC02/12/13 Appointment of Substitute Members**

Pursuant to the Council's Constitution, the appointment of the following substitute member was reported:

Councillor B Caithness for Councillor J O'Shea.

### **SC03/12/13 Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made:

#### Item 9 – Dispensations – Appointment to Outside Bodies

Councillor D Corkey declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor M J Huscroft declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor C Johnson declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor P Mason declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

### **SC04/12/13 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the former Governance Committee meeting held on 5 September 2013 be confirmed.

### **SC05/12/13 Invited Speakers**

The Chief Executive, Mr Patrick Melia, had been invited to the meeting to continue the discussions of the former Governance Committee on ethical governance and the promotion of high ethical standards by Elected Members and Co-opted Members of the Council. The respective group leaders; Strategic Directors; the Chair and Deputy Chair of Council; and the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Planning Committee would be invited to future meetings to contribute to the discussion.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the importance of the Standards Committee in discharging the duty on the Authority to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by its elected and co-opted members through the ongoing progress of the Committee's Work Programme/Action Plan.

The Chief Executive commented on how, in his view, high standards could be achieved in practice. He encouraged all members to be open, honest and transparent; respectful of each other and each others' views; and that each member was responsible for their own behaviour.

He also commented on the behaviour of the Council's officers and its partners in relation to maintaining high standards in public life. His aim was to set the standard and quality of behaviour and to ensure all representatives of the council were aware of these expectations. In his experience people did strive to achieve high standards.

The Committee then discussed how it could help improve ethical standards and assist Members in their role.

The Committee acknowledged that robust political debate was acceptable, and it did not appear that behaviour was a major problem within the Council, but there was a fine line between debate and personal attack and perhaps not all Members knew where that line was.

The Committee referred to coping techniques which could assist Members to deal with difficult situations and prevent a small concern escalating into a complaint. Difficult situations would always arise, how they were responded to and in what manner reflected on the authority as a whole.

The Head of Law and Governance advised the Committee that training on techniques and training aides to assist Members in dealing with difficult situations/coping strategies, was due to be provided in February 2014.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and contribution to the discussion.

### **SC06/12/13 Action Plan and Work Programme**

The Committee received an update on the Action Plan and Work Programme for 2013/14. The Standards Committee was responsible for the Authority's statutory duty for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members and Co-opted Members of the Council. The action plan/work programme would be monitored by the Committee at each

meeting and the progress of the identified actions would be reported in the Annual Report in May 2014.

The Review of the Authority's local arrangements for considering complaints against elected Members and co-opted Members was completed in July 2013 and agreed by Council on 26 September 2013.

The Regional Conference to facilitate a dialogue and discussion regarding ethical governance and the application of the Code of Conduct for Members', was subject to discussion with other Authorities.

The Regional Forum for local authority Standards Committee Chairs and Monitoring Officers held on 25 June 2013 and hosted by North Tyneside with representatives from all the Tyne and Wear authorities, Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland Council, had received favourable responses from attendees.

The Forum would be used to exchange information, compare different approaches and learn from each others experience. The function of the Independent Person would also be discussed at this event to inform another item on the action list of providing training to the Independent Persons on their role.

During discussions the issue of regular Regional Events was raised and whether the benefits and outcomes of these events was worthwhile, it was therefore suggested that the Committee should continue to monitor the position.

The Head of Law and Governance advised the Committee that the Regional Event in June, which was chaired by the Deputy Chair of Standards Committee, Councillor Johnson, was well attended with feedback indicating the event had been helpful to those present, and who had been very enthusiastic with their contributions. Councillor Johnson added the event had also given an opportunity to raise discussions on some of North Tyneside Council's own processes with some of the actions arising having already been implemented.

**Resolved** that the update on the Committee's work programme and action plan be noted.

### **SC07/12/13 Training Update**

The Committee received a report on Member training events recently organised.

Under the Work Programme/Action Plan training was an important feature of the Committee's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the Elected Mayor, Councillors and Co-opted Members.

Training in relation to the use of social media by Members was a requirement/task to be delivered this year. In addition, the Committee at its last meeting requested that training be delivered to assist Members deal with difficult and potentially confrontational situations.

Face to face sessions for the social media training and for dealing with difficult situations had been arranged and advertised to Members, however both were subsequently cancelled. The training for dealing with difficult situations would be rescheduled early next year, it was postponed due to a clash with the budget setting meetings. The social media training was however cancelled due to the lack of take up.

## Standards Committee

A social media on-line training package had also been developed and was available to all Members via the Learning Pool. To date, only 2 Members had completed the course, although a couple of Members had fed back that they were having difficulty accessing the course. As a result, the look and feel of the Member Development Section in the Learning Pool had been re-organised to help with navigation. The module would be promoted again with Members.

The Head of Law and Governance said she encouraged all Members to engage in the Member Development Training Programme to achieve the full benefit of this resource.

During discussions the Committee requested details of the online training modules available to Members together with login arrangements to be re-circulated to all Members in order to promote learning. The Member Development Officer advised the Committee that the Learning Pool was an online learning platform which hosted a number of online learning modules which could be accessed via any computer with internet access.

The Committee referred to the methods used in the delivery of training, with the suggestion that in addition to the face to face sessions already provided, alternative methods of learning could be offered to Members to suit different lifestyles and also to promote more cost effectiveness training.

The Committee requested a report on the Member Development training sessions arranged during the last municipal year to be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee, to include the training offered, attendance figures and the sessions cancelled.

**Resolved** that (1) the report be noted;  
(2) the Member Development Advisor be requested to re-circulate details of the online learning modules available to all Members together with login arrangements;  
(3) a report on the Member Development training sessions arranged during the last year municipal year be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

### **SC08/12/13 Committee on Standards in Public Life - Annual Report 2012-13**

The Committee received a report which presented the "Committee on Standards in Public Life" Annual Report 2012-13.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life was established under the chairmanship of Lord Nolan by the then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon Sir John Major, in October 1994. The Committee was currently chaired by Lord Bew. The Committee was an independent advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). Its members were appointed by the Prime Minister. The Committee had the following terms of reference:

"To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life and to review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements."

The Committee fulfilled its role partly through its formal inquiries. In addition, it routinely monitored and considered issues and concerns relating to standards in public life, tracked public perception of standards of conduct of public office holders and sought to promote the Seven Principles of Public Life. The Seven Principles were incorporated into the Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.

The Annual Report provided an overview of the Committee's activities over the course of the financial year 2012/13.

As a part of its work in the last year the Committee had undertaken a "Standards Check". It had examined Local Government Standards as set out in paragraph 38 of the Annual Report at Appendix 1, and Member's attention was drawn to the Committee's comments in relation to the new standards regime adopted from 1 July 2012 under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.

During discussions the Committee raised the issue of public perception regarding standards of conduct of public office holders. The Committee requested that further work to be carried out in relation to engagement with the public with a view to improving standards.

**Resolved** that (1) the Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report 2012-13 be noted;  
 (2) the Head of Law and Governance be requested to carry out further work in relation to engagement with the public on their perception of public office holders with a view to improving standards.

### **SC09/12/13 Dispensations – Appointment to Outside Bodies**

The Standards Committee received a report on applications received from a number of Councillors, seeking dispensation in accordance with Section 33(2)(e) of the Localism Act 2011. The dispensations sought would enable the Councillors to speak and vote on any item of business at any Authority meeting in which they had a registerable interest by virtue of their appointment by the Authority to outside bodies. A copy of the application letters seeking dispensation were submitted to the Committee.

**Resolved** that (1) the applications received from Councillors for dispensation in respect to their registerable interests as set out below be granted for a period of 4 years, or the date when the Member ceases to be the Authority's representative on the outside body, whichever is earlier:  
 (2) further ad-hoc applications received from Councillors seeking dispensation to be considered by the Standards Sub-Committee:

Councillor B Burdis	Joint Street Lighting PFI Project Committee (Substitute). Northumberland In-Shore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. Northumbria Regional Flood Defence Committee. Tyne Port Authority.
---------------------	---

Councillor D Corkey declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Standards Committee

Councillor D Corkey	North Tyneside Citizens Advice Bureau. North Eastern Purchasing Organisation (Substitute). Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee (Substitute).
Councillor S L Cox	Robert Ashmore Redpath Education Foundation.
Councillor E N Darke	Longbenton Partnership Board. North Tyneside Trading Company. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Joint Committee. Balliol Primary School.
Councillor C Davis	Tynemouth Blind Welfare Society. Tyne Port Health Authority (Substitute).
Councillor M Finlay	Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. North Tyneside Health and Well-being Board.
Councillor E Hodson	Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority.
Councillor John Hunter	Tyne Port Health Authority (Substitute). Wallsend Charitable (Victor Mann) Trust (To end of May 2015).

Councillor M J Huscroft declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor M J Huscroft	Wallsend Charitable (Victor Mann) Trust (To end of May 2015).
-------------------------	---

Councillor C Johnson declared a non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor C Johnson	Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee.
----------------------	--

Councillor P Mason non-registerable personal interest in his own application for dispensation and he withdrew from the meeting during consideration of his application.

Councillor P Mason	Wallsend Charitable (Victor Mann) Trust.
Councillor Mrs S E Mortimer	Tynemouth Blind Welfare Society. Cullercoats Education Trust. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor P Oliver	North Tyneside Citizens Advice Bureau. Kettlewell Education Foundation. Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Joint Committee.
Councillor K Osborne	North East Regional Employers Organisation. Tynemouth Blind Welfare Society.
Councillor G Madden	Wallsend Charitable (Victor Mann) Trust. North East Strategic Migration Partnership.
Councillor M Madden	North East Strategic Migration Partnership.
Councillor B Pickard	North East Regional Employers Organisation. LA7 Leadership Board (Substitute).
Councillor M Rankin	Pensions Committee (Substitute).
Councillor J Stirling	North Tyneside Citizens Advice Bureau. Association of North East Councils. North Eastern Purchasing Organisation.
Councillor A Waggott-Fairley	Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Joint Committee. Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee (Substitute).
Councillor Mrs J Wallace	Wallsend Charitable (Victor Mann) Trust. North Tyneside Health and Well-being Board.
Councillor A McMullen	Local Government Association Assembly Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Joint Committee (Substitute)