

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held at the **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Tuesday 1 March 2022.**

(2.02 pm - 2.45 pm)

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Nicola Clark (in the Chair)

**District Councillors:** Nicola Clark, Jenny Kenton and Sue Osborne

**Independent Persons:** Christopher Borland and Peter Forrester

**Officers:**

Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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### 1. **Minutes (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 July 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

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### 2. **Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hayward Burt and Peter Gubbins.

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### 3. **Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

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### 4. **Public question time (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

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### 5. **New Somerset Council - Proposed Members Code of Conduct (Agenda Item 5)**

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which informed members of the adoption of a new Code of Conduct for the new Unitary Authority, and sought the views of Standards members on if and when SSDC should adopt the same code. She noted the new Code had recently been adopted by Somerset Council for effect from May 2022 following the local elections. The Somerset Association of Local Councils were supportive of the new Code, and the other district councils in Somerset were also taking a similar report forward with a recommendation for approval prior to vesting day of the new Unitary Authority.

During discussion, the Monitoring Officer responded to points of detail and clarified that:

- members were only being asked for views and to form a recommendation at this stage, as a report would need to go to full council in order to adopt a new Code of Conduct for SSDC.
- The text in red shown in the agenda report was text which the Monitoring Officers across Somerset were recommending be added in addition to the Local Government Association (LGA) Code.

Other points raised by members included:

- The new Code should be adopted to provide consistency across Somerset.
- There may be a need to consider some separate guidance specifically for planning.

At the end of discussion members were in agreement that the Code should be recommended for adoption, for effect soon after May 2022 to align with Somerset County Council.

**RESOLVED:** Members agreed that their opinion was that:

- i. South Somerset District Council should adopt the Code set out at Appendix 2 to the agenda report.
- ii. The Code should be adopted from May 2022 (or thereabouts) to align with Somerset County Council.

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## 6. Update on Revisions to the Member / Officer Protocol (Agenda Item 6)

The Monitoring Officer briefly introduced the item which provided an update on revisions to the Member / Officer Protocol. She noted the report was just to confirm that changes had been made to the protocol as recommended at the previous meeting of the Standards Committee.

There was no discussion and members were content to note the update.

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## 7. Standards Committee Forward Plan (Agenda Item 7)

The Monitoring Officer introduced the item and explained she was aware there had not been many meetings of the Standards Committee for some time. She advised there were some matters that would need looked at and considered during the transition phase to the new authority.

A member of the Committee had contacted the Chairman to raise progress of items raised at a previous meeting. The Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Specialist provided some updates including:

- Review of the Code of Conduct complaints process - as recommending moving to a new Code for the new Somerset Council, it would be appropriate to review and update the complaints process and guidance document at that time.
- Clarity regarding recording of meetings - when this had previously been raised it was prior to the Covid pandemic and referred to audio recordings. Committee meetings were now streamed to YouTube to enable easy viewing, during or after a meeting. The Democratic Services Specialist suggested there might be a need

to consider a retention policy for the videos of meetings on YouTube as there were now many videos online. The Monitoring Officer advised that she would discuss the matter with the Data Protection Officer and enquire with the new authority about what it may like us to preserve and for how long. Members also suggested that the Local Government Association may have some guidance. The Monitoring Officer suggested a report could be made to a future meeting about best practice guidance on the matter.

- Training for Committee Chairs - this had been raised at a previous meeting and members were asked for their views. Members noted that different styles of chairing could lead to inconsistencies in delivery of meetings. Members agreed that training was important for Chairs and Vice-Chairs and should be rolled out for those who would have chairing responsibilities over the next 12 months.

During discussion, officers responded to points of detail, and members were content to note the updates and the suggested items for future meetings.

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**8. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 8)**

**RESOLVED:** That the following item (agenda item 9) be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under paragraphs 1 and 3: Information relating to any individual; and Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

*(Voting: Unanimous)*

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**9. Verbal Update on Complaints about Members (Confidential) (Agenda Item 9)**

Members noted a brief verbal update provided by the Monitoring Officer in confidential session about the volume and nature of complaints received under any code of conduct applying to elected members in South Somerset, at District, Town or Parish level.

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Chairman