

Standards Committee Annual Report 2022/2023

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2022/2023, which provides information about the work carried out by the committee.

Membership of the Committee

At the time of writing this report, the Standards Committee is made up as follows:

- Cllr Mark Lithgow (Chair) (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Lee Baker (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Hugh Davies (Independent)
- Cllr Richard Lees (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Martin Peters (Labour)
- Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Steven Pugsley (Conservative)
- Cllr Ray Tully (Liberal Democrat)
- Cllr Terry Venner (Independent)

Purpose of the Committee

The Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee set out that the Committee has the following roles and responsibilities:

1. Monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Council's Constitution and making recommendations to Full Council for any amendments that fall outside of the scope of the delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer. Any review of the Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules will be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.
2. Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted members.
3. Assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
4. Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
5. Monitoring the operation of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
6. Advising, training or arranging to train district, town and parish Councillors and any co-opted members on matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and wider propriety issues, including issuing guidance where appropriate.
7. Granting dispensations to Councillors and any co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Councillors' Code of Conduct or

delegating such power to a sub-committee, who will be authorised to determine such dispensations based on principles agreed by the Committee.

8. Advise on the management of statutory and other registers of interest and gifts/hospitality received.
9. Advise the Council on possible changes to the Constitution in relation to the key documents and protocols dealing with members' conduct and ethical standards.
10. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or by way of a hearing, those allegations of misconduct by district, town or parish councillors within Somerset West and Taunton or co-opted members where a formal investigation has found evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and where a local resolution has not been agreed.
11. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member found to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.
12. Making recommendations, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, to any town or parish council in the Council's area on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member of that town or parish council found to have failed to comply with that Council's Code of Conduct.
13. Implementing, monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Code of Conduct for staff.
14. Considering any other matter referred by the Monitoring Officer.

Work of the Committee during 2022/2023

The Committee has met twice in the 2022/2023 Municipal Year – 26 July 2022 and 23 February 2023.

The committee considered the following items:

- An update on the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on the Standards Regime that was written in January 2019. The Committee also considered the response from the Government which was published in March 2022.
- The Committee on Standards in Public Life report titled 'Leading in Practice' and the open letter written by Lord Evans to all public sector leaders.
- Considered the Somerset wide Code of Conduct and procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations, recommending both to Full Council for approval. These documents form part of the Standards arrangements for the new Unitary Council. All Town and Parish Councils falling under Somerset Council were written to and encouraged to sign up to the new Somerset wide Code.

- What the standards arrangements will look like for the new Somerset Unitary Council.
- Updates on Town and Parish Council Register of Interest following the May 2022 elections.
- Updates on ethical awareness training and the ethical newsletter for SWT councillors
- The register of Gifts and Hospitality for 2022/2023 for Members and Officers
- The register of complaints for 2022/2023 relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for district, town and parish councillors.

In summary, whilst the Standards Committee has only met twice, it has worked to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by district, town and parish councillors.

Cllr Mark Lithgow
Chair of the Standards Committee