

THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on Friday, 28 October 2016 at 2.30 pm in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

PRESENT

Councillors:

Cllr A Dimmick
Cllr J Edney
Cllr A Gloak (Chairman)
Cllr D Loveridge

Officers:

H Clarke
J Gale
A Hussey

Co-opted Members (non-voting):

V Chapman
R Horton
J Middleton
W Wooding

Apologies:

T Ayre (Independent Person)
M Vacher (Reserve Independent Person)

Also present:

Cllr D Tanswell

1.	MINUTES – agenda item 2
	The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2016 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – agenda item 3
	No declarations of interests were made.
3.	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – agenda item 4
	There were no questions from the public.
4.	REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER: STANDARDS ARRANGEMENTS – agenda item 5
	<p>The Committee considered a report by the Monitoring Officer which set out options for future standards arrangements as part of a review of the Constitution following the 2017 County Council elections. He highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although the government had indicated that it would review standards arrangements, there was no sign that this was likely to happen, despite representations from local authorities. The Council's current arrangements were discretionary.• Officer capacity within the Council for Standards development work was limited and reducing;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Council's new process for dealing with complaints was operating successfully and as most issues could be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person, less work was generated for the Committee. Coupled with officer capacity issues, this had led to scheduled meetings being cancelled due to lack of business. This situation was common to the Somerset district councils. Although the need for a standing committee had reduced there would still be a need at times for officers to seek decisions from members on policy / procedure issues.• The role of the co-opted members was now very limited legally, although the Council continued to value their input and advice• The Council would still need access to a group of members to form a Hearing Panel, together with an Independent Person, as and when required. <p>In order to make recommendations to the new Council, the Committee considered the following options for future Standards arrangements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. No change to current arrangements. The Committee agreed that this could not be justified for the reasons stated above.2. Standards Committee replaced by a special Members Panel to be convened when needed to hear complaints against members. Panel members would be nominated by Group Leaders. The Committee acknowledged the flexibility of this arrangement but felt that this would be outweighed by problems of training and inconsistency of approach. Also it would not provide a mechanism for dealing with policy or procedural issues relating to member conduct.3. Combining the Standards and Constitution Committees to form a single Governance & Standards Committee (as set out in para 3.5.3 of the report). Members supported this option in principle as it would be cost-effective and would give a wider role to the elected members involved, as well as the co-opted members. The Committee emphasised the importance of retaining the Independent Person and the co-opted members in overseeing member conduct issues, particularly in terms of transparency and public perception.
	<p>Following further discussion, the Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• accepted the principles set out in the Monitoring Officer's report and unanimously supported the option of amalgamating the Standards and Constitution Committees, set out in para 3.5.3.• requested that the new combined committee should include co-opted members and that the political balance rules should be waived, as with the current Standards committee.• asked the Monitoring Officer to prepare a full set of recommendations for the next meeting, following consultation with the current Constitution Committee and research on models used by other authorities.

5.	MEMBER COMPLAINTS – agenda item 6
	The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported on three recent complaints, Two had been resolved and the other would be considered when further information had been received.
6	ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING The Monitoring Officer agreed to bring details of the Member Training & Induction programme for May 2017 to the next meeting. The next meeting would take place on 17 March 2017 (The meeting scheduled for 16 December 2016 would be cancelled.)

The meeting closed at 2.55 pm

CHAIRMAN