

SWT Standards Committee - 23 February 2023

Present: Councillor Mark Lithgow (Chair)
Councillors Hugh Davies, Martin Peters, Steven Pugsley and Ray Tully

Officers: Amy Tregellas

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

13. **Appointment of Vice-chair**

The Committee resolved to elect Councillor Martin Peters as the Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for this remaining meeting of the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

(proposed by Cllr Mark Lithgow, seconded by Cllr Hugh Davies)

14. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Terry Venner.

Councillors Lee Baker, Richard Lees and Hazel Prior-Sankey were absent.

15. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Standards Committee**

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes from the Standards Committee meeting held on 26 July 2022.

(proposed by Cllr Hugh Davies, seconded by Cllr Martin Peters)

16. **Declarations of interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington TC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee, Taunton Shadow Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Council		
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

No other declarations of interest were received.

17. **Public participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item of business on the agenda.

18. **Standards Committee Action/Recommendation tracker**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the item relating to the Somerset Wide Members Code of Conduct and procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations, which were both considered by the Committee at its meeting in July 2022. The officer confirmed that both items had been approved by Full Council on 6 September 2022.

19. **Committee on Standards in Public Life Leading in practice report**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- This is the latest report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life
- Useful report for Members to see as it focuses on ethical standards
- The agenda pack includes the report (pages 17-100) and an open letter from Lord Evans to Public Sector Leaders (pages 101-103)
- Lord Evan's letter asked leaders to consider a number of questions to ensure that ethical values and standards are embedded in organisations
- Whilst Somerset West and Taunton Council's days are numbered what is suggested is to write to the Chief Executive Officer, Leader and Chair of Standards of Somerset County Council/Somerset Council to ask them to consider the report and questions set out in Lord Evans letter.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- That the letter to the Chief Executive Officer, Leader and Chair of Standards Committee asks them to bring both the report and Lord Evans letter to the attention of all Members.
- Whether the Committee was agreeing to write to Somerset County Council or Somerset Council. The Officer explained that the letter would be written to the current council but it would ask them to consider it as the new Unitary Council.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that it:

1. Notes the Leading in Practice Report: A review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life
2. Writes to Duncan Sharkey (SCC) Chief Executive Officer, Cllr Bill Revans Leader of SCC and the Chair of the Standards Committee to ask them to consider this report to ensure that ethical values are embedded into the culture and ways of working for Somerset Unitary Council.

(proposed Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded Cllr Ray Tully)

20. **Ethical awareness training update**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The Report started on Page 105 of the agenda pack.
- The Committee is responsible for promoting high standards of conduct for District, Town and Parish Councillors
- Two editions of the ethical newsletter have been sent to all SWT Councillors and the third edition will be published in the week commencing 27 February 2023
- Ethical newsletters contain information including committee meeting etiquette, promotion of the Somerset wide Members Code of Conduct, Members personal safety, reminders for the registers of interests and gifts and hospitality, and feedback from members of the public and case study examples.
- Ethical training awareness session for District Councillors took place on 11 January 2023
- Two training sessions for Town and Parish Councils had taken place and a third is scheduled for 8 March 2023.

During the debate, discussion took place around:

- Poor levels of attendance for the District Councillor ethical awareness training and it likely being due to the Council coming to an end shortly.
- Why the ethical awareness training was not mandatory. The Officer confirmed that whilst officers highlight the importance of the training, we are unable to force Councillors to attend training sessions.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to note the ethical awareness training update.

(proposed by Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded by Cllr Martin Peters)

21. **Update on Standards arrangements for the new Unitary Council**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer presented the report:

- The report starts on page 109 of the agenda pack and provides updates on the Standards arrangements for the Unitary Council
- Having an ethical framework will be a key part of the new Council's governance arrangements

- The Unitary Council's Constitution was approved by Somerset County Council on 25 February 2023, and includes the Terms of Reference for the Standards Committee and Hearing Panels
- The Member Code of Conduct and process for dealing with Standards Allegations is already in place
- Going through the recruitment and selection process for three Independent Persons
- Updating the information held for Town and Parish Council Clerks so that can be loaded onto Modern.gov and be publicly available on the website from 1 April 2023
- The Governance workstream are considering how best to deal with Register of Interest forms and Registers of Gifts and Hospitality

No discussion took place on this item.

(proposed Cllr Steven Pugsley, seconded Cllr Hugh Davies)

22. **Standards Committee Chair's Annual Report 2022/23 - For Information Only**

There were no questions, comments or discussion on the Chair's Annual Report and it was for information only.

23. **Access to information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The Chair read out the wording as set out on the agenda papers.

The Committee decided that it would vote to move into confidential session, if and when the need arose. Until that point, the Monitoring Officer's update would be given in the public domain.

24. **Monitoring Officer Update**

Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager and Monitoring Officer gave the update report:

- Officer gifts and hospitality register. To date, 4 entries for 2022/23. They included picking up an award, attending a networking event, receiving a box of chocolates and receiving an Amazon voucher for completing a conference. All signed off.
- Members gifts and hospitality. To date, 17 entries for 2022/23. All relate to Chair or Vice Chair of SWT Council or Mayor of Taunton. Hospitality included attending concerts, the theatre and dinners in their civic role.
- Code of conduct complaints register. All complaints related to Town and Parish councils. The Officer gave the Committee a brief overview of each complaint. There are currently 12 complaints listed on the register, with 7 open and 5 closed.
- Of the 7 open complaints – in two cases the Monitoring Officer (MO) is waiting from information from the complainant, one case is going to a Standards Sub-

Committee, one case is due to be closed shortly following discussion with the Independent Person, one case the MO is seeking legal advice as the subject matter is a grey area and two cases are at the initial review/legal jurisdiction test stage and will be discussed with the Independent Person shortly.

- Any complaints still open as at 1 April 2023 will go across to the new Somerset Council.

(The Meeting ended at 6.50 pm)