

A meeting of the: **Audit and Standards Committee**
will be held on: **Tuesday 8 April 2025**
at: **10.00am**
in: **Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UL**

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

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Further to the agenda previously circulated for the above meeting please find attached a report in relation to the following agenda item:

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| 10. Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England | 159 - 162 |
| To consider further information requested by the Committee in relation to the operation of the standards regimes currently in place across the region. | |

Contact Officer: Michael Robson, Senior Governance Officer
Tel: 0191 2777242 E-mail: michael.robson@northeast-ca.gov.uk
www.northeast-ca.gov.uk

Audit and Standards Committee

8 April 2025

Subject: Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England

Report of: John Softly, Monitoring Officer

Report Summary

This report provides further information requested by the Committee in relation to the operation of the standards regimes currently in place across the region.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the content of this report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting in February the Committee considered an overview of the standards regimes currently in place across the region and details of the Government's consultation on proposals to strengthen the standards framework.
- 1.2 Whilst the Committee agreed to await the outcome of the ongoing Government consultation and any consequent legislative changes before giving more detailed consideration to these issues, members requested information about the range of sanctions imposed by constituent councils in recent years. Consequently, constituent councils have been asked to provide information for 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 in relation to:
 - i. how many standards complaints each authority has received;
 - ii. how many resulted in findings that the code had been breached; and
 - iii. what sanctions were imposed.
- 1.3 The information received is set out in Appendix A. It demonstrates the relatively low number of cases in which a breach of the code of conduct is found to have occurred and sets out the sanctions which have been imposed in those cases.
- 1.4 The Committee also asked that the North East CA's arrangements for dealing with allegations of breaches of its Code of Conduct for Members be circulated to members of the Committee so that they are familiar with the process. The arrangements have been circulated to members of the Committee and these are also available to view within [Part 5.1 of the North East CA Constitution](#).
- 1.5 Under the terms of reference of this Committee at [Part 2.5 of the Constitution](#), the Committee may appoint a subcommittee to (a) conduct hearings and determine complaints of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members and (b) grant dispensations. The terms of reference do not stipulate the size of the sub-committee but it may be felt that a sub-committee of 7 elected members (one from each constituent authority) and the independent chair may be appropriate.

2. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 2.1 The duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members supports the Authority's democratic governance arrangements.

3. Key Risks

- 3.1 None.

4. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 4.1 None.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Monitoring Officer is the author of this report.

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 In developing their respective codes and arrangements for dealing with complaints, all local authorities must be mindful of their Public Sector Equality Duty.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1 As set out above, the summaries included in this report have been developed in conjunction with officers from the constituent authorities.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Details of Standards Complaints received by Constituent Councils 2022-25

9. Background Papers

[North East CA Constitution](#)

[Minutes of the Audit and Standards Committee held on 18 February 2025](#)

10. Contact Officers

John Softly, Monitoring Officer, john.softly@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Michael Robson, Senior Governance Officer, michael.robson@northeast-ca.gov.uk

(Tel: 0191 277 7242)

Details of Standards Complaints received by Constituent Councils 2022-25

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Durham	71 complaints received (24 county and 46 town/parish and 1 rejected.) No breaches found.	55 complaints received (18 county and 36 town/parish and 1 rejected.) 5 breaches found. Sanctions imposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • censure, • written apology • training on Code of Conduct/ Member Officer relations. 	66 complaints received. (19 county and 47 town/parish.) No breaches found.
Gateshead	3 complaints received. No formal sanctions.	5 complaints received No formal sanctions	6 complaints received No formal sanctions
Newcastle	6 complaints received (2 against parish councillors) 6 no action required	12 complaints received (2 against co-opted members; 1 against 3 members; 4 complaints related to same incident). 10 no action required 1 complaint withdrawn 1 investigation and no breach found	9 complaints received 7 no action required 2 investigations (on-going)
North Tyneside	23 complaints received 18 no action required. 5 investigations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 no breach found - 3 breaches found Sanctions imposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letter of apology 	20 complaints received 19 no action required 1 investigation and no breach found	6 complaints received 5 no action required 1 investigation (ongoing)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a letter of censure • decision reported to Council for information. • councillor to delete the post complained of; • councillor to undertake social media training 		
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
South Tyneside	<p>34 complaints received</p> <p>16 complaints closed due to no evidence</p> <p>17 rejected for insufficient evidence or informal resolution achieved.</p> <p>1 breach found</p> <p>Sanctions imposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal censure at full council • removal from membership of Constitution Committee for the remainder of the municipal year • additional training. 	<p>27 complaints received</p> <p>4 complaints closed due to no evidence</p> <p>13 rejected for insufficient evidence or informal resolution achieved</p> <p>8 carried forward into 2024/25</p> <p>2 breaches found</p> <p>Sanctions imposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal censure by full council • email restrictions in order to triage before action for a period of 6 months • additional training 	<p>37 complaints received</p> <p>To date no breaches found.</p>
Northumberland	<p>36 complaints received (12 County and 24 Parish)</p> <p>None taken to hearing and no sanctions</p>	<p>23 complaints received (22 County and 12 Parish)</p> <p>None taken to hearing and no sanctions</p>	<p>21 complaints received (3 County and 18 Parish)</p> <p>None taken to hearing and no sanctions</p>
Sunderland	<p>15 complaints received</p> <p>No breaches found</p>	<p>3 complaints received</p> <p>No breaches found.</p>	<p>8 complaints (including 4 against parish cllrs).</p> <p>No breaches found.</p>