

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF TUESDAY 15TH JULY 2025

PRESENT:-

Independent Members: Dr Axel Palmer

Parish Representatives: Ronald Hopkins

Bath and North East Somerset Councillors: Toby Simon, Michelle O'Doherty, June Player and Tim Warren CBE

Independent Person: Roger Morris

Officers: Michael Hewitt (Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Donna Marks (Legal Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Enfys Hughes (Democratic Services Officer)

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He stated that there were two new members on the Committee – Councillor Tim Warren (present) and Councillor George Leach (sent apologies).

2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Democratic Services Officer read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION

Apologies were received from Councillor George Leach and Kate Skelton (Parish Councillor).

Sophie Sidonio (Independent Member) had resigned from the Committee due to volunteering commitments. The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that recruitment would be undertaken for Independent Members in the autumn.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was no urgent business.

6 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS (COMPLAINTS MUST GO THROUGH THE STANDARDS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE)

There was a statement from Alex Hansen in respect of the multi use games area recently constructed by the University of Bath. He referred to sports floodlighting which was operational that had no planning permission and other irregularities in planning applications in university developments. Some of these developments were close to special areas of conservation (SAC) where it is known that bats are found. He went on to discuss a boundary wall between the university and National Trust land and a field station that the university was preparing to give away to the National Trust.

There were no questions.

The Chair of the Committee explained that the Standards Committee was responsible for maintaining standards of conduct for Councillors and Parish Councillors in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct. There was also a published process for making a complaint about planning.

The full statement was provided to the Democratic Services Officer and would be attached to the minutes.

7 ITEMS FROM COUNCILLORS AND CO-OPTED AND ADDED MEMBERS RELATING TO THE GENERAL BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE

There were none.

8 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 23RD APRIL 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23rd April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9 ANNUAL REPORT ON COMMISSION FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ENGLAND (LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN) COMPLAINTS

David Langman (Customer Feedback & Standards Manager) presented the report and explained that some of the jurisdiction of the LGSCO was changing because of their new Complaint Handling Code and so new ways of engaging with councillors through scrutiny was being prescribed. He reminded the Committee that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) was the last resort for residents and service users to make complaints against the Council, having already exhausted the Council's complaints process. He proceeded to take members through the report.

During question the following points were made:-

- There was no significant difference in procedures or criteria for managing complaints under the new Complaint Handling Code, in comparison with the Council's existing approach. The services always explained the outcomes and set out the lessons learned to ensure transparency.
- When receiving an escalated complaint, the LGO assessed the complaint first to consider if it was valid, prudent, effective and timely. From that they decided if it would be dismissed or there would be further investigation to see if there was any finding of fault. The initial assessment was quick but the

investigation could be up to a year sometimes. In all cases the customer would be informed by the LGO of their timescales.

- In comparison to neighbouring local authorities annual outcome rankings, B&NES was second or third.
- The LGO set out standards of how they expect a Council to operate and they have Good Practice Guides about their Complaint Handling Code. The final implementation should be April 2026. Currently there was a pilot running and B&NES was part of this. The Monitoring Officer stated that a report would be submitted to the Executive Member and from that point this report would go to Corporate Scrutiny not Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the Annual Review and the determinations made by the Ombudsman be noted.

10 ANNUAL REPORT

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which summarised the work of the Standards Committee for the last year. He outlined the complaints process and explained that it covered B&NES and parish councillors. He stated that the lack of sanction was a problem for many local authorities which had happened in 2011 with the Localism Act. It was hoped that this would change to bring back sanctions but the new government's latest bill was silent on this.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- It was noted that the parish councillors had been omitted from the membership section on the report.
- Though several meetings of Standards had been cancelled some had been used for training.
- If councillors needed legal advice they should contact their political association who were a source of advice.
- There was no statutory obligation to have an annual report but it was good practice. It was not necessary to have the work plan and case tracker of complaints within it as it was already on the agenda, or the arrangements for dealing with complaints, so a more concise version was suggested for transparency.

RESOLVED to note the work of the Standards Committee as set out in the Annual Report.

11 REPORT ON THE ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Office presented the report.

RESOLVED to note the report on the assessment of complaints.

12 WORKPLAN FOR THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer reported that there was nothing on the horizon currently. If there was no business for future meetings then they would be vacated and the complaints tracker would be circulated on a quarterly basis.

RESOLVED to note the workplan.

The meeting ended at 6.14 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services

Statement to Standards Committee 15th July 2025 – Alex Hansen

The University of Bath recently finished construction of the Multi Use Games Area.

The games area is surrounded by a 4-meter-high wooden fence which stops light spilling onto the bat corridors.

Inside the wooden stockade is an area of land which was **not** included in the planning application, this area has a planning condition that prohibits artificial illumination. yet it is now illuminated by eight floodlights.

Sports floodlighting has been in operation for more than *two* decades without **any** evidence of planning permission, while over a similar time the university has been developing facilities, estimated at £100m, where irregularities in planning applications have now been identified.

20 of those developments include external artificial illumination that was not declared to the Planning Authority. The B&NES Ecologists appear to have been misled. Several of those developments took place close to the Bath and Bradford on Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC), an SAC recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) the advisors to Government.

15% of the UK's **total** population of Greater Horseshoe bats *plus* 20 Bechstein's bats, are found at this SAC. The JNCC stated that, this location is one of the best areas within the United Kingdom to preserve and protect these bats. Bechstein's are one of the U.K.'s most endangered mammals and are protected by UK and European legislation and are included on the "Red List" of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

This committee has previously been informed about dinners held by the University, each with a budget of £15,000, but there is more.

The Council have explained that its lease for the campus does *not* include the boundary wall situated between the campus and the National Trust's Bushey Norwood Field. Yet, the university have been maintaining this wall, thereby making payments in goods and services to the National Trust of £333,064.00.

Furthermore, the University of Bath own a Field Station in Bathampton which they are preparing to giveaway, for free, to the National Trust.

The National Trust have explained that this land has no fiscal value other than for Biodiversity Net Gain. This is surprising, as the Field Station adjoins land owned by the National Trust valued at £14,700.00 per acre and is close to the former Community Asset land which was valued at £15,000.00 per acre.

Using sales information on one might value the Field Station at half a million pounds.

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