

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Standards Committee – 23 February 2023

Ethical Awareness Training Update

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager & Monitoring Officer

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee Members with an update on the ethical awareness training that has been carried out in 2022/2023.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the ethical awareness training update.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Having a robust Standards regime is a key part of the Council's ethical governance arrangements. Ethical awareness training plays a key part of that.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 Ethical awareness training is important to ensure that high standards of behaviour and conduct is maintained for district, town and parish councillors.

- 4.2 During 2022/2023, the following ethical awareness training has been carried out:

Ethical Newsletters

- 4.3 The Monitoring Officer has produced two ethical newsletters for Somerset West and Taunton councillors during 2022/2023, and a third edition will be published before the end February 2023.

- 4.4 The newsletter objectives are to:
- To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors through:
- Updates and reminders on the ethical framework and Code of Conduct
 - Reminders regarding Register of Interests and Gifts & Hospitality Register
 - Highlighting expected ethical behaviour and conduct

- 4.5 The newsletters include important information such as
- Pre-election period guidance
 - Committee meeting etiquette
 - Promotion of the new Somerset wide Code of Conduct
 - Members personal safety
 - Reminders to update registers of interests and the gifts and hospitality register
 - Case studies showing the implications of examples where things go wrong.

- Examples have included social media pitfalls and expected behaviour in the chamber
- Examples of feedback that the Monitoring Officer has received about SWT Committee meetings

Training for District Councillors

- 4.6 An ethical awareness Member briefing session was held for all District Councillors on 11 January 2023, covering the topics of:
- Cases hitting the headlines and the impact on standards and democracy
 - Ethical culture and the importance of the role of leadership
 - Duty under the Localism Act 2011
 - 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life
 - Ethical leadership values v virtues
 - Somerset wide Code of Conduct
 - Social Media
 - Recording of meetings
 - Examples where Councillors have breached the Code of Conduct and their behaviour and conduct has hit the public domain

- 4.7 Approximately 15 Councillors attended the session on 11 January 2023.

Town and Parish Council training

- 4.8 The Monitoring Officer has invited all Town and Parish Councillors and Clerks to attend ethical awareness training – two sessions have already taken place (26 January and 9 February 2023), and the third session is scheduled for the 8 March 2023.

- 4.9 The sessions have covered:

- Cases hitting the headlines and the impact on standards and democracy
- Standards Regime – Localism Act 2011
- 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life
- Interests including registration, declarations at meetings and criminal offenses
- Committee on Standards in Public Life report on the Standards Regime 2019 including key recommendations and best practice guidance
- Somerset wide Code of Conduct
- Social media – benefits and pitfalls
- Recording of meetings – examples of when it goes wrong including Handforth Parish Council
- Confidentiality
- Being a Councillor v being an individual
- Disrespect v freedom of speech
- Public participation and risk – to individuals and Councils

- 4.10 For the first two sessions there has been twenty-five plus councillors and clerks in attendance for each session. A similar number of councillors and clerks are booked in for the remaining session.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Having a robust ethical governance framework is a fundamental part of delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy. Raising ethical awareness forms a key part of the framework.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 None arising from this report

7 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

- 7.1 There are no Unitary Council Financial Implications or S24 Direction Implications.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 None arising from this report

9 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 9.1 None arising from this report

10 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 None arising from this report

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 11.1 None arising from this report

12 Social Value Implications

- 12.1 None arising from this report

13 Partnership Implications

- 13.1 None arising from this report

14 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 14.1 None arising from this report

15 Asset Management Implications

- 15.1 None arising from this report

16 Data Protection Implications

- 16.1 None arising from this report

17 Consultation Implications

- 17.1 None arising from this report

Democratic Path:

- **Standards Committee – Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

Contact Officers

Name	Amy Tregellas
Direct Dial	0300 304 8000
Email	a.tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk