

Report of the Standards Committee

Lead Member: Cllr John Bailey - Chair of the Standards Committee

Lead Officer: Scott Wooldridge - Monitoring Officer and Strategic Manager Governance & Democratic Services

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1. Summary

- 1.1.** At the Annual General Meeting of Full Council in May 2022 a Standards Committee was formed, comprising a representative from each political group on the Council (five members in total), supported by five co-opted members and the Council's Independent Persons. Council agreed to waive the political proportionality requirements for appointments to the Standards Committee to enable all of the political groups on the Council to be represented. The continuation of these arrangements for Somerset Council was agreed at the Council meeting on 1 March 2023.
- 1.2.** The Council agreed the Standards Committee's terms of reference as part of the new Constitution on 22 February 2023. The terms of reference state that there is no vice-chair of the Committee which is a continuation of the arrangements for several years. In accordance with the Constitution, the Council would need to agree any changes to the Committee's terms of reference and its membership.
- 1.3.** At its meeting on 19 April, the Standards Committee agreed to recommend to the Council that its terms of reference be amended to include the appointment of a vice-chair and the Committee also agreed a nomination for that role for the Council to consider.

Subject to the Council approving the appointment of a vice-chair it is further proposed that the Independent Remuneration Panel be requested to advise and recommend whether the role of vice-chair should be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance together with what level that should be set at.

2. Recommendations

2.1. The Council is recommended to agree:

- i) To amend the Standards Committee's terms of reference in the Constitution to include the appointment of a vice-chair ;**
- ii) The Committee's nomination of Councillor Brian Smedley for the role of vice-chair; and**
- iii) To request that the Independent Remuneration Panel consider and recommend to the Council whether the role should be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance and if so at what level that should be set at.**

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1.** The Standards Committee resolved that it requires a vice-chair in order to provide resilience for the committee so that there is clarity on which councillor would undertake the role of Chair should the Chair be absent or unable to preside for any part of or for all of a meeting i.e. due to illness, etc. To date the Committee has appointed a Chair of the meeting from its membership if an occasion arises when the Chair is unable to preside for all or part of the meeting.
- 3.2.** All other main committees of the Council have a vice-chair.
- 3.3.** The Committee resolved to nominate one of its members, Councillor Brian Smedley, for the Council to consider appointing as the vice-chair.
- 3.4.** Subject to the Council agreeing to appoint a vice-chair and amend the Standards Committee's terms of reference, it is further recommended that the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) be requested to consider whether the role should be awarded a Special Responsibility Allowance (as other vice-chair roles do receive a SRA). If the IRP consider recommending to the Council that a SRA should be awarded for the role of vice-chair it will then need to consider what level of allowance that should be set at.

4. Implications

Legal – there are no legal requirements to appoint a vice-chair

Financial - Any proposals from the IRP for awarding a SRA would need to be recommended to a future Council meeting and be funded from the Members Allowances Budget. Until that occurs the role of vice-chair of Standards Committee would not qualify for a SRA.

Equalities - The Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have "due regard" to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions. There are no direct negative impacts arising from these recommendations.

There are no direct impacts on sustainability, health and safety, community safety or privacy aspects as a result of this proposal.

5. Background papers

5.1. Somerset Council Constitution agreed at Council meeting 22 February 2023