

Standards Advisory Committee – 7 July 2015

Present: Councillors Davies, Gaines, Miss Smith and Wren
Michael Marshall and Bryn Wilson (Parish Council Representatives)
Anne Elder and Lynn Rogers (Co-opted independent members of the
Advisory Committee)

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

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved that Mrs Anne Elder be appointed Chairman of the Standards
Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. Apologies

Councillor Mrs Adkins, Mr Terry Bowditch (Co-opted independent member)
and Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams (Independent Person).

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the former Standards Committee held on 18
November 2014 were taken as read and were signed.

4. Declaration of Interests

Mrs 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. Councillor Wren declared a personal
interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council.

5. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2014/2015

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the draft Annual
Governance Statement (AGS).

Taunton Deane Borough Council 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.

The Council had approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance and the report explained how the Council had complied with the Code and also met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations in relation to the requirement to prepare an AGS which must accompany the Statement of Accounts.

The latest review of Taunton Deane's effectiveness had been carried out by the Corporate Governance Officers Group who had concluded the governance arrangements remained adequate and fit for purpose. This was further endorsed by the Group Auditor's annual opinion report 2014/2015, which offered 'reasonable assurance' in respect of the areas reviewed during the year.

The AGS described how the Council complied with each of the following six core principles of the Code of Corporate Governance:-

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

The AGS also identified governance issues and the steps to be taken during 2015/2016 to address these matters.

Resolved that the report be noted.

6. Outcome of complaints made against Councillors since the last meeting

Mr Lang reported that two complaints had been received in connection with planning matters in the Bishops Hull and Wiveliscombe and West Deane Wards.

The complaints had been dealt with under the agreed procedure whereby information had been collected from the subject Members in response to the complaints. The views of the Independent Person had been sought and the conclusion reached that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct which warranted further investigation in respect of either complaint.

The complainants had been advised of these outcomes.

Resolved that the report be noted.

7. Update - Training for Councillors following the Local Government Elections

Reference Minute No. 56/2014, the Democratic Services Manager, Richard Bryant, submitted for information details of the New Councillor Induction Programme which had been delivered to Taunton Deane's newly elected Members during May/June 2015.

Much of this induction training had been well received and those Councillors who had attended the event organised by South West Council titled 'Essential Skills for the 21st Century Councillor' had found this very useful. As a result, something similar would be arranged at a future date to give some of the other Councillors the opportunity to attend.

As well as the initial induction, a list of key training topics had been compiled and sessions would be provided at periodic intervals during the remainder of the year.

Members noted that Ethical Governance Training was planned for the Parish Councils in Taunton Deane, with such training scheduled to take place during September during both the daytime and evenings.

It was acknowledged that providing training in this way to the Parishes differed markedly from that provided following the 2011 Local Elections where the former Parish Liaison Officer (post now deleted) had visited every Parish Council and had delivered 'face to face' training to Councillors and the Clerks alike.

Despite the likely choice of dates and timings for the training now being planned there would inevitably be a number of Parish Council who would choose not to attend and a number of known examples were provided.

The Committee saw this as very unsatisfactory, as these Parishes – particularly those with new Members – might not understand the implications of adhering to their Codes of Conduct which would inevitably leave them open to challenge or complaint.

It was intended to compile a list of the Parishes who were represented at the forthcoming training sessions so follow up contact could be made with those who did not attend.

Noted that some Parishes might have already received training via the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Councillor Wren undertook to make some enquiries of the Somerset Branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks to establish the level of support this organisation provided in relation to matters of ethical governance.

It was agreed that this matter should be discussed again at the next meeting of the Advisory Committee.

8. Recruitment of a new Parish Representative for the Standards Advisory Committee

Mr Bryant reported that following the establishment of the Standards Advisory Committee, the number of Parish representatives needed to be increased to three, as agreed by Full Council at its meeting in September 2014.

An invitation would be sent to all the Clerks to Parish Councils in Taunton Deane to nominate Councillors who would be interested in joining the Advisory Committee.

Resolved that the report be noted.

9. The current Standards Regime

The Chairman made reference to the current Standards Regime which had been introduced by the former Government following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011.

It was clear to her that there was still significant dissatisfaction with the current arrangements and suggested that the newly elected Member of Parliament for Taunton, Ms Rebecca Pow-, be invited to a future meeting of the Advisory Committee to discuss the situation and to propose possible improvements which could be made to make the current regime more meaningful.

This was agreed.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Committee would be held on Tuesday, 8 September 2015 at 2.30 p.m. in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 3.42 p.m.)