item 3

South Tyneside Council

Standards Committee
6 July 2026

Standards Committee
Minutes of 16 March 2026

Present: Professor Wright (Chair), Councillors Cunningham, Kilgour, Lamonte, J Taylor, Mrs Hall (Lay Member).

Officers in attendance: Lucy Keating (Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer), John Rumney (Corporate Lead, Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Neil Purvis (Information Governance and Feedback Manager), and Kelly Ellwood (Democracy Support Officer).

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Agreed: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2025 be confirmed as a true and accurate record.

Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

Kelly Ellwood, Democracy Support Officer, confirmed that a Members' Communications Session with a presentation on mechanism for reporting complaints was delivered on 10 March as discussed at the previous meeting, although it had been poorly attended.

4. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

John Rumney, Corporate Lead, Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report which updated the Standards Committee on investigations undertaken by the Council using the powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 during the last three months.

Members were reminded that RIPA provided the statutory framework for public authorities to use covert investigatory techniques, such as surveillance, where necessary and proportionate, for the purposes of preventing or detecting crime.

It was confirmed that the Council had not authorised the use of covert surveillance powers under RIPA during the period covered by the report. Members also noted that the type of work undertaken by the Council rarely required the use of RIPA. Where investigations formed part of wider work by another body, the Council's role was usually limited to providing information or evidence. Any use of RIPA powers by the Council would still require its own authorisation.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

5. Council Complaints and Compliments: Quarterly Report

Neil Purvis, Information Governance and Feedback Manager, gave a presentation and written report on complaints handling throughout Quarter 3 2025-26 to offer assurance that the Corporate Complaints Framework was effective.

715 complaints were received in Q3, representing a 18% reduction in complaints received in the same period the previous year.

The majority of complaints were related to quality of service (29%), delays in providing a service (19%) or unhappiness with a decision (15%). 43% of complaints were either partially or fully upheld, and 86% of complaints were dealt with at Stage 1 of the complaints process.

23 LGSCO decisions were received, five of which was upheld. The Housing Ombudsman issued 12 decisions, nine of which were upheld.

854 compliments were received in Q3. It was noted that for the second quarter running, the number of compliments exceeded the number of complaints.

Members noted the seasonality of complaints and compliments, with the Community Operations directorate receiving the highest numbers due to the public-facing nature of its services.

On statutory complaints, there had been 30 complaints received by Adult Social Care, of which 16 were upheld or partially upheld. Of 13 complaints received in Children's Social Care, nine were upheld or partially upheld.

The Chair observed that there was little incentive for people to submit compliments and suggested that the Communications Team could look at how positive feedback might be better shared to highlight good practice. It was advised that Adult Social Care already included compliments and examples of service improvements in their Annual Report.

Members were given a demonstration of the Power BI dashboard used to record and analyse complaints and compliments. It was explained that live data could be broken down in more detail by category, directorate and team, and that word clouds could help identify emerging themes. A Member welcomed this as evidence that feedback was being used and acted upon.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

6. Complaints under the Elected Members' Code of Conduct – Quarterly Report

Lucy Keating, Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer gave a report providing an update and overview of the complaints handling procedures, which included complaints received under the Members' Code of Conduct.

Members were advised that there were currently 12 live complaints; seven complaints had been concluded and closed since the last meeting, and one new complaint had been submitted. In addition to this, it was advised that since the report was compiled, an additional complaint had gone to hearing and been closed.

A summary of complaints and reasons for closure was presented for information, along with a snapshot tracker of open complaints.

Members discussed the cost of appointing external investigators, with one Member questioning whether this was proportionate to the sanctions available. The Chair noted that while stronger sanctions were being considered by the Government, the Committee was currently limited by legislation. The Director added that external investigations can offer better value in the long term, given the small size of the in-house team and the amount of work involved.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

7. National Picture Update

John Rumney presented a report which provided information on national developments, consultations and cases relating to the work of the Committee.

Issues highlighted comprised:

- Proposed reforms to the offence of misconduct in public office.
- Recent Code of Conduct breaches by councillors in Wokingham, Redbridge, Central Bedfordshire and Peterborough, covering issues such as predetermination, disrespectful behaviour, misuse of position and conduct bringing office into disrepute.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

8. Work Programme 2025-26

Kelly Ellwood presented the Work Programme which highlighted upcoming items for discussion, and Members were reminded that they could propose items for future meetings.

The Chair thanked everyone for their input across the year.

Agreed: That the Work Programme be approved as presented.

9. Chair's Urgent Items

Members were informed that the Council's Independent Person, Corraib MacCaba, would be stepping down from the role. Mr MacCaba would honour his current workload, and recruitment would begin for his replacement. He was thanked for his commitment and service, and it was placed on record how much his work was valued.

Members were also advised that discussions had taken place regarding Professor Wright continuing as Chair for a further term, subject to approval by Full Council.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

Dates and times of future meetings of Standards Committee would be determined at the upcoming Annual Meeting of Borough Council in May 2026.

SIGNED ____
Chair 6 July 2026