

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Membership and Meetings

The Standards Committee will be composed of:

- 9 elected Councillors, except any councillor who is a member of the Executive;
- 2 Independent co-opted persons who are not Councillors or officers of the Council (independent members);
- 2 co-opted members of any town/parish councils in the Council's area (town/parish members).

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee shall be Councillors. Where a lead Councillor is appointed as a member of the Committee, they shall not be elected Chair or Vice-Chair.

The co-opted independent members and town/parish members will not be entitled to vote at meetings of the Standards Committee or any of its Sub-Committees.

The Quorum for the Standards Committee shall be 3 voting members of the Committee.

The Committee will normally meet on a quarterly basis.

Scope

The Council shall establish a Standards Committee to carry out its functions relating to ethical matters under the Localism Act 2011. The Standards Committee will have overall responsibility for ensuring probity, propriety and ethics in the organisation.

Terms of Reference

The Standards Committee will have the following roles and functions:

1. Monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Council's Constitution and making recommendations to Full Council for any amendments that fall outside of the scope of the delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer. Any review of the Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules will be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.
2. Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted members.
3. Assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

4. Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
5. Monitoring the operation of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
6. Advising, training or arranging to train district, town and parish Councillors and any co-opted members on matters relating to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and wider propriety issues, including issuing guidance where appropriate.
7. Granting dispensations to Councillors and any co-opted members from requirements relating to interests set out in the Councillors' Code of Conduct or delegating such power to a sub-committee, who will be authorised to determine such dispensations based on principles agreed by the Committee.
8. Advise on the management of statutory and other registers of interest and gifts/hospitality received.
9. Advise the Council on possible changes to the Constitution in relation to the key documents and protocols dealing with members' conduct and ethical standards.
10. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or by way of a hearing, those allegations of misconduct by district, town or parish councillors within Somerset West and Taunton or co-opted members where a formal investigation has found evidence of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and where a local resolution has not been agreed.
11. Determining, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member found to have failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.
12. Making recommendations, by delegating such power to a sub-committee or following a hearing, to any town or parish council in the Council's area on action to be taken against any Councillor or co-opted member of that town or parish council found to have failed to comply with that Council's Code of Conduct.
13. Implementing, monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Code of Conduct for staff.
14. Considering any other matter referred by the Monitoring Officer.

Hearings Sub-Committee

The Hearings Sub-Committee shall conduct local hearings on misconduct allegations against Councillors and co-opted members of the district council or town or parish councils within Somerset West and Taunton. These hearings shall be conducted in accordance with the Arrangements for Dealing with Standards Allegations.

The Hearings Sub-Committee shall be politically balanced and comprise of 3 voting members of the Standards Committee. The composition of the Sub-Committee shall be determined by the Monitoring Officer after consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee. A Chair shall be elected from among the voting members.

The Independent Person must be present when misconduct complaints against councillors and co-opted members are being considered by the Hearings Sub-Committee.

At least one co-opted town/parish member of the Committee and one independent member, together with the Independent Person, must be present when misconduct complaints against members or co-opted members of Town/Parish councils are being considered by the Hearings Sub-Committee.

Following on from a Hearing, the Hearings Sub-Committee may make a decision including the use of the following actions/penalties:

- Reporting its findings to Council (or to the Town/Parish Council) for information;
- Recommending to the Councillor's Group Leader that a Councillor be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council;
- Recommending to the Leader of the Council that a Councillor be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities should the complaint refer to a Portfolio holder;
- Instructing the Monitoring Officer to (or recommend that the Town/Parish Council) arrange training for a Councillor;
- Removing (or recommend to the Town/Parish Council that a Councillor be removed) a Councillor from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority (or by the Town/Parish Council);
- Withdrawing (or recommend to the Town/Parish Council that it withdraws) facilities provided to a Councillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and Internet access;
- Restricting contact to named officers or requiring contact be through named officers;
- Excluding (or recommend that the Town/Parish Council exclude) a Councillor from the Council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings;
- Publish its findings in respect of the Councillor's conduct

- Issue a formal letter of advice as to future conduct to the Councillor;
- Request that the Councillor tender an apology to such persons as were aggrieved by his or her actions; or,
- Where the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person are not satisfied that the Councillor has tendered the apology described above or completed such training as arranged above, then the Monitoring Officer shall report the matter to the Chair of the Standards Committee who shall cause a meeting of the Hearings Sub-Committee to take place with the purpose of resolving to apply an alternative sanction.

Annual Report

The Standards Committee must report annually to the Full Council on its work undertaken during the year, its future work programme and amended working methods if appropriate.