

Standards Committee

24 November 2014



North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chair of Standards/Governance Committees and Independent Persons Meeting

Report of Colette Longbottom, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members following the meeting of the North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs of Standards/Governance Committee and Independent Persons.

Background

2. On 19 September 2014, the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor J Armstrong and the Governance Solicitor attended a meeting of the North East Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs of Standards/Governance Committee and Independent Persons at County Hall, Morpeth.
3. The regional meeting convenes twice a year to discuss Standards issues.

Summary of business

4. A number of local authorities spoke at the regional meeting about operating different practices for managing Code of Conduct complaints. For example, at Sunderland City Council, the independent person is involved in the assessment of complaints. Both Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council's Standards Committees are chaired by independent persons. North Tyneside Council has also retained a review mechanism as part of their local assessment procedure. It was agreed at the meeting that it is unlikely that a regional approach to dealing with Standards will be possible due the difference in local arrangements. The Governance team have reflected upon the different practices around the region but have found no reason to change the procedures which have worked efficiently in Durham since the new Code of Conduct and Standards regime was introduced in July 2012.
5. A discussion was held regarding the way to deal with Councils which experience high numbers of complaints but no new ways were identified.

6. A view will be sought from the regional Monitoring Officers Group on the expansion of the Code of Conduct to include provisions regarding contravention of the Equalities Act like the provisions that were included in the old Code of Conduct.
7. The regional Monitoring Officers Group will explore whether a Code of Conduct training U Tube clip / DVD could be developed.
8. The regional Monitoring Officers Group will continue to develop a Social Media Policy for members working with members of the regional meeting.
9. Durham will be hosting the next meeting of the regional group in March 2015 at County Hall.

Recommendations and Reasons

10. Standards Committee is invited to note the content of this report.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance: None specific in this report

Staffing: None specific in this report

Risk: None specific in this report

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty: None specific in this report

Accommodation: None specific in this report

Crime and Disorder: None specific in this report

Human Rights: None specific in this report

Consultation: None specific in this report

Procurement: None specific in this report

Disability Issues: None specific in this report

Legal Implications: None specific in this report