

Standards Committee – 18 November 2014

Present: Councillor Wren (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Gaines, Tooze 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)

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

51. Apology

Mrs Louise Somerville-Williams (Independent Person).

52. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 September 2014 were taken as read and were signed.

53. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Wren declared a personal interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor Mrs Allgrove declared a personal interest as President 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. Councillor Tooze declared personal interests as Vice-Chairman of the North Taunton Partnership and as an employee of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Department.

54. Review of Standards Regime

Reference Minute No 48/2014 the Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang, reported that both the Constitutional Sub-Committee and the Corporate Governance Committee had now had the opportunity of reviewing Taunton Deane's Standards Regime.

As a result, a report had been submitted to Full Council on 30 September 2015 recommending that the Council's Constitution be amended in respect of the Standards Committee as follows:-

- (i) To increase the number of Parish Council representatives on the

Committee from two to three;

- (ii) The selection process for such membership to be determined and implemented by the Monitoring Officer;
- (iii) The Independent and Parish Members of the Committee be granted full voting rights alongside the five elected Members appointed by the Council to serve on the Committee; and
- (iv) The current requirement for the Committee and all sub-committees to be Chaired by an elected Member be amended so that the Committee and any such sub-committees could be Chaired by any Committee Member.

It had been acknowledged by Members that in the event of these recommendations being adopted, the Standards Committee would need to become an Advisory Committee in order to comply with the requirements of Local Government legislation and thereby need to make recommendations to Full Council instead of taking decisions itself.

Full Council was also cognisant of the financial pressures currently being experienced by the Council and therefore agreed that the reimbursement arrangements for members of the proposed Advisory Committee should remain as they were now to ensure that the proposal was cost neutral.

Further reported that the proposals made by the Constitutional Sub-Committee and endorsed by the Corporate Governance Committee had been approved, which would come into effect after the May 2015 Local Government Elections.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(Councillor Gaines declared that he had a conflict of interest in the following item and left the room during its consideration.)

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

Mr Lang reported that two complaints had recently been received from the same individual in connection with a planning matter in the Wiveliscombe and West Deane Ward.

The complaints had been made against the Chairman of the local Parish Council and one of the Ward Councillors.

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, Louise Somerville-Williams, had been sought and the conclusion reached that there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct which warranted further investigation.

The complainant had been advised of this outcome.

Resolved that the report be noted.

56. Training for Councillors following the Local Government Elections in May 2015

Reference Minute No. 47/2014, the Democratic Services Manager, Richard Bryant, submitted for consideration details of the Training Programme devised before the last Local Government Elections in 2011.

It was intended to use this document as a template towards the drafting of the new Councillor Training Programme following the elections next May.

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

- Joint training with West Somerset Council would be undertaken where appropriate to save costs;
- The training provided since 2011 has generally been very good;
- Topics to be included on the 2015 Training Programme should include:-
 - The Taunton Unparished Area Fund;
 - Supporting Taunton Deane's Mayoralty;
 - A briefing on the relationship with West Somerset Council;
 - Finance and Budgetting;
 - Dealing with conflict / difficult conversations
 - Whistleblowing;
 - Risk Management (but not in Year 4);
 - Scrutiny and the use of Task and Finish Groups; and
 - Working with the Town/Parish Councils.
- A 'Buddying System' would be introduced to assist the new Councillors with case work and to assist with all types of query which were bound to arise;
- It was considered essential for appropriate training to be provided to the Parish Councils either directly or via the Somerset Association of Local Councils;
- Another form of training was mentoring through the political groups; and
- It was intended to make full use of the 'Members' Champions' especially through the initial Induction process.

Mr Bryant thanked Members for their contributions which would be considered when the new Training Programme was being prepared.

57. Proposed Social Media Policy and Recording of Meetings Protocol

Mr Lang reported that the Council's Corporate Scrutiny Committee had considered a report on the introduction of a Social Media Policy and a protocol

for the recording of some Council meetings. He explained that the policy and protocol would be submitted to the next Full Council meeting next month for approval.

The Councillors at the Scrutiny meeting had supported these first proposed steps towards making all public meetings fully accessible.

Mr Lang went on to explain that, except for 'confidential items', there was nothing to stop a member of public recording the proceedings at Taunton Deane's Committee meetings. This currently put the Council at a slight disadvantage as it did not have access to 'who said what'.

Subject to Full Council approval, the purchase of a voice recorder which could be linked into the microphone system would enable the Council to record and then keep, for a reasonable period of time, the discussions that took place at its meetings.

Resolved that the report be noted.

58. Monitoring of Standards Issues at Parish Level following the discontinuation of the Parish Liaison Officer post

Mr Lang reported that since the discontinuation of the Parish Liaison Officer post in March 2014 there had been very few enquiries from Parish Councils.

It was known that the former post holder, David Greig, had forewarned the parishes about the loss of the post and had encouraged them to make use of the advice available from the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).

Although the Council had attempted to assist with the limited number of enquiries that had been received, the parishes had been 'sign-posted' to SALC if it was thought appropriate to do so.

During the discussion of this item it was reported that the number of parishes in Taunton Deane affiliated to SALC had increased in recent months which did seem to explain the limited number of contacts made to officers at The Deane House.

Resolved that the report be noted.

59. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Tuesday, 20 January 2015 at 2.30 p.m. in the John Meikle Room at The Deane House.

(The meeting ended at 3.56 p.m.)