



Standards Advisory Committee

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee to be held in Committee Room 1, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 2 September 2014 at 14:30.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies.
- 2 Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 July 2014 (attached).
- 3 Public Question Time.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of Disposable Pecuniary Interests or personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The usual declarations made at meetings of the Standards Committee are shown on the attachment.
- 5 Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014. The document is attached for consideration by Members of the Committee. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager will be in attendance to present the Statement and to respond to questions.

Reporting Officer: Paul Harding

- 6 Verbal Update on the Review of Standards. Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer.

Reporting Officer: Bruce Lang

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
Mrs A Elder
Councillor E Gaines
Mr M Marshall
Mr L Rogers
Councillor P Tooze
Councillor A Wedderkopp
Mr B Wilson
Councillor G Wren

Standards Committee – 8 July 2014

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday, 8 July 2014 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Gaines and Wren
Michael Marshall and Bryn Wilson (Parish Council Representatives)
Terry Bowditch and Anne Elder (Co-opted members of the Committee)
Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams (Independent Person)

Officers: Bruce Lang (Monitoring Officer) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager and Corporate Support Lead)

Also Present : Mr L Rogers

36. Appointment of Chairman

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

37. Apologies

Councillors Tooze and A Wedderkopp.

38. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 November 2013 were taken as read and were signed.

39. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared a personal interest as Vice-Chairman of the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Councillor Wren declared a personal interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. 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.

40. Resignation – Mr Adrian Cox

The Democratic Services Manager, Richard Bryant, reported that Adrian Cox who was one of co-opted members had resigned from the Committee earlier in the year. A letter had been sent to Mr Cox on behalf of the Chairman thanking him for his contributions to the work of the Committee.

In terms of replacing Mr Cox, Mr Bryant reported on the measures which were normally followed to recruit a new co-optee to the Committee. However, it was suggested that the Committee might like to consider approaching Mr Lynn Rogers – who was in attendance at the meeting – to see whether he might be interested in filling the current vacancy, particularly in view of his former service as an independent member of the Standards Committee before the new regime was introduced in 2012.

Mr Rogers confirmed that he would like to be considered for the vacant position.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to approve the appointment of Mr Lynn Rogers as a co-opted member of the Council's Standards Committee.

41. Overview of Standards Regime

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an overview of how the standards regime currently operated at Taunton Deane (TDBC) in comparison with the processes currently in place at West Somerset Council (WSC).

Both TDBC and WSC had retained Committees to oversee the standards regime following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011.

These Committees had broadly the same purpose in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by district/borough, town and parish elected Members and co-opted members of Councils in their respective areas.

There were nevertheless distinct differences in the composition of the two committees.

At TDBC there were five voting Councillors (politically proportional) together with three co-opted independent members and two co-opted parish councillors as observers.

In contrast, WSC had retained a Committee with a composition similar to before the Localism Act, consisting of three independent members (one of whom is Chairman), three WSC Councillors (politically balanced) and three parish councillors. All nine members could vote but, to ensure that this complied with current legislation, the Committee could only make recommendations to West Somerset' Full Council.

The approach adopted by TDBC was similar to what the majority of Councils had also done which provided a more streamlined process whereby the Committee could make its own decisions notwithstanding that by its very nature, the Committee could be considered to be "political".

The WSC version did maintain, or at least the perception, of a greater “independence” by having a majority of non-Councillors sitting on it who all had an equal voice. This did however result in some of the processes being more elongated by virtue of the Committee only being “advisory”.

There are also cost differences between the two models as in the case of Taunton Deane the only additional cost is the payment of an annual allowance of £500 plus expenses for the Independent Person whereas at WSC additional payments are made to the six co-opted members (with a further allowance for the Chairman) which resulted in the total cost of just over £5300 per annum.

Under current legislation all Councils had to have arrangements in place for dealing with complaints/allegations that a Member of a district/borough, town or parish council had breached their code of conduct.

Reported that there were many similarities between the two processes, as well as some differences too. The initial assessment at TDBC was delegated to the Monitoring Officer to be carried out in consultation with the Independent Person. However, at WSC this part of the process was also delegated to the Monitoring Officer but in consultation with the whole Advisory Committee.

If a complaint reached the hearing stage in TDBC the hearing panel consisted of three Councillors drawn from the five voting members with the Independent Person invited to attend, whilst in WSC if a complaint reaches the hearing stage, the hearing panel would comprise the whole Advisory Committee.

Although it was not intended to draw any conclusions as to which of the options were the “best”; given the closer working between the two Councils there could be some value in exploring whether there were any areas of mutual benefit to be gained from working in a similar way.

Further reported that the respective Chairmen of TDBC and WSC Standards Committees had had an informal discussion and had indicated a shared enthusiasm for exploring the possibility of at least working closely on the provision of training on the Code of Conduct following the local elections in May 2015.

During the discussion of this item, the following comments were made:-

- The previous ‘make-up’ of the Standards Committee was preferred. It was not ideal for non-Councillors to be involved in Committee discussions but not then being entitled to vote.
- The way in which the Hearings Panel dealt with the recent complaint appeared to be ‘politically influenced’.
- The costs of the WSC Committee was a small price to pay for a more acceptable way of operating. A similar system should be introduced at TDBC.

- The co-optees and the parish representatives on the TDBC Committee were struggling to understand their respective roles under the new arrangements.
- What credibility was there with a system that excluded parish involvement in the Hearings process?
- The effectiveness of the former Parish Liaison Officer had kept down the number of complaints made against Councillors. The Committee needed to become more effective to fill the current void. This should be added to the Forward Plan as a future agenda item.
- The best practice as to how the District Councils maintained their relationships with their parish councils should be gathered from the Monitoring Officers.
- It was clear that there was a need for the Committee to become more equitable. What would the process be to change TDBC's Committee to become more like WSC's Advisory Committee?
- This would involve the Constitutional Sub-Committee, the Corporate Governance Committee and Full Council.

Resolved that the Constitutional Sub-Committee be requested to review the current arrangements that had been put in place for Taunton Deane's Standards Committee with a view to making recommendations that would enable the parish and the co-opted members to more fully participate in the process than they were able to do at present.

The Standards Committee considered that by enabling these representatives to act on an equal basis would encourage greater engagement, demonstrate enhanced objectivity and dispel any perception of political influence in Standards issues.

41. Draft Regulations 2014 – Openness of Local Government Body Meetings

The Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang, reported that Regulations were to be introduced shortly by the Government to formalise current arrangements allowing the press and public to film and digitally report from all public meetings of local government bodies.

Mr Lang added that Chairmen would still have some powers to ensure the running of meetings was not disrupted.

Resolved that the report be noted.

42. Members Code of Conduct

The Monitoring Officer provided the reasons as to South Somerset District Council's recent decision to amend its Code of Conduct to remove the exemption from having to declare a prejudicial interest when that interest was by virtue of a Member also being a Member of a town, parish or County Council.

Resolved that the report be noted.

43. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 2 September 2014 at 2.30 p.m. in Committee Room No. 2 at The Deane House. This date replaces the previously published date of 9 September 2014.

(The meeting ended at 3.53 p.m.)

Usual Declarations of Interest by Councillors

Standards Committee

- **Clerk to Milverton Parish Council – Councillor Wren**
- **Member of Somerset County Council – Councillor A Wedderkopp**
- **Member of Wessex Water’s Environmental Panel – Councillor A Wedderkopp**
- **Vice-Chairman of the Somerset Association of Local Councils – Councillor Mrs Allgrove**
- **Public Governor of the Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust – Anne Elder**
- **Member of the House Management Committee of one of the premises operated by the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution – Anne Elder**

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2013/2014

Scope of responsibility

Taunton Deane Borough Council is responsible for making sure that:-

- its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards
- public money is protected and properly accounted for
- public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- there is a sound system of governance incorporating the system of internal control.

The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and the management of risk.

Taunton Deane Borough Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework "*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*". A copy of the code can be obtained on request.

This statement explains how Taunton Deane Borough Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2011 in relation to the publication of statement on internal control.

Public communication

Local public sector bodies serve every part of society and have a statutory duty to communicate with the general public and other stakeholders about their financial and governance arrangements. Local government and the public sector more widely is changing at a rapid rate, therefore greater clarity is required in public reporting to give greater transparency and to address the demands of the interactive expectations of the public.

Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives and to evaluate the likelihood and impact should those risks be realised. It ensures they are managed efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework has been in place at Taunton Deane Borough Council for the whole year ended 31 March 2014 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

The Governance Framework

In March 2008, Taunton Deane Borough Council adopted a formal code of corporate governance in line with guidance provided by CIPFA and SOLACE. This describes how Taunton Deane discharges its responsibilities for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, incorporating the six core principles identified by CIPFA / SOLACE. The framework we have in place to ensure we adhere to the Code is described in more detail below.

Core Principle 1: Focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community creating and implementing a vision for the local area.

- The Council has a 3 year Corporate Business Plan (2013/2014 – 2015/2016) which was developed after detailed consultation work with councillors and all political groups and following an external peer review by the Local Government Association (LGA). It sets out a new Vision, four corporate aims, and a series of high level actions to achieve its aims and transform the council, ensuring statutory requirements are met whilst being fit for purpose, addressing funding pressures and setting a balanced, sustainable budget. The Corporate Business Plan is the Council's core planning document, from which the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Financial Plan, Annual Budget, Asset Management Plan, Capital and Housing Strategies are formed to underpin the corporate aims. Service Plans are produced from the Corporate Business Plan to show how each service will contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Aims and its service objectives.

Hyperlink to TDBC Corporate Business Plan: [TDBC Corporate Business Plan](#)

- The Council has developed and approved a new 'Growth Prospectus for Taunton' which feeds into a higher-level Somerset Growth Plan – this document sets out an ambitious vision, commitment and a clear direction for the growth of Taunton's economy over the period to 2028,

together with an outline of the key schemes needed to deliver Taunton's full economic potential. In addition, a project was completed in 2013 to deliver a 'Taunton Rethink', which is a short sharp health-check of the Taunton Vision, and sets out a refreshed set of ambitions and plans for the future of Taunton Town Centre. A robust Programme Management approach and governance structure is being established in 2014 to coordinate the delivery of the council's growth outcomes.

- The 2013/2014 Performance Outturn Report and Annual Accounts review our performance over the last year. An Annual Report is also published highlighting some practical examples of our activities, achievements, financial position and performance.
- The council's Joint Management Team, Scrutiny Committees and the Executive review our performance and delivery of the strategic and service delivery plans and priorities on a quarterly basis. All performance and finance reports are published on the council's website.
- Additional performance monitoring reports for key service delivery partners are also reviewed by the management team and Scrutiny committees (e.g. Southwest One, Somerset Waste Partnership, Tone Leisure).
- The Taunton Deane Partnership comprises key agencies within the public and voluntary sectors that seek to tackle both urban and rural deprivation. The focus of activity within Taunton is North Taunton, Taunton East, Wellington and the rural areas. The TDP have prepared the Priority Areas Strategy and Action Plan (PAS). This was developed through extensive consultation and engagement. The PAS contains four themes: building strong communities, improved access to services, improving the lives of the most vulnerable families and improving the look and feel of priority areas. A revised version of the PAS will be published in summer 2014. The TDP also supports the delivery of the Troubled Families agenda and the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Actively supporting the Halcon One Team model which recognises the government agenda of joining up public services at the point of delivery. This model is a new 'way of working' (as opposed to a formal project) and has delivered significant outcomes to the community particularly around reduced crime, as well as the deployment of existing resources more effectively 'on the ground' reducing costs to the public purse. Our structure proposals look to extend this model across other parts of Taunton Deane. Governance arrangements exist with the involvement of senior officers and Portfolio Holders at Strategic, Tactical and operational levels.
- To ensure the Council makes best use of resources and provides value for money to service users, Service Plans and service profiles have

been developed, which include: financial and personnel resources and performance and service cost comparisons with other similar authorities (benchmarking). Work is continuing to build benchmarking data into on-going performance reports.

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- TDBC and WSC jointly developed a business case for joint management and shared services. The business case went through the democratic process and was approved by both Councils in Nov 2013.
- Between January-March 2013, the management teams from both councils met on various occasions to discuss and develop the expectations and vision for a partnership. The Leaders from both councils also worked together early on in the process to ensure they held common aims and expectations.
- During the development of the Business case a Joint Members Advisory Panel (JMAP) was established. This included four Members from each Council. Following the approval of the business case, this has developed into the Joint Partnership Advisory Panel (JPAG), with a similar format, four Members from each Council and also now includes the Leader from each Council.
- An elected Member Development Programme is also in the process of being developed with the support of the LGA/Member Peers and a member representative from each Council.
- Communications plans during the business case development and since approval, have included activities to keep Members from both Councils informed of proposals and actions underway. These activities have included Member briefing sessions at key stages of the process.
- Outcomes and benefits to the community include - Value for money services, attracting funding to the Council to improve the Council and maintain level of service delivery, maintaining local democracy and a greater local/regional/national influence/representation as a partnership than as individual Councils.

Core Principle 2: Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.

- The Council's Constitution documents the roles and responsibilities of the Council, Executive, Scrutiny, Policy Development, Regulatory and Officer functions. The Constitution is kept under review by the Constitutional Sub-Committee. All proposed changes are considered by the Corporate Governance Committee and Full Council. The Constitution was reviewed and updated in January 2014 to reflect the TDBC / WSC 'JMASS' project.
- The Statutory Officers meet as a Corporate Governance Group. The Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer are members of the Joint

Management Team (JMT) and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which meets weekly and regularly considers governance issues.

- The Group Leaders, Chief Executive and other relevant key officers meet regularly to share information and discuss any issues for the authority.
- The strategic direction of the organisation and sponsorship of key objectives and priorities is undertaken by the Joint Management Team, which consists of the Directors, Assistant Directors, Assistant Chief Executive and a representative of Southwest One – who meet on a monthly basis with the Chief Executive. In addition to this the Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive and Directors (the Senior Leadership Team) meet on a weekly basis.
- The Council's Lead Officers meet monthly along with the members of JMT. Many items are discussed. The expectation is that key messages are shared back to teams through team meetings.
- The Leader and Chief Executive meet on a monthly basis in order to maintain a shared understanding of roles and objectives.
- The statutory roles of Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer and Head of Paid Service are well established with their own control regimes to enhance the control environment. These roles are embedded within the new Joint Management structure. In the new JMT arrangements in place since January 2014, the Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer is a member of the Senior Leadership Team alongside the Chief Executive and s151 Officer / Deputy CEO / Director of Operations (two deputies are also appointed and are available to cover both WSC and TDBC)
- There is a member/officer protocol that sets out the standards of behaviour expected to ensure a good working relationship between members and officers.
- Portfolio holders and the shadow portfolio holders meet key officers on a regular basis to discuss relevant issues within their portfolio.
- The financial management arrangements are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they conform to the requirements of CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2010) as set out in the Application Note to Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework. From Jan 2014 onwards, the Chief Financial Officer and Section 151 provision is covered by the Director – Operations as part of the TDBC/WSC Joint Management now in place. The Chief Financial Officer is a CCAB qualified accountant and is responsible for maintaining a robust system of internal control

- TDBC is part of a partnership called Southwest One. We are represented on the main Southwest One Board, which meets quarterly, through a nominated elected member. The Board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the company and for its financial performance
- The Assistant Director – Corporate Services meets on a monthly basis with Southwest One’s CEO and Senior Responsible Officers of the other two partners, to discuss strategy and broad operational issues. They also meet on a monthly basis with the Southwest One Director of Service Operations and the Heads of Client of the other two partners, to discuss day to day operational issues

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- A transparent, equitable and fair recruitment process has been developed with input from Unison and JPAG to support the re-structure phase of the partnership. The ‘Creating a shared workforce and transition redundancy policy’ report was presented to and approved by both councils in November 2013
- The Chief Executive meets monthly with the Leader of TDBC and Leader WSC individually and again with both Leaders together on a monthly basis.
- All staff briefings are held monthly with sessions at West Somerset House and Deane House. These are headed up by the CEO and Assistant Chief Executive with support from other Directors and Assistant Directors as required. Senior management Team (SMT) briefings are also being held to disseminate information at key stages of the restructure process.

Core Principle 3: Promoting the values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

- The Localism Act 2011 made a number of changes to the Standards Regime which was implemented by the Council in July 2012. The Council decided to keep a Standards Committee. The Committee is politically balanced with five elected members, three independent co-opted members and two parish council representatives. In addition the Council also appointed an Independent Person and a reserve Independent Person. The terms of reference for the Committee are set out in the Constitution set out at

<http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk/irj/public/council/councillors/councillor?rid=/wpccontent/Sites/TDBC/Web%20Pages/Council/Councillors/Taunton%20Deane%20Standards%20Committee>

- The Committee promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Councillors, advising and training on the member’s code of conduct,

dealing with complaints against members, and any issues raised by the Monitoring Officer. The Committee submits an annual report to the Council's Corporate Governance Committee, and deals with any formal complaints as required.

- The Council has a set of four Core Values and Business Principles which underpin and support the Council's Vision, and reflect its fundamental beliefs as an organisation and guide how it deals with staff, customers and partners.

Core Values:-

- **Integrity** – we will be honest, do what is right and stick to it
- **Fairness** – we will consistently treat everyone as an equal, respecting their individual needs and abilities
- **Respect** – we will always show respect for everyone
- **Trust** – we will show trust and confidence in our staff and customers

Business Principles:-

- **Quality Services** – ensuring the delivery of accessible, quality services that provide good value for money (either as direct providers or through partnership)
 - **Customer Driven** – we will put the needs of our customers at the heart of all that we do
 - **A dynamic organisation** – innovative, forward-looking and focussed on results
 - **Environmentally Responsible** – we will minimise the environmental impact from our operations
- Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff operate within council policies, procedures and legislation and for the management of risk and maintenance of risk registers.
 - A complaints procedure is in place for the Council to receive and investigate any complaint made against Borough or Parish members.
 - Internal and External audit work together to review and provide annual opinions on the control framework, governance and validity of the annual accounts.

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- The Joint Partnership Advisory Group (JPAG) that provides the member governance for the JMASS programme encourages mutual working and trust between the member representatives.
- A Member development programme is in development and will encourage opportunities for TDBC/WSC members to meet and work

together. There is also the potential in the future for joint committees e.g. Audit/Standards.

- The project mandate, agreed by both councils, included the non-negotiable issues and these were reflected throughout the development of the business case. e.g., retain sovereignty/no cross subsidy.
- The trust and respect of and between the councils and management has been key to the speed of progress that has been made. Following the appointment of the Joint Chief Executive and the establishment of the Joint Management team (in place by Jan 2014) there has been the promotion and endorsement of a 'One Team' culture across both councils. This approach is also under-pinned by the agreed employment model where people appointed in the new structure are employed by TDBC.
- Additional HR resource (from SCC and via internal secondment) has been drafted in during the development of the business case and latterly as the restructure gets underway to support the recruitment process.
- A Joint Unison Board (unison reps from TDBC & WSC) was established at an early stage of the partnership process (first meeting held Mar '13). JUB meet monthly and are consulted at all stages of the process e.g. Employment model, recruitment process, Job evaluation process

Core Principle 4: Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and risk management arrangements

- Taunton Deane Borough Council has a published Constitution that sets out the decision-making arrangements and the responsibilities for different functions. There are clear rules of procedure for the running of business meetings and details of delegated authorities to individuals. The Monitoring Officer is responsible for the Constitution.
- Corporate Scrutiny and Community Scrutiny were set up in April 2009. Performance issues identified in the monitoring reports can be referred to other committees for further scrutiny.
- The main decision making body of the Council is the Executive, which consists of the Leader together with 7 Councillors and carries out all of the Council's functions, which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council.
- Council meetings are open to the public (with the exception of items that are exempt under the Access to Information Act). The Council makes every effort to advertise meetings, communicate decisions and minutes to ensure they are publicly available.
- The Executive has a published Forward Plan of Decisions to be taken and meets on a monthly basis. The Forward Plan was amended in line

with the Local Authority (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and now has a column to indicate where it is anticipated that confidential items are likely to be discussed and allows for representations to be made to state why a decision should not be made in private session. To date no representations have been received.

- Executive Councillors have delegated authority to make certain decisions, which are published in the Council's Weekly Bulletin. This, together with an appropriate level of delegation to senior managers, enables speedy and effective decision-making. In addition, all draft Executive minutes are circulated with a call-in pro-forma to all councillors, ensuring a prompt response to any request.
- The Council has in place a Risk Management Policy and Strategy, and maintains a Risk Management Action Plan which ensures that Risk Management is embedded within the Council and aligned with our partner organisations. The strategy sets out clear limits of responsibility for risk management across the Council. Major projects and partnerships also have risk registers in place and JMT has reviewed and refreshed the Corporate Risk Register during the course of the year
- Council committee reports include a standard section for the consideration of risks, which informs decision-making.
- TDBC operates a Corporate Governance Committee which is independent of the Executive and Scrutiny functions of the Council. They cover a wide remit and deal with such things as health and safety, risk management, recommend changes to the Constitution in addition to receiving any audit reports given to the Authority.
- The Council's Fraud and Whistle-blowing policies were updated during 2013/2014.

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- Savings from the Joint Management and staffing restructure were based on a budget envelope to ensure the required savings would be achieved.
- The business case identified savings from joint management and staffing restructure was based on a budget envelope to assure savings are achievable. Anticipated savings from the future transformation phase were not included because they will be reliant on the appetite of members for change and cannot be anticipated with enough assurance at this stage.
- Reports will be submitted to keep Members informed and to enable the consideration of business cases and the shaping of shared services from 2014/2015 onwards.

- There are also differences (e.g. Housing stock/coastal management) which can still be brought together under the joint management structure, although the scope for savings in these areas through joining services is obviously more limited
- Staff briefings held throughout the process have clearly stated the reasons and advantages of the partnership. A monthly project newsletter was produced during development of the business case to keep staff informed and this has been replaced with the 'One Team' newsletter.
- A risk register was developed and maintained as part of the business case process and was monitored and managed by the project board and JMAP. Following approval of the business case an implementation risk register has been drafted and this is monitored and managed by the project board and JPAG.
- Risks associated with the Partnership project are also included in the joint TDBC/WSC Corporate risk register as appropriate.

Core Principle 5: Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective in their roles

- The Council aims to ensure that officers and members have the knowledge, capacity and skills they need to undertake their duties, and this is reviewed through the appraisal system. An induction programme is in place for all new staff and new Members.
- A 'Programme Management Group' oversaw and monitored the Council's programme of major projects during 2013/2014 – a key role was to understand capacity and resourcing issues within project delivery, and report to JMT to enable these issues to be addressed. The council's approach to programme management for corporate transformation and growth and development projects will be strengthened as part of the new 'JMASS' management structure during 2014/2015.
- All staff have a performance review and employee development (PRED) meeting with their manager. Performance is reviewed and an action plan for the next period is set. This assists the member of staff in the performance of their work, helps to develop their skills and identifies any training needs.
- There have been a number of training opportunities for Members during 2013/2014, and these will continue into 2014/2015. A comprehensive Member Development programme will be developed in conjunction with the Member Development Champion (Cllr Gill Slattery) including training for all Councillors following the Borough Elections in May 2015.
- As part of the annual planning processes the Learning and Development Lead liaises with all senior managers on the training plans before preparing a plan for JMT approval. Work is currently

underway regarding an organisational development programme to ensure that staff appointed into the new 'JMASS' structure have the appropriate support, training and development to be effective in their new roles.

- In addition to this there is a corporate training plan developed every year to meet corporate needs. This year the Corporate Business Plan is being used as the baseline for identifying needs and this also links to the emerging Workforce Plan.
- The Council's Performance Management Framework ensures that the links between the Council's Corporate Objectives, Operational Plans and those of individual officers are clear.
- All Executive reports are required to include an Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure that members make decisions with a clear understanding of the impacts on groups with protected equalities characteristics.
- The Council has regular member briefings and training opportunities (such as Finance) which cover a range of issues and to ensure that the members are fully equipped with the skills they need in order to be effective leaders in their community.

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- The business case includes an ICT programme including technologies to enable managers and staff are able to work effectively across the disparate office locations. This includes a dedicated secure communications line that has been installed between Deane House and West Somerset House. A trust domain has also been established to enable both MS Outlook instances to be integrated, including calendars. Work is underway to combine/integrate building access control systems at both locations.

Core Principle 6: Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

- The Council consults using a variety of methods, which include public meetings, forums, surveys, feedback forms and focus groups. Listening to and understanding the views of residents, services users, business people, visitors and staff is important to Taunton Deane Borough Council. A corporate Consultation Register is maintained.
- The Council's vision and priorities are regularly communicated to the Community through the Somerset County Gazette, especially through the 'Deane Dispatch' page each month.

- The Council produces an Annual Statement of Accounts. The Council Tax booklet shares with Council Tax and Business Rate payers, details on the Council's financial position (i.e. a summary of the Statement of Accounts), priorities, and other useful information and is available on line and also available in paper format on request.
- Committee and Council meetings are open to the public, with papers available on the internet.
- There is regular community engagement and participation through specific community groups involving Housing, Environmental Health, Planning and Democratic Services.
- A Tenants Services Management Board has been set up, whose members include tenants and councillors. This board holds the Housing Service to account including performance and expenditure and helps shape the direction of the service. Other groups such as the Tenants Forum and Sheltered Housing Forum also allow tenants to have a strong voice in ensuring accountability of the Housing service.
- The Council encourages all types of feedback (complaints, compliments, comments and suggestions) from a number of channels (website, telephone, e-mail/letter, face-to-face), and these are logged on a central database for analysis and review. A Customer Feedback Guidance and Process document is available for Managers and Officers to deal with feedback consistently and effectively.
- Corporate use of social media ('Twitter') is being trialled during 2013-2014, and a policy is being developed
- The corporate communications function has been moved into the corporate centre under the responsibility of the Assistant Chief Executive – this will enable closer links with elected Members and the Democratic Services function. Various communication methods are in place to ensure effective internal communications (e.g. Core Brief / 'One Team' newsletters, staff briefings / Senior Management Team / Leads meetings)

Joint Management and Shared Services:-

- A communications plan was developed to support the business case process which included keeping community groups and key stakeholders informed.
- A press briefing was held on 1 October 2013 to ensure the media were kept in the loop and able to report accurately on the business case proposals.
- TDBC's Weekly Bulletin and WSC's Community Matters have also been used to communicate information at key stages.

- Communications, since the Business case approval has been focused internally (for staff and members), which is appropriate to this stage of the process.
- The communications plan is being updated for the next stage of the process and successes at key stages will be communicated to the public as appropriate
- The monthly staff briefings, regular member briefings and the monthly newsletters, which are circulated to all members and officers, are the key communication channels at this stage of change. These help to reinforce the 'One Team' ethos, highlight successes, future proposals and developments in the transformation phase of the project.

Review of effectiveness

Taunton Deane Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of its governance framework including the effectiveness of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness is informed by senior managers within the Council, who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, and also by the work of the internal and external auditors.

The review for the 2013/14 statement was led by the Corporate Performance Lead Officer, supported by the Monitoring Officer (Assistant Chief Executive), the Deputy Section 151 Officer (Assistant Director – Resources), and the Council's Audit Manager. The process that has been applied to maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework include:-

- **South West Audit Partnership** - Internal Audit (SWAP) is subject to regular inspection by the Council's external auditors who place reliance on the work carried out by Internal Audit. In addition, the s151 Officer carries out a review annually. A summary of the Internal Audits undertaken during 2013/14 where level 4 () and 5 () recommendations together with their mitigating actions and an update on progress of these is attached as Appendix B
- **Grant Thornton** (as external auditors)
- **Local Partnerships** (subsidiary of the LGA) - undertook the assurance review of the Joint Management and shared services business case)
- **Corporate Governance Committee** - reviews the effectiveness of Internal Audit, and the Annual Governance Statement. It receives reports from internal audit on a quarterly basis and agrees Internal and External Audit Plan
- **Standards Board**
- **Executive committee**
- The **monitoring officer** has a duty to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure its aims and principles are adequate. The Council reviews the constitution regularly – the latest review being undertaken in March 2013.

- The Council's **Financial Regulations** are kept under continuous review – the last review was approved in December 2012

The conclusion of the review is that, overall, the governance arrangements are robust and are working effectively. Some issues need attention and they are set out below.

Significant governance issues

During the year the Group Auditor (South West Audit Partnership) brought a number of control issues to the attention of the Council's Corporate Governance Committee. The opinion of the Internal Auditors was that the control environment was "*reasonable*" in 2013/2014.

High priority recommendations were made in the following areas from audits during 2013/2014 - these continue to be included on the council's action plan for 2014/2015:

- Strengthening of contractual arrangements
- Creditors – purchase ordering and new creditor authorisation processes
- Equality & Diversity – compliance with requirements and duties
- Fraud – improve awareness of Corporate Counter Fraud and Corruption policy and strategy
- Information governance – introduce a confidentiality Code of Practice

ACTION PLAN

Area	Action	Who	When
Strengthen contractual arrangements	Address legacy arrangements that are in place where contracts have expired	Paul Fitzgerald	Qtr 2
	Develop a process to keep Contracts register up to date to ensure it is an accurate reflection of contracts in place.	Paul Fitzgerald	Qtr 2
Creditors – purchase ordering and new creditor authorisation processes	Ensure vendor checks are undertaken to confirm change of details are correct.	Paul Fitzgerald	Qtr 2
	Retrospective PO still occurs – address the on-going issue from the previous year.	Paul Fitzgerald	Qtr 3
Equality and Diversity – compliance with requirements and duties	Monitor compliance and adherence to the TDBC Equalities framework.	Simon Lewis	Qtr 3
	Increase awareness of the TDBC framework and expectations (staff training and awareness).	Simon Lewis	Qtr 2
Fraud	Improve awareness of the approved Corporate Counter Fraud	Paul Fitzgerald	Qtr 3

	and Corruption Policy and Strategy		
Information governance	Introduce a confidentiality Code of Practice	Richard Sealy	Qtr 3
Priority Area Strategy	Improve clarity surrounding the ownership of reviewing the outcomes of PAS, bringing this information to a central point.	Simon Lewis	Qtr 2
	Introduce a defined reporting structure to formally inform the dashboards.	Simon Lewis	Qtr 2

The Council proposes over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters in order to further enhance our governance arrangements. Regular reports will be made to the Corporate Governance Committee on the progress being made. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:

Signed:

Cllr John Williams

Penny James

Standards Committee – 2 September 2014

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Committee Room No. 1, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday, 2 September 2014 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor Wren (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Gaines and A Wedderkopp
Michael Marshall and Bryn Wilson (Parish Council Representatives)
Terry Bowditch, Anne Elder and Lynn Rogers (Co-opted independent members of the Committee)
Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams (Independent Person)

Officers: Bruce Lang (Monitoring Officer), Paul Harding (Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager and Corporate Support Lead)

44. Apology

Councillor Tooze.

45. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 July 2014 were taken as read and were signed.

46. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Wren declared a personal interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared a personal interest as Vice-Chairman of the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Councillor A Wedderkopp 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.

47. Annual Governance Statement 2013/2014

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager, Paul Harding, reported that Taunton Deane Borough Council was responsible for making sure that:-

- its business was conducted in accordance with the law and proper Standards;
- public money was protected and properly accounted for;
- public money was used economically, efficiently and effectively; and

- there was a sound system of governance incorporating the system of internal control.

The Council also had a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions were exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council was responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and the management of risk.

An Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which was compiled in accordance with a Code of Corporate Governance recommended by CIPFA/SOLACE explained how the Council had complied with the code and also met the requirements of Government Regulations in relation to the publication of statement on internal control. The AGS was based on the following six core principles:-

- Core Principle 1: Focusing on the purpose of the Council and on outcomes for the community creating and implementing a vision for the local area.
- Core Principle 2: Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
- Core Principle 3: Promoting the values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
- Core Principle 4: Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and risk management arrangements.
- Core Principle 5: Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective in their roles.
- Core Principle 6: Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

The AGS also included a review of the effectiveness of Taunton Deane which had concluded that, overall, the governance arrangements were robust and working effectively.

Noted, however, that during the year the Group Auditor had brought a number of control issues to the attention of the Council's Corporate Governance Committee. The opinion of the Internal Auditors was that the control environment was "reasonable" in 2013/2014.

High priority recommendations had been made in the following areas from audits during 2013/2014 - these continued to be included on the Council's action plan for 2014/2015:-

- Strengthening of contractual arrangements;
- Creditors – purchase ordering and new creditor authorisation processes;
- Equality and Diversity – compliance with requirements and duties;
- Fraud – improvement of awareness of Corporate Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy; and
- Information governance – introduction of a confidentiality Code of Practice.

Further reported that the Council proposed over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters in order to further enhance Taunton Deane's governance arrangements.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made (*with responses in italics*):-

- What was the role of the Standards Committee with regard to the AGS? *With regard to this year's AGS, it was submitted principally for information although any particular comments from Members of the Committee would be welcomed.*

It was recognised that the AGS was a formal document which was not exactly 'user friendly' and that either an AGS summary or, alternatively, an Annual Report should be prepared for next year which could be easily understood by members of the public. It was thought that a clear statement about the current joint management arrangements and an acronym glossary should be provided too!

- Should the issues in the action plan be addressed by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee? *The Chairman undertook to discuss this with the relevant portfolio-holders. There was a need for future AGSs to review the action plan from the previous year to establish whether the required improvements had been undertaken or not.*
- It was hoped that the modified version of the AGS in future could be circulated to the Parish Councils too.
- One of the main points to emerge from the current AGS was the need to ensure there was a good programme of training in place particularly for newly appointed Councillors following the Local Government Elections in May 2015.
- It was all very well putting together such a programme but it was equally important for Members to attend the various sessions. Could pressure to attend be exerted by the Group Leaders? Or by way of an incentive scheme? Should not Councillors require to undergo refresher

training every year? *The more notice that could be given about potential training dates the better chance of Councillors being able to attend. A record of attendance was already kept for training events and these could be made available to Group Leaders if required. Even though Councillors could not be forced to attend training strong 'pointers' could be given by labelling particular sessions as 'Mandatory' or 'Recommended'.*

- The provision of Planning training for Parish Councils was likely to be important too.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed that:-

- (1) The ideas put forward to make the Annual Governance Statement more accessible be supported;
- (2) The Chairman be requested to approach the Group Leaders in an attempt to encourage their respective Members to take the opportunity to attend all relevant future training sessions; and
- (3) Details of the Induction Training provided to new Councillors following their election in May 2011 and the subsequent Programme of Training for Members over the four year term be submitted for information and discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.

48. Review of Standards Regime

Reference Minute No 41/2014 the Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang, reported that following the discussion that had taken place at the last meeting, a paper had been drafted for consideration by the Council's Constitutional Sub-Committee at its meeting on 4 September 2014.

This proposed that the Committee should have:-

- Advisory status – where any decisions that needed to be taken were referred to Full Council rather than dealt with by the Committee;
- Three parish representatives rather than the two at present who should have full voting rights;
- Full voting rights for the independent members of the Committee; and
- Sub-Committees chaired by any voting Member of the Committee.

In addition, it was going to be proposed that these proposed alterations should be introduced on a cost neutral basis.

If the proposals met with the approval of the Constitutional Sub-Committee, the Corporate Governance Committee and, ultimately, Full Council would also be recommended to approve this particular way forward.

Resolved that the report be noted.

49. Forward Plan

It was suggested that the Committee should consider the following items at future meetings:-

- Following the discontinuation of the Parish Liaison Officer post how Standards issues would be monitored at the Parish Council level; and
- How the new 'Transparency Regulations' (e.g. the recording of meetings) will affect the Council.

50. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Tuesday, 18 November 2014 at 2.30 p.m. in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 3.40 p.m.)