

Item 6

REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DATE: 6TH April 2006

REPORT OF SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL AND MONITORING OFFICER

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER FORUM

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the Council's position in relation to the establishment of an Independent Member Forum in the Northern Area.
- 1.2 The Independent Members of Darlington Borough Council's Standards Committee have suggested the possibility of establishing an Independent Member Forum in the North East and have enquired whether there is any interest from our Independent Members to set up that kind of body.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Standards Committee be appraised of the report.
- 2.2 That the level of interest from the Independent Members at the meeting be noted.
- 2.3 That a further report follows, when the details and recommendations for the forum have been finalised.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1 At present, there is no such forum in the North East. The nearest forum geographically is in Yorkshire and Humberside. Enlarging that forum would not appear to be an attractive proposition and a better alternative would appear to be setting up a forum for the North East.
- 3.2 There are perceived to be some benefits for Independent Members in having their own support organisation, where they can exchange experiences of best practice and help to develop consistency of approach across Authorities.
- 3.3 References have been made to the concept and the way in which such a forum might be set up in the Standards Committee News, Issues 3 and 4.
- 3.4 The Standards Board have agreed that it will be useful if more forums are set up and on setting up a forum consideration is to be given to the following:

- 3.5 **Size:** Depending on enthusiasm, support of Councils and travel distances, 30 – 40 attendees at a meeting is advisable.
- 3.6 **Membership:** Many forums are restricted to Independent Members but some are opened up to Officers, such as Monitoring Officer for support and advice or as a full participant.
- 3.7 **Formality:** Some formality is useful, such as terms of reference but informality is more appropriate for some areas.
- 3.8 **Costs:** Travel costs should be covered if it is recognised by the Authority that the forum is a formal part of the role of an Independent Member.
- 3.9 **Support:** Forums need secretarial and financial support for basic duties like arranging meetings and distributing agendas and minutes
- 3.10 **Council Position:** The Chief Executive and Director of Resources have been consulted on the establishment of such a forum and support the idea being progressed. If necessary the Council is prepared to be actively involved in setting up and servicing such a forum, on a joint basis with participating authorities, providing whatever is necessary

4. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No financial implications have been specifically identified at this early stage. Nevertheless it is anticipated that there will be certain implications for the Council in establishing an Independent Member Forum. Accordingly, further reports will follow in due course.

5. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 5.1 The Statutory Officers have considered this report.
- 5.2 Independent members of the Standards Committee have been consulted on this report and their views will be taken into consideration.

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Wards: N/A

Key Decision Validation: N/A

Background Papers

Standards Committee News: Issue 04: November 2005
Standards Committee News: Issue 03: November 2004
Correspondence from the Borough Solicitor, Darlington Borough Council

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Council's Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Council's S.151 Officer or his representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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