

# North Tyneside Council Report to Standards Committee Date: 17 December 2015

## ITEM 6

Title: Regional Meeting of  
Chairs and Deputy Chairs  
of Standards Committees  
and Independent Persons

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**Report from Service Area:** Law and Governance

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**Wards affected:** All

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### 1.1 Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the most recent regional meeting of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standards Committee and Independent Persons held on 9 October 2015.

### 1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that the Committee notes this report.

### 1.3 Information

As the Committee will recall, the first regional meeting of Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Standards Committees and Independent Persons was held in June 2013. The fifth and most recent meeting was hosted by Gateshead Council on 9 October 2015. Most local authorities in the region were represented. The Minutes of the Meeting are attached at Appendix 1.

The discussion included the following items:

#### (i) Dealing with “persistent complainants”

One authority reported that it had received a substantial number of complaints from the same person and was keen to explore how other authorities dealt with that issue.

Some of the other authorities confirmed they had had a similar experience. It was generally agreed that each complaint should be dealt with in accordance with the authority’s assessment criteria and these should generally “filter out” those complaints which had no merit so that they could be disposed of quickly. If a complainant continued to make purely vexatious complaints, then it would be for the Monitoring Officer and the Authority to decide how to deal with that complainant in the same way as it would deal with any other person who made vexatious complaints (ie not necessarily under the standards regime).

## (ii) Dealing with “persistent offenders”

Some authorities reported that some Members had had a number of complaints against them upheld but the current sanctions regime did not deter them from committing further breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members. It was acknowledged that the lack of effective statutory sanctions had been an issue of concern since the new regime was implemented in 2012. It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer Group would liaise to make joint representations to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Those present agreed to supply evidence (anonymised where required) of the problems experienced to support these representations. It was also agreed that the letter to DCLG could be copied to local MPs in an effort to seek their support.

## (iii) Training for Standards Committee Members/Independent Persons

It was proposed that there should be regional training for Standards Committee members to deliver a common approach and economies of scale. Any such training would, of course, need to note the differences in the code of conduct adopted by each Authority. This proposal was welcomed. Similarly, it was also proposed that regional training for Independent Persons would be beneficial. This training could be largely combined with the training for standards committee members, given that it would relate to similar issues and would also help committee members to gain a better insight into the role of Independent Persons and vice versa, although the training would obviously need to recognise the specific responsibilities of each role.

The Monitoring Officer Group will bring a proposal to the next regional meeting. The next meeting will be held in approximately six months' time in Sunderland.

### **1.4 Appendices**

Minutes of the Meeting of Regional Standards Committee Chairmen and Independent Persons Meeting on 9 October 2015.

### **1.5 Contact officers:**

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### **1.6 Background information:**

None.