

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 27 March 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr John Bailey (Chair)
Cllr Brian Smedley (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Hugh Davies
Paul Hooper
Alan Hemsley

Cllr Frances Nicholson
David Stripp

40 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies for absence received from Robin Horton.

Paul Hooper and Cllr Martin Dimery sent apologies but were in attendance online.

41 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

42 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3

No members of the public had registered to speak.

43 Minutes from the Previous Meeting and Action Sheet - Agenda Item 4

The committee considered the action sheet from the previous meeting held on 24th January 2024 and noted the following.

Action 1.1 (Review committee – sub-committee membership)

This is included in the P2 report under item 8 on this agenda.

Action 1.2 (Update on the recruitment of an additional co-opted member)

This is agenda item 9.

Action 1.3 (Qualitative to response to survey Q5)

This is included in the P2 report under item 8 on this agenda.

Action 1.4 (To discuss and feedback the Groups thoughts on improving response levels to survey and uptake of Code of Conduct)

This is included in the P2 report under item 8 on this agenda.

Action 1.5 (Confirmation of whether point 9.6 of Somerset Councils code of conduct was included in the model code of conduct provided for city, town and parish councils to be given to members)

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that 9.6 was omitted.

Action 1.6 (Service director to share with Union reps and update committee)

The Monitoring Officer advised that this is a low priority item and is on hold at this time.

Action 1.7 (Individual experiences to be used to Test Drive)

This is included in the P1 report under agenda item 8 on this agenda.

Action 2.1 (Monthly reports to members and reporting to be reviewing every 6 months)

This is included in the P1 report under agenda item 8 on this agenda.

Action 2.2 (Standards Committee Annual Report – SW to discuss with JB and agree)

This is agenda item 5.

Resolved

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 24th January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

44 Annual Report of the Standards Committee - Agenda Item 5

The committee received the details of the six-monthly report of the relevant declarations of gifts and hospitality received from the 110 members during the period August 2023 to February 2024.

It was noted that none have been reported as accepted or rejected, which this committee has asked for before. The Chair asked that the Monitoring Officer consider this additional reporting going forward.

Members discussed the relevance and appropriateness of those declarations of gifts which do not appear to be related to Council

business. i.e. attending events where members were not representing this council. The Chair proposed that the issue should come back to P2 for further discussion, and this was agreed by the committee.

Resolved

The committee noted the Register of Gifts and Hospitality for the period August 2023 to February 2024.

45 Register of Gifts and Hospitality - Agenda Item 6

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Members discussed the relevance and appropriateness of those declarations of gifts which do not appear to be related to Council business. i.e. attending events where members were not representing this council. The Chair proposed that the issue should come back to P2 for further discussion, and this was agreed by the committee.

Resolved

The committee noted the Register of Gifts and Hospitality for the period August 2023 to February 2024.

46 Code of Conduct Complaints - Quarterly update - Agenda Item 7

The committee received the quarterly update on the number of Code of Conduct complaints received since April 2023, and the following comments and questions were received and discussed with David Clark, the Council's Monitoring Officer.

This would be picked up later in the agenda under the P1 working group report.

Regarding two recent incidents that occurred at Full Council meetings, one of these was not upheld as a formal complaint, and the other, which occurred after the reporting period presented to members in this report, would be included in the next report.

There is an inaccuracy in Appendix 1 Minehead Parish Council, should be Minehead Town Council.

Regarding Member Training on the Code of Conduct and Standards, this will be developed by the Member Development Panel, and the Chair asked that more details of this would be brought back to the next meeting of this committee.

Regarding any training needs that are identified by complaints, the Monitoring Officer suggested that he reach out to SALC regarding a training programme for town and parish councils.

There was a discussion around support and messaging around media policy and the Monitoring Officer advised that many of the larger councils do have their own policies.

Resolved

The committee noted the update.

47 Working Group Updates - Agenda Item 8

The Chair presented the Priority Group 1 report and there was some debate around the need for a feedback form. The Monitoring Officer advised that he would be happy to review the draft feedback form and report back.

Cllr Nicholson presented the Priority Group 2 report and asked that the committee to consider the recommendations within in. The Head of Governance reminded members that the recommendations within the report would result in a proposed amendment to the Constitution and would be subject to Full Council approval. He also added that under the Constitution Standards sub-committee members are made up of the elected members with voting rights, and that Standards co-opted members do not have the same voting rights.

Members discussed the recommendations at length and debated the value of the proposed changes given that there are minimal numbers of Standards sub-committees meetings held each year. The Chair proposed that this committee revisits the debate at a future meeting, should the number of Standards sub-committee meetings increase.

Resolved

The committee noted the reports from the Priority Groups 1 & 2.

48 Standards Committee Co-Opted Member recruitment update - Agenda Item 9

The committee received the update and one member felt disappointed that the vacancy had not been filled and suggested that the committee should seek some reassurance on the timeline for recruitment to the vacancy. The Head of Governance advised that from advertisement through to appointment the recruitment should take around two months, and the Chair and the wider committee agreed that this seems reasonable and acceptable, and therefore agreed that the outcome should be known in time for the next meeting.

Resolved

The committee noted the update on the recruitment to the co-opted member vacancy.

49 Work Programme and Actions - Agenda Item 10

(The meeting ended at 3.55 pm)

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CHAIR