

Standards Advisory Committee

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee to be held in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 7 February 2013 at 14:30.

Agenda

- 1 Appointment of Chairman.
- 2 Apologies.
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
- 5 The Role and Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee. Verbal report of the Monitoring Officer.
- 6 The role of the Council's Independent Person. The Monitoring Officer to report.
- 7 Dispensations - An update from the Monitoring Officer following the introduction of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests in the Localism Act.
- 8 Other work the Standards Committee could do to uphold the standards of ethical governance within the Council, for example the Staff Code of Conduct and Statistics from the Local Government Ombudsman. The Monitoring Officer to report.

A COPY OF THE REPORT ON THE NEW STANDARDS REGIME WHICH WAS CONSIDERED BY FULL COUNCIL ON 17 JULY 2012 IS ATTACHED FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

Bruce Lang
Assistant Chief Executive

16 May 2017

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions.

There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions.

Speaking under “Public Question Time” is limited to 4 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chairman will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate.

Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chairman will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

This is more usual at meetings of the Council’s Planning Committee and details of the “rules” which apply at these meetings can be found in the leaflet “Having Your Say on Planning Applications”. A copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Reception Desk at The Deane House or by contacting the telephone number or e-mail address below.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

Full Council, Executive, Committees and Task and Finish Review agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



Lift access to the John Meikle Room and the other Committee Rooms on the first floor of The Deane House, is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available off the landing directly outside the Committee Rooms.



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Corporate Support Unit on 01823 356414 or email r.bryant@tauntondeane.gov.uk

If you would like an agenda, a report or the minutes of a meeting translated into another language or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please telephone us on 01823 356356 or email: enquiries@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Standards Advisory Committee Members:-

Ms L Somerville Williams (Independent Person)
Councillor J Allgrove
(Historic)Mr T Bowditch
(Historic)Mr A Cox
Mrs A Elder
Councillor E Gaines
Mr M Marshall
Mr L Rogers
Councillor P Tooze
Councillor A Wedderkopp
Mr B Wilson
Councillor G Wren

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Full Council – 17 July 2012

The Localism Act 2011 – The Amended Standards Regime

(Report of the Monitoring Officer and Cllr David Reed, Chair of Corporate Governance Committee)

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor John Williams, Leader of the Council)

1. Executive Summary

This report details the changes to the Standards regime that will be required to comply with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and requests Full Council approves the various recommendations.

2 The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 makes fundamental changes to the system of regulation of standards of conduct for elected and co-opted Members. The long awaited regulations are out and the Council now needs to approve various aspects of the regulations in order to comply with the legislation.

This report describes the changes and recommends the actions required for the Council to implement the new regime.

3 Duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct

The Council will remain under a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct for its elected and co-opted members and the arrangements that the Council puts in place will provide evidence of compliance with that duty.

4 Code of Conduct

The current ten General Principles and Model Code of Conduct will be repealed, and members will no longer have to give an undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct. However, the Council will be required to adopt a new Code of Conduct governing elected and co-opted member's conduct when acting in that capacity. The Council's new Code of Conduct must, when viewed as a whole, be consistent with the following seven principles –

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

The Council has discretion as to what it includes within its new Code of Conduct, provided that it is consistent with the seven principles. However, regulations provide for the registration and disclosure of “Disclosable Pecuniary Interests” (DPIs), broadly equating to the current prejudicial interests. The provisions of the Act also require an authority’s code to contain appropriate requirements for the registration (and disclosure) of other pecuniary interests and non-pecuniary interests.

The Act prohibits members with a DPI from participating in authority business, and the Council can adopt a Standing Order requiring members to withdraw from the meeting room.

Therefore the Council’s new Code of Conduct will have to deal with the following matters –

- General conduct rules, to give effect to the seven principles. This corresponds broadly with Paragraphs 3 to 7 of the current Code of Conduct. In practice, the easiest course of action would be simply to re-adopt Paragraphs 3 to 7 of the existing Code of Conduct. The Council can amend its Code of Conduct subsequently if the need arises; and
- Registration and disclosure of interests other than DPIs – effectively, replacing the current personal and prejudicial interests provisions. The Act requires that the Code contains “appropriate” provisions for this purpose.

The Monitoring Officers in Somerset have been working together to draft a code of conduct that can be used by all authorities including the Parish Councils should they wish to do so. The benefits of a standardised code are that it will assist members who sit on more than one Council and provide some consistency.

Annexed to this report at Appendix 1 is the draft code of conduct that the Monitoring Officers have drafted. The code is similar to the one seen by the Standards Committee and Constitutional Sub-Committee but with the addition of the definition of the relevant interests which were not known at the time.

Recommendation 1 – it is recommended that Full Council adopts the Code of conduct annexed at Appendix 1.

5 Standards Committee

The Act repeals Section 55 of the Local Government Act 2000, which provides for the current statutory Standards Committee. Therefore, there will be no requirement for a Standards Committee. However, there will still be a need to deal with

standards issues and case-work, so it would be sensible to continue to have a Standards Committee. It will be a normal Committee of Council, without the unique features which were conferred by the previous legislation. As a result –

The composition of the Committee will be governed by proportionality, unless Council votes otherwise with no member voting against. The present restriction to only one member of the Executive on the Standards Committee will cease to apply.

The current co-opted independent members will cease to hold office but the Act establishes for a new category of Independent Persons (see below) who must be consulted at various stages. The legislation provides that the existing co-opted independent members cannot serve as Independent Persons for 5 years except for a transitional period.

The District Council will continue to have responsibility for dealing with standards complaints against elected and appointed members of Parish Councils, but the current Parish Council representatives cease to hold office. The District Council can choose whether it wants to continue to involve Parish Council representatives and, if so, how many Parish Council representatives it wants.

Many authorities are continuing to have a Standards Committee but their composition varies between the different authorities. The Monitoring Officer has been having various conversations with members and has taken on board the desire of members to try to retain some independent members on a Standards Committee due to the value that they have added in the past.

Therefore in order to satisfy the legislation and also the will of this Council the Monitoring Officer suggests that a Standards Committee could comprise of five (5) elected members, (voting), 2 independent co-optees, (non-voting), and 2 parish council representatives, (non-voting).

The terms of reference for the Standards Committee are set out below under constitutional amendments.

Recommendation 2 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees to appoint a Standards Committee comprising of five (5) elected members, (voting), two (2) independent co-optees, (non-voting), and 2 parish representatives, (non-voting).

6 Independent Persons

The “arrangements” adopted by Council must include provision for the appointment by Council of at least one Independent Person.

“Independence”

The Independent Person must be appointed through a process of public advertisement, application and appointment by a positive vote of a majority of all members of the Borough Council.

A person is considered not to be “independent” if –

- (a) He/she is, or has been within the last 5 years, an elected or co-opted member or an officer of the Borough Council or of any of the Parish Councils within its area;
- (b) He/she is, or has been within the last 5 years, an elected or co-opted member of any Committee or Sub-Committee of the Borough Council or of any of the Parish Councils within its area (which would preclude any of the current co-opted independent members of Standards Committee from being appointed as an Independent Person); or
- (c) He/she is a relative or close friend of a current elected or co-opted member or officer of the Borough Council or any Parish Council within its area, or of any elected or co-opted member of any Committee or Sub-Committee of such Council.

For this purpose, “relative” comprises –

- (i) the candidate’s spouse or civil partner;
- (ii) any person with whom the candidate is living as if they are spouses or civil partners;
- (iii) the candidate’s grandparent;
- (iv) any person who is a lineal descendent of the candidate’s grandparent; parent, brother, sister or child of anyone in Paragraphs (i) or (ii);
- (v) the spouse or civil partner of anyone within Paragraphs (iii) (iv) or (vi); or
- (vi) any person living with a person within Paragraphs (iii) (iv) (vi) as if they were spouse or civil partner to that person.

Functions of the Independent Person

The functions of the Independent Person(s) are –

- They must be consulted by the authority before it makes a finding as to whether a member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct or decides on action to be taken in respect of that member (this means on a decision to take no action where the investigation finds no evidence of breach or, where the investigation finds evidence that there has been a breach, on any local resolution of the complaint, or on any finding of breach and on any decision on action as a result of that finding);
- They may be consulted by the authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage; and
- They may be consulted by a member or co-opted member of the District Council or of a Parish Council against whom a complaint has been made.

This causes some problems, as it would be inappropriate for an Independent Person who has been consulted by the member against whom the complaint has been made, and who might as a result be regarded as prejudiced on the matter, to be involved in the determination of that complaint.

How many Independent Persons?

The Act gives discretion to appoint one or more Independent Persons, but provides that the Independent Person must be consulted before any decision is taken on a complaint which has been investigated. Accordingly, there would appear to be little advantage in appointing more than one Independent Person, provided that a couple of reserve candidates are retained and can be activated at short notice, without the need for re-advertisement, in the event that the Independent Person is no longer able to discharge the function.

Following discussions with the other Somerset Monitoring Officers we have all suggested that at this stage the Council should appoint 1 Independent Person and 1 reserve until the 1st July 2013 in order to give each authority time to work through the implications and arrangements that need to be put in place for a sharing arrangement to work effectively.

Remuneration

As the Independent Person is not a member of the authority or of its Committees or Sub-Committees, the remuneration of the Independent Person no longer comes within the scheme of members' allowances, and can therefore be determined without reference to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

It is not known how onerous this role will be but he/she is likely to be invited to attend all meetings of the Standards Committee and Hearings Panels, but not to be a formal member of the Committee or Panel (he/she could be co-opted as a non-voting member but cannot chair as the Chair must exercise a second or casting vote). He/she will need to be available to be consulted by members against whom a complaint has been made, although it is unclear what assistance he/she could offer. Where he/she has been so consulted, he/she would be unable to be involved in the determination of that complaint. This report suggests that the Independent Person also be involved in the local resolution of complaints and in the grant of dispensations.

A general consensus at this stage is that the Independent Person should be paid the same rate as the Chair of the Standards Committee and then be subject to a review before appointing a permanent Independent Person after the 1st July 2013.

Recommendation 3 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees to:-

- (a) appoint one Independent person and 1 Reserve**
- (b) the Independent Person is paid the equivalent of the Chair of the existing Standards Committee until 30th June 2013.**

- (c) **That 3 members of the Corporate Governance Committee and the Monitoring Officer being given delegated authority to undertake the interviews and recruitment of the Independent Person and Reserve.**
- (d) **That the Reserve Independent Person be able to claim any relevant expenses.**

7. The register of Members Interests

The provisions of the Act in respect of the Code of Conduct require an authority's code to contain appropriate requirements for the registration (and disclosure) of other pecuniary interests and non-pecuniary interests.

Regulations have defined "Disclosable Pecuniary Interests" (DPIs). The Monitoring Officer is required to maintain a register of interests, which must be available for inspection and available on the Council's website. The Monitoring Officer is also responsible for maintaining the register for Parish Councils, which also have to be open for inspection at the District Council offices and on the District Council's website.

The Monitoring Officer is required by the Act to set up and maintain registers of interest for each Parish Council, available for inspection at the District Council offices and on the District Council's website and, where the Parish Council has a website, provide the Parish Council with the information required to enable the Parish Council to put the current register on its own website.

Registration on election or co-option

Each elected or co-opted member must register all DPIs within 28 days of becoming a member. Failure to register is made a criminal offence, but would not prevent the member from acting as a member.

In so far as the Code of Conduct which the Council adopts requires registration of other interests, failure to do so would not be a criminal offence, but would be a failure to comply with the code of conduct.

There is no continuing requirement for a member to keep the register up to date, except on re-election or re-appointment, but it is likely that members will register new interests from time to time, as this avoids the need for disclosure in meetings. When additional notifications are given, the Monitoring Officer has to ensure that they are entered into the register.

The preparation and operation of the register, not just for this authority but also for each Parish Council, is likely to be a considerable administrative task, especially where different Parish Councils adopt different Code requirements for registration and disclosure in respect of interests other than DPIs. There is no provision for the District Council to recover any costs from Parish Councils.

The definitions of the various interests are set out in the Code of Conduct attached at Appendix 1 to this report. In addition, guidance will be prepared for members to

assist them in their understanding of the definitions but Monitoring Officers have tried to keep definitions close to the current arrangements in order to assist members.

Recommendation 4 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees:-

- a. That the Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain a new register of members interests to comply with the requirements of the Act and of the Council’s Code of Conduct, once adopted, and ensure that it is available for inspection as required by the Act;**
- b. That the Monitoring Officer ensure that all members are informed of their duty to register interests;**
- c. That the Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain new registers of members’ interests for each Parish Council to comply with the Act and any Code of Conduct adopted by each Parish Council and ensure that it is available for inspection as required by the Act; and**
- d. That the Monitoring Officer arrange to inform and train Parish Clerks on the new registration arrangements.**

8. Sensitive interests

The Act effectively re-enacts the existing Code of Conduct provisions on Sensitive Interests.

So, where a member is concerned that disclosure of the detail of an interest (either a DPI or any other interest which he/she would be required to disclose) at a meeting or on the register of members’ interests would lead to the member or a person connected with him/her being subject to violence or intimidation, he/she may request the Monitoring Officer to agree that the interest is a “sensitive interest”.

If the Monitoring Officer agrees, the member then merely has to disclose the existence of an interest, rather than the detail of it, at a meeting, and the Monitoring Officer can exclude the detail of the interest from the published version of the register of members’ interests.

9. Dispensations

The provisions on dispensations are significantly changed by the Localism Act.

At present, a member who has a prejudicial interest may apply to Standards Committee for a dispensation on two grounds –

- (a) That at least half of the members of a decision-making body have prejudicial interests (this ground is of little use as it is normally only at the meeting that it is realised how many members have prejudicial interests in the matter, by which time it is too late to convene a meeting of Standards Committee); and
- (b) That so many members of one political party have prejudicial interests in the matter that it will upset the result of the vote on the matter (this ground would require that the members concerned were entirely predetermined, in which case the grant of a dispensation to allow them to vote would be inappropriate).

In future, a dispensation will be able to be granted in the following circumstances:-

- i. That so many members of the decision-making body have DPIs in a matter that it would “impede the transaction of the business”. In practice this means that the decision-making body would be inquorate as a result;
- ii. That, without the dispensation, the representation of different political groups on the body transacting the business would be so upset as to alter the outcome of any vote on the matter. This assumes that members are predetermined to vote on party lines on the matter, in which case, it would be inappropriate to grant a dispensation to enable them to participate;
- iii. That the authority considers that the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the authority’s area;
- iv. That, without a dispensation, no member of the Executive would be able to participate on this matter (so, the assumption is that, where the Executive would be inquorate as a result, the matter can then be dealt with by an individual Executive Member. It will be necessary to make provision in the scheme of delegations from the Leader to cover this, admittedly unlikely, eventuality); or
- v. That the authority considers that it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

Any grant of a dispensation must specify how long it lasts for, up to a maximum of 4 years.

The next significant change is that, where the Local Government Act 2000 required that dispensations be granted by Standards Committee, the Localism Act gives discretion for this power to be delegated to Standards Committee or a Sub-Committee, or to the Monitoring Officer. Grounds (i) and (iv) are pretty objective, so it may be appropriate to delegate dispensations on these grounds to the Monitoring Officer, with an appeal to the Standards Committee, thus enabling dispensations to be granted “at the door of the meeting”. Grounds (ii), (iii), and (v), are rather more objective and so it may be appropriate that the discretion to grant dispensations on these grounds remains with Standards Committee, after consultation with the Independent Person.

Recommendation 5 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees that the power to grant dispensations is delegated as set out below –

- a. **on Grounds set out in Paragraphs (i) and (iv) of this report to the Monitoring Officer with an appeal to Standards Committee, and**
- b. **on Grounds (ii), (iii) and (v) to the Standards Committee, after consultation with the Independent Person.**

10. Dealing with Misconduct Complaints

“Arrangements”

The Act requires that the Council adopt “arrangements” for dealing with complaints of breach of Code of Conduct both by Borough Council members and by Parish Council members. Such complaints can only be dealt with in accordance with those “arrangements”. So the “arrangements” must set out in some detail the process for dealing with complaints of misconduct and the actions which may be taken against a member who is found to have failed to comply with the relevant Code of Conduct.

The advantage is that the Act repeals the requirements for separate Referrals, Review and hearings Sub-Committees, and enables the Council to establish its own process, which can include delegation of decisions on complaints. Indeed, as the statutory provisions no longer give the Standards Committee or Monitoring Officer special powers to deal with complaints, it is necessary for Council to delegate appropriate powers to any Standards Committee and to the Monitoring Officer.

Attached at Appendix 2, are the arrangements that have been previously drafted and reviewed by the Standards Committee and Constitutional Sub-Committee.

Decision whether to investigate a complaint

In practice, the Standards for England guidance on initial assessment of complaints provided a reasonably robust basis for filtering out trivial and tit-for-tat complaints. It would be sensible to take advantage of the new flexibility and delegate to the Monitoring Officer the initial decision on whether a complaint requires investigation, subject to consultation with the Independent Person and the ability to refer particular complaints to the Standards Committee where it is believed to be inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer to take a decision on it.

For example where the Monitoring Officer has previously advised the member on the matter or the complaint is particularly sensitive. These arrangements would also offer the opportunity for the Monitoring Officer to seek to resolve a complaint informally, before taking a decision on whether

the complaint merits formal investigation. If this function is delegated to the Monitoring Officer, it is right that the Monitoring Officer should be accountable for its discharge. For this purpose, it would be appropriate to make a quarterly report to Standards Committee, which would enable the Monitoring Officer to report on the number and nature of complaints received and draw to the Committee's attention the areas where training or other action might avoid further complaints, and keep the Committee advised of progress on investigations and costs.

“No Breach of Code” finding on investigation

Where a formal investigation finds no evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the current requirement is that this is reported to Standards Assessment Sub-Committee and the Sub-Committee take the decision to take no further action.

In practice, it would be reasonable to delegate this decision to the Monitoring Officer, but with the power to refer a matter to Standards Committee if the Monitoring Officer deems appropriate. It would be sensible for copies of all investigation reports to be provided to the Independent Person to enable them to get an overview of current issues and pressures, and that the Monitoring Officer provide a summary report of each such investigation to Standards Committee for information.

“Breach of Code” finding on investigation

Where a formal investigation finds evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, there may yet be an opportunity for local resolution, avoiding the necessity of a local hearing. Sometimes the investigation report can cause a member to recognise that his/her conduct was at least capable of giving offence, or identify other appropriate remedial action, and the complainant may be satisfied by recognition of fault and an apology or other remedial action.

However, it is suggested that at this stage it would only be appropriate for the Monitoring Officer to agree a local resolution after consultation with the Independent Person and where the complainant is satisfied with the outcome, and subject to summary report for information to the Standards Committee.

In all other cases, where the formal investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, it would be necessary for the Standards Committee (in practice a Hearings Panel constituted as a Sub-Committee of Standards Committee) to hold a hearing at which the member against whom the complaint has been made can respond to the investigation report, and the Hearing Panel can determine whether the member did fail to comply with the Code of Conduct and what action, if any, is appropriate as a result.

Action in response to a Hearing finding of failure to comply with Code

The Act does not give the Council or its Standards Committee any powers to impose sanctions such as suspension or requirements for training or an apology on

members. So, where a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct is found, the range of actions which the authority can take in respect of the member is limited and must be directed to securing the continuing ability of the authority to continue to discharge its functions effectively, rather than “punishing” the member concerned.

In practice, this might include the following –

- (i) Reporting its findings to Council [*or to the Parish Council*] for information;
- (ii) Recommending to the member’s Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committees) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
- (iii) Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the member be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities;
- (a) Instructing the Monitoring Officer to [*or recommend that the Parish Council*] arrange training for the member;
- (b) Removing [*or recommend to the Parish Council that the member be removed*] from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority [*or by the Parish Council*];
 - (i) Withdrawing [*or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws*] facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access; or
 - (ii) Excluding [*or recommend that the Parish Council exclude*] the member from the Council’s offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.

There is a particular difficulty in respect of Parish Councils. The Localism Act gives the Standards Committee no power to do any more in respect of a member of a Parish Council than make a recommendation to the Parish Council on action to be taken in respect of the member. Parish Councils will be under no obligation to accept any such recommendation. The only way round this would be to constitute the Standards Committee and Hearings Panels as a Joint Committee and Joint Sub-Committees with the Parish Councils, and seek the delegation of powers from Parish Council to the Hearings Panels, so that the Hearings Panels can effectively take decisions on action on behalf of the particular Parish Council.

Appeals

There is no requirement to put in place any appeals mechanism against such decisions. The decision would be open to judicial review by the High Court if it was patently unreasonable, or if it were taken improperly, or if it sought to impose a sanction which the authority had no power to impose.

The Council has to decide what “arrangements” it will adopt for dealing with standards complaints and for taking action where a member is found to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.

Recommendation 6 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees that the Arrangements set out in Appendix 2 are adopted and that:-

- a. That the Monitoring Officer be appointed as the Proper Officer to receive complaints of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct;**
- b. That the Monitoring Officer be given delegated power, after consultation with the Independent Person, to determine whether a complaint merits formal investigation and to arrange such investigation. The Monitoring Officer be instructed to seek resolution of complaints without formal investigation wherever practicable, and that Officer be given discretion to refer decisions on investigation to the Standards Committee where it is deemed inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer to take the decision, and to report quarterly to Standards Committee on the discharge of this function;**
- c. Where the investigation finds no evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer be instructed to close the matter, providing a copy of the report and findings of the investigation to the complainant, the member concerned, the Independent Person, and reporting the findings to the Standards Committee for information;**
- d. Where the investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person be authorised to seek local resolution to the satisfaction of the complainant in appropriate cases, with a summary report for information to Standards Committee. Where such local resolution is not appropriate or not possible, the Monitoring Officer is to report the investigation findings to a Hearings Panel of the Standards Committee for local hearing;**
- e. That Council delegate to Hearings Panels such of its powers as can be delegated to take decisions in respect of a member who is found on hearing to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, such actions to include –**
 - Reporting its findings to Council [*or to the Parish Council*] for information;**
 - Recommending to the member’s Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committees) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;**

- **Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the member be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities;**
- **Instructing the Monitoring Officer to *[or recommend that the Parish Council]* arrange training for the member;**
- **Removing *[or recommend to the Parish Council that the member be removed]* from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority *[or by the Parish Council]*;**
- **Withdrawing *[or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws]* facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access; or**
- **Excluding *[or recommend that the Parish Council exclude]* the member from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.**

11. Constitutional amendments

As a result of these changes there needs to be a number of changes to the Constitution. These are a:-

- (a) Change to the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee;
- (b) Changes to ensure that members leave the room when they have a Prejudicial Interest and a Disclosable Personal Interest.

Attached at Appendix 3 is a copy of the relevant changes to the constitution to be approved.

Recommendation 7 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees the changes to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 3.

12. Finance Comments

There is only a minimal increase in the costs of remuneration to members and the Independent Person which is anticipated to be less than £150.

13. Legal Comments

The Council has a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct as well as the various requirements set out in this report therefore careful consideration needs to be given to the various recommendations to ensure that the duty is met.

14. Links to Corporate Aims (Please refer to the current edition of the Corporate Strategy)

There are no links to the Corporate Aims

15. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications in this report.

16. Community Safety Implications (if appropriate, such as measures to combat anti-social behaviour)

There are no community safety implications

17. Equalities Impact (An Equalities Impact Assessment should be carried out in respect of:-

There are no equalities impact contained in this report.

18. Risk Management (if appropriate, such as reputational and health and safety risks. If the item the subject of the report has been included in a Service Plan, the result of the risk assessment undertaken when the plan was prepared should be entered here.

The Council needs to demonstrate that it can comply with its duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and the recommendations in this report will assist the Council in doing that. Failure to have appropriate processes and procedures in place to deal with any complaints could be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility.

19. Partnership Implications (if any)

There is a requirement to work with parish councils to ensure consistency in operating these arrangements.

20. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – it is recommended that Full Council adopts the Code of conduct attached at Appendix 1.

Recommendation 2 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees to appoint a Standards Committee comprising of five (5) elected members, (voting), two (2) independent co-optees, (non-voting), and 2 parish representatives, (non-voting).

Recommendation 3 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees to :-

(a) appoint one Independent person and 1 Reserve

(b) that the Independent Person is paid the equivalent of the Chair of the existing Standards Committee until 30th June 2013.

- (c) That 3 members of the Corporate Governance Committee and the Monitoring Officer undertake the interviews and recruitment of the Independent Person and Reserve.**
- (d) That the Reserve Independent Person be able to claim any relevant expenses.**

Recommendation 4 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees that:-

- (a) That the Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain a new register of members interests to comply with the requirements of the Act and of the Council's Code of Conduct, once adopted, and ensure that it is available for inspection as required by the Act;**
- (b) That the Monitoring Officer ensure that all members are informed of their duty to register interests;**
- (c) That the Monitoring Officer prepare and maintain new registers of members' interests for each Parish Council to comply with the Act and any Code of Conduct adopted by each Parish Council and ensure that it is available for inspection as required by the Act; and**
- (d) That the Monitoring Officer arrange to inform and train Parish Clerks on the new registration arrangements.**

Recommendation 5 – it is recommended Full Council agrees to delegate the power to grant dispensations –

- (a) on Grounds set out in Paragraphs (i) and (iv) of this report to the Monitoring Officer with an appeal to Standards Committee, and**
- (b) on Grounds (ii), (iii) and (v) to the Standards Committee, after consultation with the Independent Person.**

Recommendation 6 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees to adopt the Arrangements set out in Appendix 2 and the delegations set out in (a) – (e) below:-

- (a) That the Monitoring Officer be appointed as the Proper Officer to receive complaints of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct;**
- (b) That the Monitoring Officer be given delegated power, after consultation with the Independent Person, to determine whether a complaint merits formal investigation and to arrange such investigation. The Monitoring Officer be instructed to seek resolution of complaints without formal investigation wherever practicable, and that Officer be given discretion to refer decisions on investigation to the Standards Committee where it is deemed inappropriate for the Monitoring Officer to take the decision, and to report quarterly to Standards Committee on the discharge of this function;**

- (c) Where the investigation finds no evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer be instructed to close the matter, providing a copy of the report and findings of the investigation to the complainant, the member concerned, the Independent Person, and reporting the findings to the Standards Committee for information;
- (d) Where the investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person be authorised to seek local resolution to the satisfaction of the complainant in appropriate cases, with a summary report for information to Standards Committee. Where such local resolution is not appropriate or not possible, the Monitoring Officer is to report the investigation findings to a Hearings Panel of the Standards Committee for local hearing;
- (e) That Council delegate to Hearings Panels such of its powers as can be delegated to take decisions in respect of a member who is found on hearing to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, such actions to include –
- Reporting its findings to Council [*or to the Parish Council*] for information;
 - Recommending to the member's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committees) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the member be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities;
 - Instructing the Monitoring Officer to [*or recommend that the Parish Council*] arrange training for the member;
 - Removing [*or recommend to the Parish Council that the member be removed*] from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority [*or by the Parish Council*];
 - Withdrawing [*or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws*] facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access; or
 - Excluding [*or recommend that the Parish Council exclude*] the member from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.

Recommendation 7 – it is recommended that Full Council agrees the changes to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 3.

Contact: Tonya Meers
Monitoring Officer
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t.meers@tauntondeane.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1

Draft MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT

NB THE WORDS IN SQUARE BRACKETS [] APPLY TO PARISHES ONLY

INTRODUCTION AND INTERPRETATION

As a Member and representative of this Council it is your responsibility to comply with this Code when you undertake or claim to be undertaking Council business or give the impression that you are undertaking Council business.

As a representative of this Council your actions impact on how the Council as a whole is viewed by the public. It is important, therefore, that you do not do anything when undertaking Council business which you could not justify to the public. It is not enough to avoid actual impropriety, you should at all times avoid any occasion for suspicion or appearance of improper conduct.

This Code is based upon the seven principles of public life which are set out at Appendix 1. You shall have regard to those principles when fulfilling your role.

An explanation of the terms used in this Code can be found in Appendix 2.

1. GENERAL OBLIGATIONS

When undertaking Council business you must:

- 1.1 treat others with respect;
- 1.2 not use or attempt to use your position as a member improperly to give yourself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage;
- 1.3 when reaching decisions on any matter, consider any relevant advice provided to you by—
 - a) the Council's Chief Finance Officer (S151) [responsible officer (RFO)]; or
 - b) the Council's Monitoring Officer [proper officer],in accordance with his or her statutory duties;

- 1.4 give reasons for decisions in accordance with any statutory requirements and the Constitution of the Council [second part only applicable if the Town/Parish has a constitution];
- 1.5 act in accordance with the [the Council's policies –Towns/Parishes only] Council's Constitution and the policies contained within it and any other relevant Council policies ;
- 1.6 not use Council's resources improperly (including for political purposes);
- 1.7 avoid doing anything which may cause the Council to breach a statutory duty or any of the equality enactments (as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010);
- 1.8 not bully any person;
- 1.9 not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is or is likely to be—
 - a) a complainant,
 - b) a witness,
 - c) involved in the administration of any investigation or proceedings, or
 - d) any other person carrying out the functions of the Council,in relation to an allegation that a member (including yourself) has failed to comply with the Council's code of conduct;
- 1.10 avoid doing anything which compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the Council;
- 1.11 not disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, except where—
 - a) you have the consent of a person authorised to give it;
 - b) you are required by law to do so;

- c) the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or
- d) the disclosure is—
 - i. reasonable and in the public interest; and
 - ii. made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the Council; and
- e) you have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release;

1.12 not prevent another person from gaining access to information to which that person is entitled by law; and

1.13 not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or the Council into disrepute.

2. INTERESTS

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

2.1 You must register and declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests that relate to your public duties as required by this Code, and set out in Appendix 3.

2.2 You must, within 28 days of this Code being adopted by the Council or your taking office as a member or co-opted member, register any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests with the Council's Monitoring Officer, where the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is yours, your spouse's or civil partner's, or is the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest of somebody with whom you are living with as a husband or wife, or as if you were civil partners. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests will be recorded in the [District] Council's Register of Members' Interests and made available for public inspection including on the [District] Council's website at: www.gov.uk. [In addition it will be made available on the Council's website at www.xxxxxxxxxx- only applicable for those parishes with a website]

2.3 Within 28 days of becoming aware of any new Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or change to any such interest already registered, you must register details of that new interest or change in writing to the Council's monitoring officer.

2.4 Where any business of the Council, relates to or affects a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest whether registered under 2.2 or 2.3 above or not, and you attend any meeting of the Council, its Cabinet/Executive or any Committee, Sub-Committee, Joint Committee [delete as necessary] at which that business is to be considered, you must:-

- not seek to influence a decision about that business
- disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest no later than the start of the consideration of the business in which you have that interest, or (if later) the time at which the interest becomes apparent to you. The exception to the requirement to disclose an interest is if the matter is a sensitive interest under paragraph 2.11
- withdraw from the meeting room or chamber as soon as it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at that meeting; unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Council's Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee [Council or clerk] .

2.5 Following any disclosure at a meeting or as part of a decision record, of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest not on the Council's register or the subject of pending notification, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days beginning with the date of the disclosure at the meeting or in the decision record in order for the interest to be included in the register.

2.6 Unless dispensation has been granted, you may not participate in any discussion of, vote on, or discharge any function related to any matter in which you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest. Additionally you must observe the restrictions the Council places on your involvement in matters where you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as defined by the Council and set out in this Code.

Other Interests

NOTE: It is conceivable that an interest could be categorised as both a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and a personal or a personal and prejudicial interest. If so you must treat it as a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and comply with the requirements set out in paragraphs 2.1 – 2.6 inclusive

2.7 (1) In addition to the Disclosable Pecuniary Interests notifiable under the Localism Act 2011, you must, within 28 days of—

- a) this Code being adopted by or applied to the Council; or
- b) your election or appointment to office (where that is later),

give written notification to the Monitoring Officer of the details of your other personal interests, as defined in 2.8(1) (i) and (ii) below, for inclusion in the register of interests. The exception to this requirement is if the detail of the personal interest is classified as sensitive – see paragraph 2.11.

(2) You must, within 28 days of becoming aware of any new personal interest or change to any such registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer of the details of that new interest or change.

Personal Interests

2.8(1) You have a personal interest in any business of the Council where:

- (a) it relates to or is likely to affect—
 - (i) any body of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management and to which you are appointed or nominated by the Council;
 - (ii) any body—
 - (aa) exercising functions of a public nature;
 - (bb) established for charitable purposes; or
 - (cc) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union), of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management;
- (b) a decision in relation to any business of the Council might reasonably be regarded as affecting your well-being or financial position or the well-being or financial position of a significant person to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral division, as the case may be, affected by the decision;

(2) Subject to sub-paragraphs (3) to (5) below, where you are aware of a personal interest described in paragraph (1) above in any business of the Council, and you attend a meeting of the Council at which the business is considered, you must disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest at the start of the consideration of that business, or when the interest becomes apparent to you.

(3) Where you have a personal interest in any business of the Council which relates to or is likely to affect a significant person (see paragraph 1 (b) above and Appendix 2 for the interpretation of the term 'significant person'), or a body described in paragraph 2.8(1)(a)(ii) you need only disclose to the meeting the existence and nature of that interest if and when you address the meeting on that business.

(4) Where you have a personal interest but the interest is not detailed in the Council's register of members' interests because of the sensitive nature of the interest, you must indicate to the meeting that you have a personal interest, but need not disclose the sensitive information to the meeting.

(5) Where you have a personal interest in any business of the Council and you have made an individual decision (as a Cabinet/Executive member) in relation to that business, you must ensure that any written statement of that decision records the existence and nature of that interest subject to (4) above.

(6) Any personal interests notified to the Monitoring Officer will be included in the register of interests.

(7) A copy of the register will be available for public inspection and will be published on the [District] Council's website [and the Council's website (where applicable)].

Prejudicial Interests

2.9 (1) Where you have a personal interest in any business of your Council you also have a prejudicial interest in that business where the interest is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest and where that business—

(a) affects your financial position or the financial position of a significant person or a body described in paragraphs 2.8(1)(a)(i) and (ii) (other than another town parish district or county council of which you are also a member); or

(b) relates to determining any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any significant person or a body described in paragraph 2.8(1)(a)(ii) (other than another town parish district or county council of which you are also a member).

(2) Subject to paragraph (3) and (4), where you have a prejudicial interest in any business of your Council—

(a) You may not participate in any discussion of the matter at a meeting.

(b) You may not participate in any vote taken on the matter at a meeting.

(c) You must disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting and leave the room where the meeting is held while any discussion or voting takes place on the matter. The exception to the requirement to disclose the detail of the interest is if the matter is a sensitive interest under paragraph 2.11. In these circumstances you need only state that you have a prejudicial interest and that the details are withheld because of the sensitive information involved.

(3) Where you have a prejudicial interest in any business of your Council, you may attend a meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business and you leave the meeting room immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence.

(4) Subject to you disclosing the interest at the meeting, you may attend a meeting and vote on a matter where you have a prejudicial interest that relates to the functions of your Council in respect of—

(i) housing, where you are a tenant of your Council provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease [not applicable];

(ii) school meals or school transport and travelling expenses, where you are a parent or guardian of a child in full time education, or are a parent governor of a school, unless it relates particularly to the school which the child attends;

(iii) statutory sick pay under Part XI of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, where you are in receipt of, or are entitled to the receipt of, such pay;

(iv) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members;

(v) any ceremonial honour given to members; and

(vi) setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(5) Where, as a Cabinet/Executive member, you may take an individual decision, and you become aware of a prejudicial interest in the matter which is the subject of the proposed decision you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter, or seek to influence a decision about the matter.

Receipts of gifts and hospitality

2.10(1) You must, within 28 days of receipt, notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of £25 which you have accepted as a member from any person or body other than the Council.

(2) The Monitoring Officer will place your notification on a public register of gifts and hospitality.

2.11 Sensitive Interests

2.11(1) If you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or a Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interest but you consider that disclosure of the interest could lead to you or a person connected with you being subject to violence or intimidation **and** the Monitoring Officer agrees with that assessment then instead of disclosing the interest you need only disclose that you have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interest (as the case may be). In such instances any published version of the register of interests will exclude details of the interest but may state that you have an interest, the details of which are withheld.

Overview and Scrutiny

(1) [Not applicable to Town/Parishes] In relation to any business before an overview and scrutiny committee of the Council (or of a sub-committee of such a committee) where—

- a. that business relates to a decision made (whether implemented or not) or action taken by your Council's Cabinet/Executive or another of your Council's committees, sub-committees, joint committees or joint sub-committees; and
- b. at the time the decision was made or action was taken, you were a member of the Cabinet/Executive, committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint sub-committee mentioned in paragraph a) and you were present when that decision was made or action was taken;

or

- c. that business relates to a decision made (whether implemented or not) or action taken by you (whether by virtue of the Council's constitution or under delegated authority from the Leader);

you may attend a meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee or sub-committee of the Council but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business.

Appendix 1

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

SELFLESSNESS

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

INTEGRITY

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

OBJECTIVITY

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

OPENNESS

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

HONESTY

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

LEADERSHIP

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

COUNCIL'S CODE OF CONDUCT - INTERPRETATION

In the Council's Code of Conduct the following words shall have the following meanings ascribed to them—

- “the Act” means the Localism Act 2011;
- “Disclosable Pecuniary Interest” is as defined in Appendix 3
- “meeting” means any meeting of—
 - (a) the Council;
 - (b) the Cabinet/Executive of the Council;
 - (c) any of the Council's or its Cabinet's/Executive's committees, sub-committees, joint committees, joint sub-committees, or area committees; whether or not the press and public are excluded from the meeting in question by a resolution of members
- “member” includes a co-opted member and an appointed member.
- “sensitive information” means information relating to a member's interests that the monitoring officer has determined need not be included in the member's registration of an interest or any change to that interest, by virtue of the fact that its availability for inspection by the public is likely to create a serious risk that any person may be subjected to violence or intimidation
- “bullying” means offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour based on abuse or misuse of power or authority which attempts to undermine
- “disrepute” means a lack of good reputation or respectability which can be reasonably regarded as reducing the public's confidence in that member being able to fulfil their role or adversely affecting the reputation of members generally in being able to fulfil their role
- “significant person” in relation to personal and personal and prejudicial Interests means

a member of your family or any person with whom you have a close association; or

any body-

(1) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management and to which you are appointed or nominated by the Council;

(2) exercising functions of a public nature;

(3) established for charitable purposes; or

(4) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union), of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management

- “wellbeing” means a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness. Anything that could be said to affect a person’s quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing. It is not restricted to matters affecting a person’s financial position
- “close association” means someone that you are in regular contact with over a period of time who is more than an acquaintance or colleague. It may be a friend, a business associate or someone you know through general social contacts. It is someone who a reasonable member of the public might think you would be prepared to favour or disadvantage when discussing a matter that affects them.
- “member of your family” means partner i.e someone you are married to, your civil partner, or someone you live with in a similar capacity, a parent, a parent-in-law, a son or daughter, a stepson or stepdaughter, the child of a partner, a brother or sister, a brother or sister of your partner, a grandparent, a grandchild, an uncle or aunt, a nephew or niece, and the partners of any of these people

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

This note explains the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 (Ss 29-34) in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests.

These provisions are enforced by criminal sanction.

They come into force on 1 July.

1 Notification of disclosable pecuniary interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or co-opted member, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of any 'disclosable pecuniary interests'.

A 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' is an interest of yourself or your partner (which means spouse or civil partner, a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners) within the following descriptions:

<i>Interest</i>	<i>Description</i>
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	An employment, office trade profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the Council) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by M in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of M. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Contract	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the Council – (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the Council.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the Council for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to M's knowledge) – (a) the landlord is the Council; and (b) the tenant is body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where – (a) that body (to M/s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the Council; and (b) either – (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

These descriptions on interests are subject to the following definitions;

“the Act” means the Localism Act 2011;

“body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest” means a firm in which the relevant person is a partner or a body corporate of which the relevant person is a director, or in the securities of which the relevant person has a beneficial interest;

“director” includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society;

“land” includes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not carry with it a right for the relevant person (alone or jointly with another) to occupy the land or to receive income;

“M” means the person M referred to in section 30 of the Act;

“member” includes a co-opted member;

“relevant authority” means the Council of which M is a member;

“relevant period” means the period of 12 months ending with the day on which M gives a notification for the purposes of section 30(1) of the Act;

“relevant person” in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests means M or M’s spouse or civil partner or a person with whom M is living as husband and wife or a person with whom M is living as if they were civil partners;

securities” means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000() and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

2 Dispensations

The Standards Committee or Monitoring Officer [Council or Clerk] may grant you a dispensation, but only in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

3 Offences

It is a criminal offence to

- Fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of any disclosable pecuniary interest within 28 days of election
- Fail to disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest at a meeting if it is not on the register
- Fail to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of a disclosable pecuniary interest that is not on the register that you have disclosed to a meeting
- Participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest
- As a Cabinet/Executive member discharging a function acting alone, and having a disclosable pecuniary interest in such a matter, failing to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the interest.
- Knowingly or recklessly providing information that is false or misleading in notifying the Monitoring Officer of a disclosable pecuniary interest or in disclosing such interest to a meeting

The criminal penalties available to a court are to impose a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale and disqualification from being a councillor for up to 5 years.

Guidance on Bias and Predetermination –This is not part of the Code of Conduct

- Where you have been involved in campaigning in your political role on an issue which does not impact on your personal and/or professional life you may participate in a decision on the issue in your political role as a member. However, you must not place yourself under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence you in the performance of your official duties.
- When making a decision, consider the matter with an open mind and on the facts made available to the meeting at which the decision is to be taken.

APPENDIX 2

Arrangements for dealing with standards allegations under the Localism Act 2011

1 Context

These “Arrangements” set out how you may make a complaint that an elected or co-opted member of this authority *[or of a parish council within its area]* has failed to comply with the authority’s Code of Conduct, and sets out how the authority will deal with allegations of a failure to comply with the authority’s Code of Conduct.

Under Section 28(6) and (7) of the Localism Act 2011, the Council must have in place “arrangements” under which allegations that a member or co-opted member of the authority *[or of a parish council within the authority’s area]*, or of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the authority, has failed to comply with that authority’s Code of Conduct can be investigated and decisions made on such allegations.

Such arrangements must provide for the authority to appoint at least one Independent Person, whose views must be sought by the authority before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided shall be investigated, and whose views can be sought by the authority at any other stage, or by a member *[or a member or co-opted member of a parish council]* against whom an allegation as been made.

2 The Code of Conduct

The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for members, which is attached as Appendix One to these arrangements and available for inspection on the authority’s website and on request from Reception at the Council Offices.

[Each parish council is also required to adopt a Code of Conduct. If you wish to inspect a Parish Council’s Code of Conduct, you should inspect any website operated by the parish council and request the parish clerk to allow you to inspect the parish council’s Code of Conduct.]

3 Making a complaint

If you wish to make a complaint, please write or email to –

The Monitoring Officer
The Council Offices
Belvedere Road
Taunton
TA1 1HE

Or email t.meers@tauntondeane.gov.uk

The Monitoring Officer is a senior officer of the authority who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the register of members' interests and who is responsible for administering the system in respect of complaints of member misconduct.

In order to ensure that we have all the information which we need to be able to process your complaint, please complete and send us the model complaint form, which can be downloaded from the authority's website, next to the Code of Conduct, and is available on request from Reception at the Council Offices.

Please do provide us with your name and a contact address or email address, so that we can acknowledge receipt of your complaint and keep you informed of its progress. If you want to keep your name and address confidential, please indicate this in the space provided on the complaint form, in which case we will not disclose your name and address to the member against whom you make the complaint, without your prior consent. The authority does not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so.

The Monitoring Officer will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 working days of receiving it, and will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint. In addition the Monitoring Officer will also notify the subject member of the complaint.

4 Will your complaint be investigated?

The Monitoring Officer will review every complaint received and, after consultation with the Independent Person, take a decision as to whether it merits formal investigation. This decision will normally be taken within 14 days of receipt of your complaint. Where the Monitoring Officer has taken a decision, you will be informed of that decision and the reasons for it.

Where additional information is required in order to come to a decision, the Monitoring Officer may come back to you and may also request information from the member against whom your complaint is directed. *[Where your complaint relates to a Parish Councillor, the Monitoring Officer may also inform the Parish Council or your complaint and seek the views of the Parish Council before deciding whether the complaint merits formal investigation.]*

In appropriate cases, the Monitoring Officer may seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for a formal investigation. Such informal resolution may involve the member accepting that his/her conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, or other remedial action by the authority. Where the member or the authority make a reasonable offer of local resolution, but you are not willing to accept that offer, the Monitoring Officer will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint merits formal investigation.

If your complaint identifies criminal conduct or breach of other regulation by any person, the Monitoring Officer has the power to call in the Police and other regulatory agencies.

5 How is the investigation conducted?

If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits formal investigation, an Investigating Officer may be appointed. That Investigating Officer may be another senior officer of the authority, an officer of another authority or an external investigator. The Investigating Officer will decide whether they need to meet or speak to you to understand the nature of your complaint, this will allow you to further explain your understanding of events and suggest what documents the Investigating Officer may need to see or who the Investigating Officer may need to interview.

The Investigating Officer would normally write to the member against whom you have complained and provide him/her with a copy of your complaint. They will ask the member to provide his/her explanation of events, and to identify what documents they need to see and/or who he needs to be interviewed. In exceptional cases, the Monitoring Officer may delete your name and address from the papers or delay notifying the member until the investigation has progressed sufficiently where it might prejudice the investigation.

At the end of their, the Investigating Officer will produce a draft report and will send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to you and to the member concerned, to give you both an opportunity to identify any matter in that draft report which you disagree with or which you consider requires more consideration.

Having received and taken account of any comments which you may make on the draft report, the Investigating Officer will send their final report to the Monitoring Officer.

6 What happens if the Investigating Officer concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

The Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and, if satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient, the Monitoring Officer will write to you and to the member concerned [*and to the Parish Council, where your complaint relates to a Parish Councillor*], notifying you that no further action is required. A copy of the Investigating Officer's final report will be given to both of you. If the Monitoring Officer is not satisfied that the investigation has been conducted properly, the Investigating Officer may be asked to reconsider their report.

7 What happens if the Investigating Officer concludes that there is evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

The Monitoring Officer will review the Investigating Officer's report and will then either send the matter for local hearing before the Hearings Panel or, after consulting the Independent Person, seek local resolution.

7.1 Local Resolution

The Monitoring Officer may consider that the matter can reasonably be resolved without the need for a hearing. In such a case, the Independent

Person will be consulted with you as complainant and seek to agree what you consider to be a fair resolution which also helps to ensure higher standards of conduct for the future. Such resolution may include the member accepting that his/her conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, and/or other remedial action by the authority. If the member complies with the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the matter to the Standards Committee *[and the Parish Council]* for information, but will take no further action. However, if you tell the Monitoring Officer that any suggested resolution would not be adequate, the Monitoring Officer will refer the matter for a local hearing.

7.2 Local Hearing

If the Monitoring Officer considers that local resolution is not appropriate, or you are not satisfied by the proposed resolution, or the member concerned is not prepared to undertake any proposed remedial action, such as giving an apology, then the Monitoring Officer will report the Investigating Officer's report to the Hearings Panel which will conduct a local hearing before deciding whether the member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and, if so, whether to take any action in respect of the member.

Essentially, the Monitoring Officer will conduct a "pre-hearing process", requiring the member to give his/her response to the Investigating Officer's report, in order to identify what is likely to be agreed and what is likely to be in contention at the hearing. The Chair of the Hearings Panel may issue directions as to the manner in which the hearing will be conducted. At the hearing, the Investigating Officer will present their report, call such witnesses as they consider necessary and make representations to substantiate their conclusion that the member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. For this purpose, the Investigating Officer may ask you as the complainant to attend and give evidence to the Hearings Panel. The member will then have an opportunity to give his/her evidence, to call witnesses and to make representations to the Hearings Panel as to why they consider that they did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct.

If the Hearings Panel, with the benefit of any advice from the Independent Person, conclude that the member did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct they will dismiss the complaint. If the Hearings Panel concludes that the member did fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, the Chair will inform the member of this finding and the Hearings Panel will then consider what action, if any, the Hearings Panel should take as a result of the member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. In doing this, the Hearings Panel will give the member an opportunity to make representations to the Panel and will consult the Independent Person, but will then decide what action, if any, to take in respect of the matter..

8 What action can the Hearings Panel take where a member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?

The Council has delegated to the Hearings Panel such of its powers to take action in respect of individual members as may be necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. Accordingly the Hearings Panel may –

- 8.1 Publish its findings in respect of the member's conduct;
- 8.2 Report its findings to Council [*or to the Parish Council*] for information;
- 8.3 Recommend to the member's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to Council or to Committees) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
- 8.4 Recommend to the Leader of the Council that the member be removed from the Executive, particular Portfolio responsibilities, as chairman of a committee or from a committee itself;
- 8.5 Instruct the Monitoring Officer to [*or recommend that the Parish Council*] arrange training for the member;
- 8.6 Remove [*or recommend to the Parish Council that the member be removed*] from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority [*or by the Parish Council*];
- 8.7 Withdraw [*or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws*] facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access; or
- 8.8 Exclude [*or recommend that the Parish Council exclude*] the member from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.

The Hearings Panel has no power to suspend or disqualify the member or to withdraw members' or special responsibility allowances.

9 What happens at the end of the hearing?

At the end of the hearing, the Chair will state the decision of the Hearings Panel as to whether the member failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any actions which the Hearings Panel resolves to take.

As soon as reasonably practicable thereafter, the Monitoring Officer shall prepare a formal decision notice in consultation with the Chair of the Hearings Panel, and send a copy to the Complainant, to the member [*and to the Parish Council*], make the decision notice available for public inspection and report the decision to the next convenient meeting of the Council.

10 Who are the Hearings Panel?

The Hearings Panel is a Sub-Committee of the Council's Standards Committee. The Standards Committee has decided that it will comprise a maximum of five members of the Council, including not more than one member of the authority's Executive and comprising members drawn from at least 2 different political parties. Subject to those requirements, it is appointed on the nomination of party group leaders in proportion to the strengths of each party group on the Council.

The Independent Person is invited to attend all meetings of the Hearings Panel and their views are sought and taken into consideration before the Hearings Panel takes any decision on whether the member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code of conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

11 Who is the Independent Person?

The Independent Person is a person who has applied for the post following advertisement of a vacancy for the post, and is appointed by a positive vote from a majority of all the members of Council.

A person cannot be "independent" if he/she –

- 11.1 Is, or has been within the past 5 years, a member, co-opted member or officer of the authority;
- 11.2 *[Is or has been within the past 5 years, a member, co-opted member or officer of a parish council within the authority's area], or*
- 11.3 Is a relative, or close friend, of a person within paragraph 11.1 or 11.2 above. For this purpose, "relative" means –
 - 11.3.1 Spouse or civil partner;
 - 11.3.2 Living with the other person as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners;
 - 11.3.3 Grandparent of the other person;
 - 11.3.4 A lineal descendent of a grandparent of the other person;
 - 11.3.5 A parent, sibling or child of a person within paragraphs 11.3.1 or 11.3.2;
 - 11.3.6 A spouse or civil partner of a person within paragraphs 11.3.3, 11.3.4 or 11.3.5; or
 - 11.3.7 Living with a person within paragraphs 11.3.3, 11.3.4 or 11.3.5 as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners.

12 Revision of these arrangements

The Council may by resolution agree to amend these arrangements, and has delegated to the Chair of the Hearings Panel the right to depart from these arrangements where they considers that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter.

13 Appeals

There is no right of appeal for you as complainant or for the member against a decision of the Monitoring Officer or of the Hearings Panel

If you feel that the authority has failed to deal with your complaint properly, you may make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

APPENDIX 3

ARTICLE 8 The Standards Committee

1.1 Standards Committee

The Council will establish a Standards Committee.

1.2 Constitution

(a) Membership

The Standards Committee will be comprised of:

- (i) five (5) elected members from each of the political groups who are represented on the Council;
- (ii) two (2) independent co-opted members who are not councillors or officers of the Council or of any County, District or Unitary Council or of any Parish Council within Taunton Deane (these are referred to as “Independent co-opted members”);
- (iii) (subject to the same exceptions as (ii) above) two (2) members of a parish council from within the Borough of Taunton Deane who shall represent the interests of all such Parish Councils (the Parish Members);
- (iv) members of the Standards Committee will hold office from one Annual Meeting until the next - at which point their appointments shall be either renewed or terminated at Annual Council.

(b) Independent co-opted members

Independent co-opted members (see 8.2(a)(ii) above):-

- (i) shall be selected in accordance following a recruitment and selection process ;
- (ii) will not be entitled to vote at meetings of the Committee or on any sub-committees to which they have been appointed. Their role is an advisory one.

(c) Parish Members

A Parish Member must be present at any meeting of the Standards Committee when matters relating to Parish Councils or their members are being considered. Parish members will

not be voting members of the Committee and their role is an advisory one.

(d) Independent Person

The Independent Person is a person who is appointed following a recruitment and selection process and carries out the following functions:-

- (i) they must be consulted by the authority before it makes a finding as to whether a member has failed to comply with the code of conduct or decides on action to be taken in respect of that member (this means on a decision to take no action where the investigation finds no evidence of breach or, where the investigation finds evidence that there has been a breach, on any local resolution of the complaint, or on any finding of breach and on any decision on action as a result of that finding);
- (ii) they may be consulted by the authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage; and
- (iii) they may be consulted by a member or co-opted member of the Borough Council or of a Parish Council against whom a complaint has been made.

(e) Chairing the Committee

The Committee shall be chaired by an elected member.

(f) Sub-committees

The Standards Committee shall be entitled to appoint sub-committees or Hearings Panels to assess complaints received against members where allegations are made that a member has failed to comply with the code of conduct; where this happens the following limits will apply:-

- (i) the quorum (that is, minimum size at which business may be transacted) shall be 3;
- (ii) All sub-committees shall be chaired by an elected member;
- (iii) All sub-committees must include at least 3 voting members

- (iii) Sub-committees may include at least one co-opted independent member;
 - (iv) where a Parish Councillor is the subject of a complaint then a Parish Member (unless s/he is the subject of that investigation) shall be appointed to that sub-committee.
- (g) The Standards Committee may appoint a sub-committee to determine any application for a dispensation should time be of the essence in the application (however there must be compliance with the statutory time limits on notification of meetings).
- (h) Any sub-committee set up to determine dispensations shall adhere to the limits as set out in (f) above.

1.3 Role and Function

The Standards Committee will have the following roles and functions in relation to the Borough Council and Parish Councils within Taunton Deane.

- (a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members;
- (b) assisting councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (c) advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (e) advising, training or arranging to train councillors and any co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct and wider propriety issues including issuing guidance where appropriate;
- (f) granting dispensations to councillors and any co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' 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:
- (g) deal with the assessment and determination of complaints under the Members' Code of Conduct relating to Members, Co-opted and Parish Members (other than where the power to deal with such matters has been delegated to and exercised by the Monitoring Officer). Where the investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and a local resolution

is not appropriate or not possible, then a Hearing Panel of the Committee (comprising 3 voting members of the Standards Committee agreed by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Committee Chairman) will consider and decide the complaint.

- (h) take decisions in respect of a Member and Co-opted Member who is found on hearing to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, including –
- Reporting its findings to Council [or to the Parish Council] for information;
 - Recommending to the member's Group Leader that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the member be removed from the Executive Committee, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities should the complaint refer to a Portfolio holder;
 - Instructing the Monitoring Officer to [or recommend that the Parish Council] arrange training for the member;
 - Removing [or recommend to the Parish Council that the member be removed] from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority [or by the Parish Council];
 - Withdrawing [or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws] facilities provided to the member by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access;
 - Restricting contact to named officers or requiring contact be through named officers; or
 - Excluding [or recommend that the Parish Council exclude] the member from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.
- (i) advise on the management of statutory and other registers of interest and gifts / hospitality received;
- (j) advise the Council on possible changes to the Constitution (except the Council and Executive Schemes of Delegation) in relation the key documents and protocols dealing with members conduct and ethical standards;

WITHDRAWAL FROM MEETINGS

31. Where a member has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any business of the Council, whether registered under paragraphs 2.2 or 2.3 of the Council's Code of Conduct or not, and you attend any meeting of the Council, its Executive or any Committee, Sub-Committee, Joint Committee at which that business is to be considered you must:-
- (a) not seek to influence a decision about that business;
 - (b) disclose to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest no later than the start of the consideration of the business in which you have that interest, or (if later) the time at which the interest becomes apparent to you. The exception to the requirement to disclose an interest is if the matter is a sensitive interest as set out in paragraph 2.11 of the code of conduct.
 - (c) Withdraw from the meeting room or chamber including the public gallery as soon as it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at that meeting;

Unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Council's Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee.

32. Where a member has a prejudicial interest as defined by paragraph 2.9 of the Council's Code of Conduct the member must:-
- (a) not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting
 - (b) not participate in any vote on the matter at the meeting
 - (c) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting and leave the room where the meeting is being held while any discussion or voting takes place on the matter.
33. Where a member has a prejudicial interest in any business of the Council, the member may attend a meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business and he/she must leave the meeting immediately after making those representations, answering questions or giving evidence.

Standards Committee – 7 February 2013 (re-arranged from 22 January 2013)

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room No. 1, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Thursday, 7 February 2013 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Councillors Tooze, A Wedderkopp and Wren
Mr M Marshall and Mr B Wilson (Parish Council Representatives)
Mr T Bowditch and Mrs A Elder (Co-opted members of the Committee)

Officers: Mrs T Meers (Monitoring Officer) and Mr R Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: Councillor Horsley

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Wren be appointed Chairman of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Allgrove and Gaines. Ms L Somerville-Williams (Independent Person), Ms L Williams (Reserve Independent Person) and Mr A Cox (Co-opted member of the Committee).

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Wren declared a personal interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor A Wedderkopp and declared a personal interest as a member of Wessex Water's Environmental Panel. Anne Elder, declared personal interests as a Public Governor of the Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust and as a Member of the House Management Committee of one of the premises operated by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution.

4. The Role and Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee

The Monitoring Officer, Tonya Meers, reported that Full Council had agreed at its meeting on 17 July 2012 to change the Council's Constitution as to the role and functions of the Standards Committee. These roles and functions in relation to the Borough Council and Parish Councils in Taunton Deane were as follows:-

- (a) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted members;
- (b) Assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;

- (c) Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (d) Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (e) Advising, training or arranging to train Councillors and any co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct and wider propriety issues including issuing guidance where appropriate;
- (f) Granting dispensations to Councillors and any co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct or delegating such power to a sub-committee which will be authorised to determine such dispensations based on principles agreed by the Committee:
- (g) Dealing with the assessment and determination of complaints under the Members' Code of Conduct relating to Members, Co-opted and Parish Members (other than where the power to deal with such matters has been delegated to and exercised by the Monitoring Officer). Where the investigation finds evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and a local resolution is not appropriate or not possible, then a Hearing Panel of the Committee (comprising three voting members of the Standards Committee agreed by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Committee Chairman) will consider and decide the complaint.
- (h) Taking decisions in respect of a Member and co-opted member who is found on hearing to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct, including –
 - Reporting its findings to Council [or to the Parish Council] for information;
 - Recommending to the Member's Group Leader that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
 - Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the Member be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities should the complaint refer to a Portfolio Holder;
 - Instructing the Monitoring Officer to [or recommend that the Parish Council] arrange training for the Member;
 - Removing [or recommend to the Parish Council that the Member be removed] from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority [or by the Parish Council];
 - Withdrawing [or recommend to the Parish Council that it withdraws] facilities provided to the Member by the Council, such as a computer,

website and/or email and Internet access;

- Restricting contact to named officers or requiring contact be through named officers; or

- Excluding [or recommend that the Parish Council exclude] the Member from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings.

- (i) Advising on the management of statutory and other registers of interest and gifts / hospitality received; and
- (j) Advising the Council on possible changes to the Constitution (except the Council and Executive Schemes of Delegation) in relation to the key documents and protocols dealing with Members' conduct and ethical standards.

Resolved that the role and functions of the Standards Committee be noted.

5. The role of the Council's Independent Person

Mrs Meers again referred to the decision made last July by Full Council and reported that the role of Taunton Deane's Independent Person would be as follows:-

- They must be consulted by the authority before it makes a finding as to whether a Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct or decides on action to be taken in respect of that Member (this means on a decision to take no action where the investigation finds no evidence of breach or, where the investigation finds evidence that there has been a breach, on any local resolution of the complaint, or on any finding of breach and on any decision on action as a result of that finding);
- They may be consulted by the authority in respect of a standards complaint at any other stage; and
- They may be consulted by a Member or co-opted member of the District Council or of a Parish Council against whom a complaint has been made.

She added that the new 'complaints' regime was significantly different to the previous arrangements and these would evolve over time. One major difference was that Monitoring Officers could become involved at a 'lower level' than previously in an attempt to resolve complaints without resorting to the arrangements under the new legislation.

At the moment there were very few complaints being submitted and there had not been the need so far to involve the Independent Person. Details of complaints made would be reported to the Committee at future meetings.

Resolved that the report be noted.

6. Dispensations

Mrs Meers reported on the situation with regard to Dispensations following the introduction of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) in the Localism Act.

Although it was still early days, it was clear that the new legislation relating to interests was not as helpful to Councillors as previously.

She referred to the debate at Full Council back in October last year on the proposed Badger Cull, during which it became clear that a Member had a DPI and had to leave the Council Chamber without having the opportunity to address the other Councillors present. The DPI only became apparent during the discussion so there was no means of a dispensation being sought from the Member concerned or one being granted by her, as the Monitoring Officer.

In her view Mrs Meers felt that at some point the new legislation might have to be clarified. She reported that she had written to the Local Government Minister, Brandon Lewis, suggesting that Monitoring Officers should be asked to consider the effectiveness of DPI's. Mrs Meers felt that the same 'rules' relating to prejudicial interests should be applied to DPI's whereby Councillors could have the means to make a statement before leaving a meeting, so not being able to influence other Members.

Mrs Meers had also suggested that Monitoring Officers should have the means to make conditional dispensations in all circumstances rather than the current situation where most dispensations would have to be granted following a special meeting of the Committee.

During the discussion of this item, Anne Elder queried the role of the co-optees on the Standards Committee. Councillor Horsley felt this was a pertinent question and stated that he had been happy to see the demise of the previous Standards regime. He actually saw no role for the Committee other than for it to meet on an annual basis to review what had happened over the past 12 months. He added that the Chairman, the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person were the 'key players' and that everyone else on the Committee was there to form a 'court' to consider complaints, if this became necessary.

In response, the Chairman stated that the Committee was responsible for promoting high ethical standards amongst Taunton Deane Members as well as Parish and Town Councillors. He disagreed with Councillor Horsley in that he saw the co-optees having an important future role. Standards in public life had not changed that much. The Committee still needed to convince Councillors that they needed to comply with the adopted Code of Conduct.

Members felt that all the previous work done by the Committee, especially with the Parishes, should not be lost. Unless the Standards 'message' continued to be conveyed strongly, it was likely far more complaints than before would be submitted about Councillor behaviour. This was a situation that should be avoided if at all possible.

There was a need for a detailed explanation about the changes to interests to be prepared so all Councillors knew exactly what the current position was.

Generally, Members felt that the Committee needed to maintain a high profile and seek to be proactive rather than reactive.

7. Other work the Standards Committee could become involved with

Mrs Meers felt that with the new Committee, there was scope to consider widening the sphere of the Committee's work.

As well as upholding the standards of ethical governance within the Council, for example the Staff Code of Conduct and considering statistics from the Local Government Ombudsman, the further following work areas were suggested:-

- Ways in which to maintain our current relationships with Parish Councils;
- Local Codes of Conduct;
- Keeping protocols in the Council's Constitution under review; and
- Annual Governance Statement.

Where necessary, working in conjunction with both the Corporate Governance Committee and the Scrutiny Committees would be sought.

8. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 19 March 2013 at 2.30 p.m. in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 3.48 p.m.)