

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Standards Committee – 23 February 2023**

### **Update on Standards arrangements for Somerset Unitary Council**

**This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts**

**Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager & Monitoring Officer**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give Members an update on the Standards arrangements that are being put into place for Somerset Council prior to vesting day on 1 April 2023.

#### **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the update on Standards arrangements for Somerset Council.

#### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 Having a robust Standards regime is a key part of the Council's ethical governance arrangements. This will form a key part of the new Unitary Council's governance arrangements.

#### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 On 1 April 2023, Somerset Council will go live.
- 4.2 In the run up to vesting day, a significant amount of work has been undertaken (particularly by the Governance workstream) to ensure that robust arrangements are in place relating to the Standards regime. This includes arrangements for the 110 Unitary Councillors but also all Town and Parish Councillors currently sitting under the four district council areas.
- 4.3 In preparation for vesting day:
- The Somerset wide Code of Conduct was adopted by Somerset County Council (SCC), the 4 district councils and a significant number of town and parish councils.
  - The process for dealing with standards allegations has also been approved
  - The Constitution for the new council has been drafted and is currently going through the democratic process. This includes the Standards Committee Terms of Reference and Standards Hearing Panel Arrangements. This was considered by the SCC Standards Committee on 2 February 2023 and Constitution and Governance Committee on 14 February 2023. It will go before Full Council on 1 March 2023.
  - The Localism Act requires that every authority has at least one Independent Person

to be consulted during the standards allegations procedure process. Somerset Council is looking to appoint three Independent Persons. The role was advertised on the website on 5 January 2023 and went in the local press on 12 January 2023. Officers are now going through the recruitment process to ensure that the Independent Persons are in post ready for vesting day.

- The Somerset Council website will have a page containing information relating to complaints about councillors and information has been drafted to be included on that page.
- Work is now being carried out to be ready for vesting day in respect of town and parish councils. The details of all clerks is being checked so that this information can be loaded onto modern.gov and available on the website from 1 April 2023.
- Work is also being carried out to have one master copy of town and parish councillor register of interests. Again, register of interest forms will be loaded to modern.gov and be publicly available on the website from 1 April 2023.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 Having a robust ethical governance framework is a fundamental part of delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy.

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 None arising from this report

## **7 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications**

- 7.1 There are no Unitary Council Financial Implications or S24 Direction Implications.

## **8 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 None arising from this report

## **9 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

- 9.1 None arising from this report

## **10 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 10.1 None arising from this report

## **11 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 11.1 None arising from this report

## **12 Social Value Implications**

- 12.1 None arising from this report

## **13 Partnership Implications**

- 13.1 None arising from this report

## **14 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

14.1 None arising from this report

## **15 Asset Management Implications**

15.1 None arising from this report

## **16 Data Protection Implications**

16.1 None arising from this report

## **17 Consultation Implications**

17.1 None arising from this report

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Standards Committee – Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc**

### **Contact Officers**

Name	Amy Tregellas
Direct Dial	0300 304 8000
Email	<a href="mailto:a.tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk">a.tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk</a>