

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Thursday 6 October 2022 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Cllr J Bailey (Chair), Cllr N Cavill, Cllr H Davies, Cllr B Smedley, Alan Hemsley, Paul Hooper, Robin Horton and David Stripp

**Other Members present via Microsoft Teams:** Cllr M Dimery and Cllr L Leyshon

1 **Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

No apologies had been received.

2 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

The Committee noted the details of the personal interests of all Councillors present already declared in relation to their membership of County, District, Town and Parish Councils.

No additional declarations were made.

3 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 3

No members of the public had registered to speak.

4 **Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee** - Agenda Item 4

The Committee discussed the Terms of Reference and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- Committee members asked if the co-opted members could give their feedback on the Terms of Reference.  
*The Committee Manager advised that yes, all feedback was valid and appreciated as part of the discussion. However, only elected members could vote on any recommendations.*
- Committee members queried whether there was an Independent Person appointed to assist with the complaint process.  
*The Committee Manager advised that yes there was as part of the Code of Conduct Complaints process.*

**Resolved** that the Standards Committee noted the Terms of Reference as attached in Appendix 1.

5 **Update from Standards Committee Workshop on 14 September 2022** - Agenda Item 5

The Committee discussed the Workshop and the following was a summary of the areas raised:-

- The Chair highlighted the three priorities that would be the focus for the committee and when they would be worked upon throughout the year.

- The Chair suggested that the committee should split into three smaller groups to help work on the priorities. This was agreed by the committee.
- The Monitoring Officer suggested that Priority Two would be an aspiration to get all the Parish/Town Councils to adopt the Countywide Code of Conduct (CoC). They were aware that the County and District Councils had all adopted it and that they would encourage all the Parish Councils to do the same, to ensure there was some consistency across all the different levels of authority.
- The Monitoring Officer advised that Somerset Association for Local Authorities (SALC) had advised that there was still a lot of work to get all councils to that position.
- Committee members queried whether Justin Robinson from SALC could be invited to the next meeting of the committee.  
*The Committee Manager advised that Justin Robinson would be invited to attend the next meeting of the committee.*
- The Monitoring Officer advised that Priority Three was further ahead in the work that had already been carried out. This was due to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Project and the work that had been carried out by the workstream groups. The committee was advised that the People Workstream was working on the CoC and that it should be ready by early 2023 in time for Vesting Day.
- Committee members mentioned the Open Day that they had recently attended for work on the Local Community Networks (LCNs) and they queried what had been said on contracts being set up between Parish Councils and the Unitary Council. The discussions had included the CoC and information from SALC on a Town and Parish Charter.
- Committee members suggested that once they had found out which Parish Councils had not adopted the CoC, they could ask them the reasons why, to offer any assistance if required.  
*The Monitoring Officer agreed and advised that work should be carried out in collaboration with SALC to ensure as many Parish Councils adopt the CoC, especially in light of the work being carried out for the Town and Parish Charter as that would include the CoC.*
- Committee members were keen to ensure all Parish Councils had adopted the same CoC as this would enable standardised training to be rolled out across the County and mean that the Monitoring Officer would only need to resort to looking at one version of the CoC when dealing with any complaints received.
- Committee members queried what happened with any complaints that had been received for Parish Councils that had not adopted the CoC.  
*The Monitoring Officer advised that they would have to use the individual code from that specific Parish Council.*
- Committee members requested clarification on the complaint procedures.
- Committee members queried who was responsible for the CoC.  
*The Monitoring Officer advised he was responsible for the Somerset Council and that it was the individual Parish Councils who were responsible for their own. He further advised that the legal framework came from the Localism Act 2020 and the former Constitution and Standards Committee had carried out some work of the CoC previously.*

- Committee members queried whether there was a minimum level required for the CoC.  
*The Monitoring Officer advised that the Localism Act 2020 set the high-level detail to be included along with the key areas that should be included.*

The Standards Committee agreed the following actions:-

- 1) The three priorities:  
**Priority One** - Review and assurance on existing complaints procedures, including any LGA recommendations for amendments ready for the New Council  
**Priority Two** - Adoption of Parish Council CoC across the County to come before the Committee  
**Priority Three** – Reviewing updates on Officer CoC
- 2) The members of the three groups:  
**Priority One:** Councillor John Bailey, Councillor Brian Smedley, Councillor Norman Cavill, David Stripp and Paul Hooper.  
**Priority Two:** Councillor Norman Cavill, Robin Horton and Alan Hemsley.  
**Priority Three:** Councillor Hugh Davies, Councillor Martin Dimery and Alan Hemsley.
- 3) That Justin Robinson from SALC would be invited to the next meeting of the committee.

## 6 **Work Programme 2022/23** - Agenda Item 6

The Work Programme was discussed as part of the previous item.

The Chair advised the committee of his plan for the Work programme as follows:-

- 1) **6 October 2022** – Agreed the Project Action Plans for Priorities One, Two and Three
- 2) **10 November 2022** – To agree and update on Priority One and to agree the Standards Committee input to Priority Two
- 3) **8 December 2022** – To finalise the draft report for Priority One and to agree the Standards Committee input to Priority Three
- 4) **2 February 2023** (moved from 26 January 2023) – To agree recommendations for all three Priorities and to agree the Annual Report for the Standards Committee, which should include the forward horizon and the role of the committee in the New Council.

## 7 **Any other business** - Agenda Item 7

- Committee members asked for an update on the work being carried out on the new Constitution.  
*The Monitoring Officer gave an update from the Constitution and Governance Committee.*

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**(The meeting ended at 11.45 am)**

**CHAIRMAN**