

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held in **Council Chamber B, Council Offices on Tuesday 11 July 2017.**

(2.00 pm - 3.00 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Anna Groskop (Chairman)

District Councillors: Nigel Gage and Crispin Raikes

Parish Representatives: Godfrey Townrow

Independent Persons: Christopher Borland and Peter Forrester (to 2.50pm)

Officers

Ian Clarke	Director (Support Services)
Angela Cox	Democratic Services Specialist
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

13. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The Director (Support Services) in his role as Monitoring Officer referred to the second paragraph of minute 4, and noted copies of the unanswered correspondence referred to had never been received.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Bloomfield, Paul Maxwell and Angie Singleton.

15. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declaration of interest.

16. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

17. Presentation From The Somerset Association of Local Councils (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Justin Robinson, Chief Executive of the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) to the meeting.

Mr Robinson provided an informative presentation 'Raising Standards: Council Health Checks' which included information about:

- The work of SALC
- Common problem areas
- Developing Council Health Checks
- More detail about the five options available for a health check:
 - Council policy/compliance check
 - Staff review/salary benchmarking exercise
 - Meeting observation
 - Personalised training
 - Council business planning

In response to questions raised during discussion, Mr Robinson clarified that:

- SALC could make suggestions and recommendations to town and parish councils, and if relating to HR issues such matters were usually discussed by the said councils in closed session.
- There were very few self-employed clerks with the majority of town and parish councils now registered as an employer with HMRC.
- There were cases where some clerks are working more than their contracted hours, and this could lead to issues regarding the minimum wage. Councils had been made aware of the issue but in some cases there was reluctance to accept the advice provided.
- Training for parishes about the planning process needed to come from the District Councils, but SALC could provide courses on how to effectively respond to planning applications.
- SALC had templates available to member parishes for creating key documents such as Council Plans and risk assessments etc.

The Director (Support Services) noted he would like to try and work together with SALC in the future to get to the root of problems in some parishes, and commented it would be useful to have an indication of the costs involved.

Mr Robinson explained there was currently no cost structure as the process was in a development stage, however they did charge expenses. Any charges would be structured in such a way so as to be affordable.

At the end of discussion members thanked Mr Robinson for his interesting presentation.

RESOLVED: It was resolved that:

1. The presentation be noted.
2. The way in which the Monitoring Officer could use this service to support town and parish councils in the SSDC administrative area was considered.

18. Complaints Received by the Monitoring Officer - Update (Agenda Item 6)

The Director (Support Services) in his role as Monitoring Officer presented the report which provided an update on complaints received about councillors since the last meeting of the Standards Committee. He noted the sanctions available were limited and reminded members of the current complaints procedure.

It was noted most complaints received about councillors were not Code of Conduct matters, but were more to do with disagreements about decisions made or meeting procedures. He acknowledged that in the absence of a Local Government Ombudsman equivalent for town and parish councils, many complainants may have felt they had no option but to complain to SSDC.

There was no discussion and members were content to note the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

19. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 7)

The Director (Support Services) explained that he had put this item on the agenda as there had been speculation there might be changes to the Code of Conduct in the future, but no other information had since come forward.

During a very brief discussion there was reference to adverse publicity and it was felt all councillors, both SSDC and town and parish councils in the SSDC administrative area, should be reminded of the consequences regarding breaches of confidential information and the risks of using social media. It was agreed a reminder should be sent to all SSDC councillors and parish clerks.

RESOLVED: That the verbal updates be noted.

20. Committee Work Programme and Future Meetings (Agenda Item 8)

The Director (Support Services) explained that he would be looking for volunteers to help with the review of some documents referred to in the Work Programme, in particular the protocol on Member/Officer Relations as an action had been highlighted by Internal Audit as part of a Healthy Organisation Review.

During discussion it was noted a meeting of the independent members with the political leaders and Chief Executives needed to be arranged. It was agreed that the Democratic Services Manager would try to make arrangements for prior to a meeting of full Council.

The parish representative informed members he may not stand for election in May 2019. It was suggested as there was currently only one representative on the Standards Committee that a new appointment should be sought in order to offer some continuity into the next term. It was agreed a report would be made to the next meeting to agree the process for making a new parish representative appointment to the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be agreed subject to the following additional report:

1. Process to make an appointment of parish representative to the

- Standards Committee – October 2017
2. That the future meeting arrangements be noted.

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Chairman