

Minutes of a Meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Wednesday, 30 August 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr John Bailey (Chair)

Cllr Brian Smedley (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Martin Dimery

Alan Hemsley

David Stripp

Cllr Frances Nicholson

Robin Horton (virtually)

Others present remotely:

Cllr Tessa Munt

Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Leigh Redman

19 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

The Chair welcomed the Independent Persons present and apologies were received from Paul Hooper.

20 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards Committee held on 28 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

The Committee then considered the Action Plan and noted the following:

- The comparison document had been circulated.
- The job specification for the co-opted member vacancy and the timetable had been circulated.
- The Monitoring Officer outlined the options available when a complaint was upheld.
- The Service Director's meeting with the Unions regarding the Officer Code of Conduct had not yet taken place.
- Whilst there was not yet an organisational chart for Democratic Services

available, due to the restructuring process, details of the relevant officers would instead be circulated to the Committee members.

The Monitoring Officer gave an update in respect of Code of Conduct Complaints action. He explained that he had circulated an example of the information that he could provide and that, as time spent was recorded, he could also provide a costing based upon this. Members discussed whether it was just details of the number of cases and time taken, that was needed to ensure that the process was adequately resourced, or the more detailed range of information that that was being offered. After some debate it was agreed that, whilst a detailed look at the data would be required on an annual basis, in order to identify trends and training needs, it would be helpful to have this information on a monthly basis for 6 months after which the requirements could be reviewed.

Resolved

To request that the Monitoring Officer provide Standards Committee members with details of the Code of Conduct complaints, in the form circulated, on a monthly basis.

21 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no additional declarations of interest.

22 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Cllr Tessa Munt spoke in respect of Agenda Item 5 – Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

She explained that, because it was something particularly important to her, she had asked the Constitution and Governance Committee to consider reducing the threshold for which gifts and hospitality that had to be declared from £50 to £0. Hence the request from that Committee to the Standards Committee. However, she now accepted that £0 may be too low and was asking for this Committee to consider a reduction from £50 to £5. She also raised the following points:

- There should be more continuity of reporting. That she believed that the Council's Constitution and Code of Conduct referred to 'gifts, benefits and hospitality' and not just 'gifts and hospitality' referred to in the declaration form.
- Under 3.1 (1) of the Code members are required to state whether they had accepted or refused a gift or hospitality and this should be shown in the

report.

- If someone declared gifts or hospitality of under £50 it should be included within the report.

23 Register of Gifts and Hospitality - Agenda Item 5

The Committee was advised that the requirement for to declare whether the gift or hospitality was accepted or rejected was often overlooked by members when completing their forms. However, in the interests of openness and transparency, officers would now be seeking confirmation of this, if omitted. Additionally, whether the gift or hospitality was accepted or rejected would also be included within the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Register Summary. The Committee felt that this was a much needed amendment that would be of interest not only to the Committee but to the press and public.

Members agreed in principle with the sentiments expressed by Cllr T Munt and felt that it would be appropriate to look into the matter and requested that she provide details of her concerns to them.

Resolved

1. To note the gifts and hospitality received.
2. To add the Gifts and Hospitality to the Work Programme.

24 Work Programme and Action Plan - Agenda Item 6

Having already considered the Action Plan members reviewed the Work Programme.

Members discussed and agreed that the various items on the work programme should be allocated to either the Committee or the existing working groups:

- Priority Group 1 (P1) - Cllr Bailey (Chair), Cllr Smedley, Cllr Nicholson, D Stripp & P Hooper
- Priority Group 2 (P2) - Cllr Nicholson (Chair), R Horton & A Hemsley
- Priority Group 3 (P3) - Cllr Dimery (Chair), Cllr H Davies & A Hemsley

as follows:

Work Item	By Whom	Committee Meeting
Gifts & Hospitality Register and request from Constitution & Governance Committee on value of	P3	25/10/23

gifts/hospitality to be declared

Model Code of Conduct Adoption by City, Town & Parish Councils – Results of on-line survey with all City, Town and Parish Councils to ascertain current Code of Conduct	P2	25/10/23
Code of Conduct complaints (speed of responding to complaints)	P1	25/10/23
Review the operation and effectiveness of the Council’s Officer Code of Conduct and make recommendations on proposed changes to the Council	P3	25/10/23
Standards Committee Annual Report to Full Council (28 February 2024)	Committee	21/01/24
Media Plan review & costings	P1	27/03/24
Review the operation and effectiveness of the Members’ Code of Conduct and recommend any changes considered necessary to the Council for approval	P2	27/03/24
Keep under review the operation and effectiveness of the Standards Committee and Standards Hearing Sub-Committee arrangements and to recommend any changes considered necessary to the Council for approval	P2	24/03/24
Review the Monitoring Officer’s arrangements for the investigation of allegations of breaches of the Council’s Code of Conduct by Members and co-opted Members and to make recommendations for appropriate changes to the Monitoring Officer	P1	27/03/24
Committee & Sub-Committee process review	P2	27/03/24

Resolved

To note and agree the amendments to the Committee’s Work Programme

(The meeting ended at 3.13 pm)

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CHAIR