



Members of the Standards Advisory Committee:

Mr T Evans, Mr J Gamlin, Mr I Gunn,
Cllrs J Davis, Mrs S O de Renzy-Martin, Mrs P Webber,
P H Murphy, N Thwaites and D J Westcott
Independent Person: Louise Somerville

SAC/BL/kk

Mr Lang
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19 March 2018

**THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND THE MEETING
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Dear Sir/Madam

I hereby give you notice to attend the following meeting:

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 27 March 2018
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, West Somerset House, Williton

Please note that this meeting may be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded.

You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy.

Therefore unless you advise otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact Committee Services on 01643 703704.

Yours faithfully

BRUCE LANG
Proper Officer

RISK SCORING MATRIX

Report writers score risks in reports uses the scoring matrix below

Risk Scoring Matrix							
Likelihood (Probability)	5	Almost Certain	Low (5)	Medium (10)	High (15)	Very High (20)	Very High (25)
	4	Likely	Low (4)	Medium (8)	Medium (12)	High (16)	Very High (20)
	3	Possible	Low (3)	Low (6)	Medium (9)	Medium (12)	High (15)
	2	Unlikely	Low (2)	Low (4)	Low (6)	Medium (8)	Medium (10)
	1	Rare	Low (1)	Low (2)	Low (3)	Low (4)	Low (5)
			1	2	3	4	5
			Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Catastrophic
Impact (Consequences)							

Likelihood of risk occurring	Indicator	Description (chance of occurrence)
1. Very Unlikely	May occur in exceptional circumstances	< 10%
2. Slight	Is unlikely to, but could occur at some time	10 – 25%
3. Feasible	Fairly likely to occur at same time	25 – 50%
4. Likely	Likely to occur within the next 1-2 years, or occurs occasionally	50 – 75%
5. Very Likely	Regular occurrence (daily / weekly / monthly)	> 75%

- Mitigating actions for high ('High' or above) scoring risks are to be reflected in Service Plans, managed by the Group Manager and implemented by Service Lead Officers;
- Lower scoring risks will either be accepted with no mitigating actions or included in work plans with appropriate mitigating actions that are managed by Service Lead Officers.

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

AGENDA

**Tuesday, 27 March 2018 at 2 pm in the
Council Chamber, West Somerset House, Williton**

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes**

To note the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 13 June 2017 – **SEE ATTACHED.**

3. **Declarations of Interest**

To receive and record any declarations of interest in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

4. **Public Participation**

The Chairman to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public wishing to speak at this meeting there are a few points you might like to note.

A three-minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue. There will be no further opportunity for comment at a later stage. Your comments should be addressed to the Chairman and any ruling made by the Chair is not open to discussion. If a response is needed it will be given either orally at the meeting or a written reply made within five working days of the meeting.

5. **Local Government Ethical Standards : Stakeholder Consultation**

A copy of the a consultation paper prepared by the Committee on Standards in Public Life is attached for consideration together with the initial responses to the questions raised by the Monitoring Officer.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider excluding the press and public during consideration of Item 6 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during that item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows:-

Item 6 contains information that could release confidential information relating to the identities of individuals. It is therefore proposed that after consideration of all the

circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

6. Monitoring Officer's Update

To consider a verbal update from the Monitoring Officer on activities undertaken since the last meeting of the Committee.

7. Date of Future Meeting

12 June 2017 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, West Somerset House.

Note: other 'meetings' of the Standards Advisory Committee may be convened to act as consultee with the Monitoring Officer when undertaking an initial assessment in response to the receipt of any formal complaints relating to allegations of a breach of a Code of Conduct.

The Council's Corporate Priorities:

- Local Democracy:
Securing local democracy and accountability in West Somerset, based in West Somerset, elected by the people of West Somerset and responsible to the people of West Somerset.
- New Nuclear Development at Hinkley Point:
Maximising opportunities for West Somerset communities and businesses to benefit from the development whilst protecting local communities and the environment.

The Council's Core Values:

- Integrity
- Respect
- Fairness
- Trust

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 JUNE 2017

AT 4.30 PM

IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WILLITON

Present:

Mr T Evans Chairman

Councillor J Davis

Mr J Gamlin

Councillor P Webber

Councillor N Thwaites

Councillor S O de Renzy-Martin

Mr I Gunn

Councillor P H Murphy

Councillor D J Westcott

Officers in Attendance:

Monitoring Officer (B Lang)

Deputy Monitoring Officer and Meeting Administrator (R Bryant)

Also present : Mr Justin Robinson, County Executive Officer of the Somerset Association of Local Councils

SA1 Apology for Absence

Ms Louise Somerville (Independent Person)

SA2 Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and Members and officers introduced themselves.

SA3 Appointment of Chairman

RESOLVED that Mr T Evans be appointed Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

SA4 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Mr I Gunn be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

SA5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 March 2016

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 14 March 2016 - circulated with the Agenda.)

RECOMMENDED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Standards Advisory Committee held on 14 March 2016 be noted and would be confirmed as a correct record at the meeting of Council to be held on 19 July 2017.

SA6 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were declared.

SA7 **Public Participation**

No member of the public had requested to speak.

SA8 **Raising Standards : Parish Council Health Checks**

The Chairman introduced Mr Justin Robinson, the County Executive Officer of the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) who gave the Advisory Committee a presentation titled 'Raising Standards : Parish Council Health Checks'.

SALC was now in its 75th year and it currently represented 266 Town and Parish Councils and four Parish Meetings in Somerset.

The key services it provided were support and advice, troubleshooting, training and networking. Current areas for development included sharing good practice, specialist training and the promotion of high standards of governance.

The common problem areas encountered by SALC were:-

- Poor Council/community relations;
- Poor Member relations;
- Poor officer/Member relations;
- Lack of a plan;
- Lack of understanding of legal/ financial responsibilities and the Code of Conduct; and
- Lack of ambition.

SALC was currently planning to offer 'Council Health Checks' in an attempt to overcome the above problems areas.

The Health Checks were in the early stages of development but would draw on elements of existing work that had already proven to be valuable. SALC would act as a critical friend, highlighting both good practice and areas for improvement.

There would be five different options which could be chosen by a Town/Parish Council depending on the nature of the problem. These options were:-

- (1) **Council Policy/Compliance Check** – A desktop exercise or

Combined with 1-2-1 new Clerk training; Would ensure that policies were in place and up to date; Checks of agendas and minutes to ensure compliance with relevant legislation; Assessing the structure of the Council and compliance with the Transparency Code which might lead to referral to the Local Council Advisory Service.

- (2) **Staff Review/Salary Benchmarking Exercise** - Conducted by telephone or 1-2-1 interview; Reviewed hours/salaries/contracts against the work currently undertaken by the Council and its future aspirations; Would look at current member HR management, appraisals and assess training needs; This had proven helpful in diffusing officer/Member tensions in the past.
- (3) **Meeting Observation** - Particular focus on agenda management, public participation, Member engagement, Chairmanship, procedural and Code of Conduct compliance; This was a useful method to help build Council confidence and address compliance issues in a practical way.
- (4) **Personalised Training** - Training for the whole Council and staff or referral to SALC's existing training options; Single Council sessions which provided greater focus on what the Council did and an opportunity to address local concerns/problems or a training Question and Answer session where Members set the agenda. This had proven very effective at addressing poor internal relations; and a Mentoring Scheme was being developed.
- (5) **Council Business Planning** - An informal, facilitated session to take stock of where the Council was and where it wanted to be in 3-5 years' time; This might lead to a Council Work Plan or something larger involving the whole community; This had been tried and tested elsewhere and had been shown to raise aspirations and as a way of re-engaging with the local community.

Mr Robinson concluded his presentation by stating that although the development of the Health Checks were in their early days there had already been some positive outcomes and interest in the scheme from the National Association of Local Council's Improvement and Development Board.

There was a need to further trial aspects of the scheme and then assess how the Councils concerned were operating six months later on. He was hopeful that the approach outlined above would be one Standards Committees would recommend to Town and Parish Councils.

During the discussion of this item the following points were raised:-

- Who on the Town/Parish Council should obtain the legal/financial expertise required? *Ideally, the Clerk to the Council;*
- Was mediation ever used in an effort to resolve issues? *SALC had used this where deemed appropriate. There was a need though for a*

- level of co-operation between the parties;*
- Some people sought election to Parish Councils for the 'wrong' reasons. However, they rarely remained as a Councillor when they realised they could not always get their own way.
 - Was there a danger of a Clerk seeking to run a Parish Council? *A strong Chairman and a good HR Policy was the means of preventing this happening. SALC was able to help with the selection of new Clerks and assimilate them into the role;*
 - Was it up to the Parish Council to ask SALC for advice/assistance or did it require a referral from a Standards Committee to trigger action? *It was entirely up to a Parish Council to decide whether to seek assistance from SALC. The trial of the 'Health Check' scheme would be actively promoted when a new member of staff took up their position with SALC;*
 - Did SALC have any powers of sanction over Parish Councils? *No. If individual Councillors had allegedly breached the Parish Council's Code of Conduct resulting in a complaint being received, this would initially be dealt with by the District Council's Monitoring Officer. Recently, SALC had been 'called in' by the Monitoring Officer to resolve several complaints that had been made at one Parish Council rather than use the formal investigation route. This had proved to be successful.*
 - How did a Parish Council become 'Council of the Year'? *This accolade was given to Councils who were particularly innovative. Martock Town Council was a particularly good example of this due to the range of services it provided.*
 - A reference was made to the weakness in the Standards Regime relating to Councillors not declaring interests. *It was felt that the lack of sanctions available to Standards Committees ought to be restored. However, Councils were currently stuck with the regime that had been introduced by the Government in 2012.*

RECOMMENDED that Mr Robinson be thanked for his interesting presentation the contents of which would be noted.

SA9 Monitoring Officer's Update

The Monitoring Officer reported on activities undertaken since the last meeting of the Advisory Committee.

It had been quite some time since the Standards Advisory Committee had last met. Part of the reason for this was that very few formal complaints against Councillors had been received. He added he had been able to resolve these complaints without having to resort to the formal procedure.

In recent weeks, complaints had been received about Members of a particular Parish Council which would necessitate an informal meeting of the Advisory Committee to decide on the appropriate course of action to deal with them. This meeting would be arranged in due course.

The Monitoring Officer went on to draw the attention of Members to the letter that had been written by Sedgemoor District Council – with the

support of eleven other Councils across the South-West – to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government outlining discontent with the current Standards Regime. The views that had been expressed were strongly supported by the Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Monitoring Officer's update be noted.

SA10 **Date of Future Meeting**

- 10 October 2017 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, West Somerset House.

The meeting closed at 5.28 pm

DRAFT

Review of Local Government Ethical Standards: Stakeholder Consultation

The Committee on Standards in Public Life is undertaking a review of local government ethical standards.

Robust standards arrangements are needed to safeguard local democracy, maintain high standards of conduct, and to protect ethical practice in local government.

As part of this review, the Committee is holding a public stakeholder consultation. The consultation is open from 12:00 on Monday 29 January 2018 and closes at 17:00 on Friday 18 May 2018.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the review are to:

1. Examine the structures, processes and practices in local government in England for:
 - a. Maintaining codes of conduct for local councillors;
 - b. Investigating alleged breaches fairly and with due process;
 - c. Enforcing codes and imposing sanctions for misconduct;
 - d. Declaring interests and managing conflicts of interest; and
 - e. Whistleblowing.
2. Assess whether the existing structures, processes and practices are conducive to high standards of conduct in local government;
3. Make any recommendations for how they can be improved; and
4. Note any evidence of intimidation of councillors, and make recommendations for any measures that could be put in place to prevent and address such intimidation.

The review will consider all levels of local government in England, including town and parish councils, principal authorities, combined authorities (including Metro Mayors) and the Greater London Authority (including the Mayor of London).

Local government ethical standards are a devolved issue. The Committee's remit does not enable it to consider ethical standards issues in devolved nations in the UK except with the agreement of the relevant devolved administrations. However, we welcome any evidence relating to local government ethical standards in the devolved nations of the UK, particularly examples of best practice, for comparative purposes.

Submissions will be published online alongside our final report, with any contact information (for example, email addresses) removed.

The Committee will publish anonymised submissions (where the name of the respondent and any references to named individuals or local authorities are removed) where a respondent makes a reasonable request to do so.

Consultation questions

The Committee invites responses to the following consultation questions.

Please note that not all questions will be relevant to all respondents and that submissions do not need to respond to every question. Respondents may wish to give evidence about only one local authority, several local authorities, or local government in England as a whole. Please do let us know whether your evidence is specific to one particular authority or is a more general comment on local government in England.

Whilst we understand submissions may be grounded in personal experience, please note that the review is not an opportunity to have specific grievances considered.

- a. Are the existing structures, processes and practices in place working to ensure high standards of conduct by local councillors? If not, please say why.
- b. What, if any, are the most significant gaps in the current ethical standards regime for local government?

Codes of conduct

- c. Are local authority adopted codes of conduct for councillors clear and easily understood? Do the codes cover an appropriate range of behaviours? What examples of good practice, including induction processes, exist?
- d. A local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that its adopted code of conduct for councillors is consistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life and that it includes appropriate provision (as decided by the local authority) for registering and declaring councillors' interests. Are these requirements appropriate as they stand? If not, please say why.

Investigations and decisions on allegations

- e. Are allegations of councillor misconduct investigated and decided fairly and with due process?
 - i. What processes do local authorities have in place for investigating and deciding upon allegations? Do these processes meet requirements for due process? Should any additional safeguards be put in place to ensure due process?

- ii. Is the current requirement that the views of an Independent Person must be sought and taken into account before deciding on an allegation sufficient to ensure the objectivity and fairness of the decision process? Should this requirement be strengthened? If so, how?
- iii. Monitoring Officers are often involved in the process of investigating and deciding upon code breaches. Could Monitoring Officers be subject to conflicts of interest or undue pressure when doing so? How could Monitoring Officers be protected from this risk?

Sanctions

- f. Are existing sanctions for councillor misconduct sufficient?
 - i. What sanctions do local authorities use when councillors are found to have breached the code of conduct? Are these sanctions sufficient to deter breaches and, where relevant, to enforce compliance?
 - ii. Should local authorities be given the ability to use additional sanctions? If so, what should these be?

Declaring interests and conflicts of interest

- g. Are existing arrangements to declare councillors' interests and manage conflicts of interest satisfactory? If not please say why.
 - i. A local councillor is under a legal duty to register any pecuniary interests (or those of their spouse or partner), and cannot participate in discussion or votes that engage a disclosable pecuniary interest, nor take any further steps in relation to that matter, although local authorities can grant dispensations under certain circumstances. Are these statutory duties appropriate as they stand?
 - ii. What arrangements do local authorities have in place to declare councillors' interests, and manage conflicts of interest that go beyond the statutory requirements? Are these satisfactory? If not, please say why.

Whistleblowing

- h. What arrangements are in place for whistleblowing, by the public, councillors, and officials? Are these satisfactory?

Improving standards

- i. What steps could *local authorities* take to improve local government ethical standards?

- j. What steps could *central government* take to improve local government ethical standards?

Intimidation of local councillors

- k. What is the nature, scale, and extent of intimidation towards local councillors?
- i. What measures could be put in place to prevent and address this intimidation?

Who can respond?

Anyone with an interest may make a submission. The Committee welcomes submissions from members of the public.

However, the consultation is aimed particularly at the following stakeholders, both individually and corporately:

- Local authorities and standards committees;
- Local authority members (for example, Parish Councillors, District Councillors);
- Local authority officials (for example, Monitoring Officers);
- Think tanks with an interest or expertise in local government;
- Academics with interest or expertise in local government; and
- Representative bodies or groups related to local government.

How to make a submission

Submissions can be sent either in electronic format or in hard copy.

Submissions must:

- State clearly who the submission is from, i.e. whether from yourself or sent on behalf of an organisation;
- Include a brief introduction about yourself/your organisation and your reason for submitting evidence;
- Be in doc, docx, rtf, txt, ooxml or odt format, not PDF;
- Be concise – we recommend no more than 2,000 words in length; and
- Contain a contact email address if you are submitting by email.

Submissions should:

- Have numbered paragraphs; and
- Comprise a single document. If there are any annexes or appendices, these should be included in the same document.

It would be helpful if your submission included any factual information you have to offer from which the Committee might be able to draw conclusions, and any recommendations for action which you would like the Committee to consider.

The Committee may choose not to accept a submission as evidence, or not to publish a submission even if it is accepted as evidence. This may occur where a submission is very long or contains material which is inappropriate.

Submissions sent to the Committee after the deadline of 17:00 on Friday 18 May 2018 may not be considered.

Submissions can be sent:

1. Via email to: public@public-standards.gov.uk
2. Via post to:
Review of Local Government Ethical Standards
Committee on Standards in Public Life
GC:07
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

If you have any questions, please contact the Committee's Secretariat by email (public@public-standards.gov.uk) or phone (0207 271 2948).

West Somerset Council

Standards Advisory Committee – 27 March 2018

Review of Local Government Ethical Standards

Initial thoughts on Consultation Questions

- a. *Are the existing structures, processes and practices in place working to ensure high standards of conduct by local councillors? If not, please say why.*

Not in all cases, especially the potentially serious cases or instances whereby a particular councillor keeps breaching the code as the sanctions have no teeth to act as a deterrent.

- b. *What, if any, are the most significant gaps in the current ethical standards regime for local government?*

Sanctions that would act as a deterrent. Very limited powers in respect of town and parish councils where the majority of issues arise. At present, there is no independent body that people can go to if they are unhappy with the treatment/service provided by a town/parish council (like the local government ombudsman for example) and this means a range of issues come to the Monitoring Officer which are either outside their remit completely and if they do relate to code of conduct issues, as mentioned above, there are no effective sanctions to adequately address the more serious issues.

- c. *Are local authority adopted codes of conduct for councillors clear and easily understood? Do the codes cover an appropriate range of behaviours? What examples of good practice, including induction processes, exist?*

Broadly yes at principal council level but not consistently across town and parish councils – it is very difficult to reach all such councillors – we have offered free training and have still only reached about a third of parish/town councillors in our area.

- d. *A local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that its adopted code of conduct for councillors is consistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life and that it includes appropriate provision (as decided by the local authority) for registering and declaring councillors' interests. Are these requirements appropriate as they stand? If not, please say why.*

The main issue is that since 2011 the wording does not have to be consistent in relation to declarations of interests and it would be much clearer if all codes of conduct had precisely the same wording. Using the three classifications of disclosable pecuniary, prejudicial and personal interests works well at our principal council level but this is not mirrored by all town and parish councils which has caused confusion and inconsistency.

e. *Are allegations of councillor misconduct investigated and decided fairly and with due process?*

(i) *What processes do local authorities have in place for investigating and deciding upon allegations? Do these processes meet requirements for due process? Should any additional safeguards be put in place to ensure due process?*

We do have good processes in place, but rarely use them due to the expense and time taken knowing that there is no significant sanction available at the end of the process to address serious issues; councils cannot afford to enter into potentially long and costly processes unless it is clearly in the public interest.

(ii) *Is the current requirement that the views of an Independent Person must be sought and taken into account before deciding on an allegation sufficient to ensure the objectivity and fairness of the decision process? Should this requirement be strengthened? If so, how?*

The views of the Independent Person do provide a useful check and balance and a support to the Monitoring Officer. Members of the public do not always understand where/why they fit in (in relation to the council, Monitoring Officers, Standards Committees etc.).

(iii) *Monitoring Officers are often involved in the process of investigating and deciding upon code breaches. Could Monitoring Officers be subject to conflicts of interest or undue pressure when doing so? How could Monitoring Officers be protected from this risk?*

I would always use someone else to undertake any formal investigation but this will take extra resource internally (which we often do not have) so it can cost additional funding that is difficult to budget for – a further deterrent to going down the formal investigation route – so we always look to deal with matters by the way of an informal resolution.

f. *Are existing sanctions for councillor misconduct sufficient?*

(i) *What sanctions do local authorities use when councillors are found to have breached the code of conduct? Are these sanctions sufficient to deter breaches and, where relevant, to enforce compliance?*

For less serious matters where some training or an apology is a proportionate mitigation, then the current sanctions are adequate – but for cases that require a formal investigation, then, in my opinion, they do not offer a sufficient deterrent.

(ii) *Should local authorities be given the ability to use additional sanctions? If so, what should these be?*

For more serious cases, sanctions of up to and including suspension for six months would have the potential to have a real impact and make people think more about their behaviours. Even the making of certain breaches a criminal offence does not seem to have worked as such matters have to be referred to the Police who, from my experience, are not geared up to the local

government world and do not (understandably) see such matters as a high priority to them and matters can take a long time and often end being handed back to the council to deal with in any case.

- g. *Are existing arrangements to declare councillors' interests and manage conflicts of interest satisfactory? If not, please say why.*

(i) A local councillor is under a legal duty to register any pecuniary interests (or those of their spouse or partner), and cannot participate in discussion or votes that engage a disclosable pecuniary interest, not take any further steps in relation to that matter, although local authorities can grant dispensations under certain circumstances. Are these statutory duties appropriate as they stand?

Broadly the arrangements work quite well. It is quite difficult from a Monitoring Officer perspective to get all register of interest forms completed by all parish and town councillors across our areas (can be hundreds of councillors) let alone keep them up to date.

(ii) What arrangements do local authorities have in place to declare councillors' interests, and manage conflicts of interest that go beyond the statutory requirements? Are these satisfactory? If no, please say why.

A declarations of interest item is on the agenda near the beginning of all formal decision making meetings; induction training is given on the code of conduct and as long as the member concerned brings to the Monitoring Officer's attention any potential conflict of interest in good time, then discussions can usually be held to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are satisfactorily managed.

- h. *What arrangements are in place for whistleblowing by the public, councillors, and officials? Are these satisfactory?*

We have a Whistleblowing Policy which has proved to be satisfactory to date.

- i. *What steps could local authorities take to improve local government ethical standards?*

Provide more training especially to parish and town councillors.

- j. *What steps could central government take to improve local government ethical standards?*

Either give councils greater sanctions or remove the requirement to formally deal with complaints to give more freedom to focus or not locally. At present there is a statutory requirement to have to deal with complaints with nothing significant to back it up.

- k. *What is the nature, scale and extent of intimidation towards local councillors?*

There are some rare examples of tit for tat and/or persistent complaints about a particular parish/town council who rather than try to sort out their own issues, try to use the local Standard process to 'take sides' and sort things out for them. On occasion a particular councillor will be the subject of several complaints with other councillors ganging up on them.

I also have seen a lot of pressure put on councillors who sit on the planning committee. It does not feel appropriate that they have to sit and determine, say, a contentious large housing development, sat in front of sometimes hundreds of angry objectors who make it clear that they will not vote for them again etc. unless they object, even if there are no valid planning reasons for doing so.

(i) What measures could be put in place to prevent and address this intimidation?

Adequate sanctions especially for more serious examples of bullying (councillor to councillor may help).

Controversially, perhaps do away with a formal and ineffective complaints system and then at least it cannot be abused by people trying to bully or put pressure on councillors.

Also, perhaps controversially, whilst part of the planning committee is held in public when information from officers and representations are being made, to allow the committee to debate and determine the application in private to avoid the in the moment intimidation and almost 'circus of booing and clapping' that can happen – a public record of the decisions made can still be recorded and made available subsequently.

Allow independent persons to sit as full voting members of a Standards Committee to demonstrate that this process is not political as it used to be able to be. Since 2011, the role and status of Standards Committees has, from my experience, declined and I do not believe that is a good thing for local government ethics.