

# North Tyneside Council Report to Standards Committee Date: 19 June 2014

## ITEM

Title: Annual Report  
and Action Plan

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**Report from Directorate:** Chief Executive's Office

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Governance and Employment

**Wards affected:** All

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### 1.1 Purpose:

To provide a report on:

- a) the work of the Standards Committee from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014; and
- b) the action plan/work programme of the Standards Committee for 2014/15.

### 1.2 Recommendation(s):

The Committee is requested to:

1. consider and suggest any additions and amendments to this report as appropriate; and
2. grant delegated authority to the Head of Law and Governance in consultation with the Chair of the Committee to finalise the report, taking into account any comments received pursuant to recommendation 1 above, prior to its submission to Council at its meeting to be held on 24 July 2014.

### 1.3 Information

Central Government's modernisation agenda for local government in the late 1990's included the introduction of a new ethical framework for local government. This followed on from the Nolan report on Standards in Public Life published in 1995.

The Local Government Act 2000 provided the statutory basis for this and a key element was that Authorities were required to set up Standards Committees.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes to the Local Government Act 2000 with effect from 1 July 2012 and the Council abolished the Standards Committee and established a Governance Committee in response to the new requirements in relation to ethical governance.

Following a further review of the Authority's Local Arrangements in respect of dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct for Members, Council in September 2013, along with other changes to the Local Arrangements, renamed the Governance Committee as the Standards Committee.

### 1.3.1 The Standards Committee's role

The Standards Committee's terms of reference are set out in Appendix 1 to this report. The Committee's ongoing role is to consider what actions it should undertake to promote high standards of behaviour by Members and Co-opted Members.

### 1.3.2 Membership of the Standards Committee

The following were the Members of the Standards Committee in 2013/14:

Councillors Jim Allan, Councillor Frank Lott, Councillor Paul Mason, Councillor Jean McLaughlin, Councillor John O'Shea, Councillor Lesley Spillard and Councillor Michael Huscroft. The Committee was chaired by Councillor D Corkey. The Deputy Chair was Councillor C Johnson.

Mr G Clark and Mrs S Gardner have been appointed by the Council to act as Independent Persons in relation to the operation of the Authority's Code of Conduct. Mr Clark and Mrs Gardner attend meetings of the Standards Committee as guests of the Committee.

### 1.3.2 What has been done

#### Meetings of the Standards Committee

The Standards Committee met 4 occasions in 2013/14. The work of the Standards Committee in the last year is set out in the body of this report and the Action Plan outcome table detailed below.

The Standards Committee has a sub-committee. The Standards Sub-Committee was established to consider requests for dispensations from the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Members and to consider reports of complaints for potential breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members referred for investigation. The sub-committee has met on 4 occasions.

#### Complaints under the Code of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members

In accordance with the Authority's Local Arrangements, from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 there was only 1 local assessment of a complaint against a Members carried out. This complaint was referred for investigation.

The Sub-Committee received and accepted a report into this complaint that concluded that no breach of the Code of Conduct for Members had occurred.

The Sub-Committee also undertook a hearing into 1 complaint that had been referred for investigation. That complaint had been received in the previous municipal year. The Sub-Committee found that no breach of the Code of Conduct for Members and Co-Opted Members had occurred.

#### Public Engagement on Code of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members

The Committee at its December 2013 meeting requested that a public engagement exercise be undertaken to gauge the public's perception of Member behaviour and the requirement for the Authority to have a Code of Conduct.

Engagement events were organised and took place in late April and June 2014. Participants were invited from the Residents Panel and the Youth Council. Both events were successful and positive feedback was received from the participants in relation to how the event was organised and run.

A report summarising the feedback received from participants was provided at the June meeting of the Standards Committee.

Action Plan for 2012/13

The Action Plan for 2013/14 has been monitored by the Committee at each meeting.

The Standards Committee is responsible for the Authority's statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the Elected Mayor, Councillors and Co-opted Members. The Committee had worked to discharge this duty by undertaking the following actions:

| Action   | Why   | By When   | Status/Suggested action   |
|--|---|-----------|---|
| Monitor the operation of the new Members' Code of Conduct.   | To ensure that it is operating effectively  | Ongoing   | Ongoing   |
| Review the Authority's local arrangements for considering complaints against Members.  | To ensure that it is operating effectively and transparently with appropriate ownership of the procedure by Members                     | July 2013 | Completed. New arrangements approved at Council Meeting on 26 September 2013.   |
| Develop an on going programme of meetings with invited guests, including the Elected Mayor, the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Group Leaders, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Council and the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Planning Committee. | To develop a dialogue between the Committee, and members and appropriate Officers relating to ethical governance and ethical standards. | Ongoing   | Ongoing. The Elected Mayor and Interim Chief Executive attended the Committee on 6 June 2013. The current Chief Executive attended the Committee on 5 December 2013. The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended the Committee on 6 March 2014. |

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| To provide training for the Committee on relevant ethical standards issues  | Training on local assessment, the Code of Conduct and other relevant matters/legislation.  | Ongoing   | Ongoing.  |
| To make training available to all Council Members on ethical governance, ethical standards issues including arrangements with respect to the Code of Conduct; granting of dispensations, the use of Social Media and declaring interests. | To ensure all members receive information on ethical governance, ethical standards to minimise risk of unwitting breaches of the Code of Conduct | May 2013  | Completed. On-line training via the Learning Pool is available to all Members in relation to the requirements of the Code of Conduct, declaring interests, dispensations and the use of social media. |
| Continue production of Annual Standards Committee Report  | Presentation of Annual Report of the work of the Committee during the previous 12 months.  | By end of each municipal year   | Ongoing.  |
| Consider holding a Standards Committee Regional Conference.   | To facilitate a dialogue and discussion about ethical governance and the application of the Code of Conduct for Members                          | Decision whether to hold such an event - September 2013   | The meeting of Chair and Deputy Chairs in a regional forum (see below) overtook the requirement for a regional conference. This will be reconsidered as part of the new year's work programme.        |
| Encourage the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standards Committees to meeting in a regional forum   | To facilitate a dialogue and discussion about ethical governance and the application of the Code of Conduct for Members                          | Mid June. Favourable responses from authorities in the region have been received to this event. | Completed. First meeting held on 25 June 2013. Further meeting held on 31 January 2014.   |
| To provide training to the Independent  | To ensure that the Authority's   | November 2013   | Completed. Training event   |

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| Persons on their role | Independent<br>Persons understand<br>their role in relation<br>to ethical<br>governance and the<br>Code of Conduct for<br>Members |  | held on 20<br>January 2014. |
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### 1.3.3 The Standards Committee's - Future Work/Action Plan up to 31 March 2015

This Action Plan will be monitored by the Committee at each meeting and the progress of the identified actions will be reported in the Committee's Annual Report in May 2015. The Standards Committee is responsible for the Council's statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the Elected Mayor, Councillors, Co-opted Members. The Committee will work to discharge this duty by undertaking the following actions:

| Action  | Why  | By When  |
|---|--|--|
| Monitor the operation of the new Members' Code of Conduct.  | To ensure that it is operating effectively   | Ongoing  |
| To continue to develop an on going programme of meetings with invited guests, including the Elected Mayor, the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors, Group Leaders, the Chair and Deputy Chair of Council and the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Planning Committee. | To develop a dialogue between the Committee, and members and appropriate Officers relating to ethical governance and ethical standards.          | Ongoing  |
| To provide training for the Committee on relevant ethical standards issues  | Training on local assessment, the Code of Conduct and other relevant matters/legislation.  | Ongoing  |
| To review training available to all Council Members on ethical governance, ethical standards issues including arrangements with respect to the Code of Conduct; granting of dispensations, the use of Social Media and declaring interests.   | To ensure all members receive information on ethical governance, ethical standards to minimise risk of unwitting breaches of the Code of Conduct | September 2014. Results of a survey detailing Members views of the current training provision will be presented to the Committee's meeting in June 2014. The results of that feedback will be used to review the available training. |
| Continue production of Annual Governance Committee Report   | Presentation of Annual Report of the work of the Committee during the previous 12 months.  | By end of each municipal year  |

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| Consider holding a regional Standards Committee Conference.  | To facilitate a dialogue and discussion about ethical governance and the application of the Code of Conduct for Members                        | Decision whether to hold such an event - July 2014 at regional forum of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standards Committees (see below) |
| Encourage the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standards Committees to meeting in a regional forum      | To facilitate a dialogue and discussion about ethical governance and the application of the Code of Conduct for Members                        | An event is currently scheduled for 4 July 2014 and will be hosted by Northumberland County Council.                                 |
| To provide training to the Independent Persons on their role                                       | To ensure that the Authority's Independent Persons understand their role in relation to ethical governance and the Code of Conduct for Members | November 2014  |
| To review the Authority's Local Arrangements for dealing with Complaints under the Code of Conduct | To ensure that the Authority's Local Arrangements meet the requirements and expectations of the Members and the relevant legislation.          | September 2014   |

**1.4 Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Standards Committee Terms of Reference

**1.5 Contact officers:**

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**1.6 Background information:**

Reports to and Minutes of Standards Committee Meetings

Stephen Ballantyne

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