

APPENDIX 1

Standards Committee

Annual Report 2024-2025

Chair's Foreword

The Standards Committee fulfils a most important role for Bath and North East Somerset Council and for the Parish and Town Councils within its area. The Committee members are all volunteers: some are Unitary Councillors; some are Parish or Town Councillors drawn from Parish or Town Councils in the Bath and North East Somerset Council area, whose nominations are facilitated by Avon Local Councils Association, and some are Independent Members, being independent members of the public. In addition, as legally required, the Authority appoints an 'Independent Person', to work alongside the Standards Committee and Monitoring Officer.

All committee members have given willingly and generously of their time and talents in approaching issues most thoughtfully and constructively.

The following detailed report shows the range of matters within the scope of the Standards Committee. In the past year, since April 2024 there have been:

- i. 17 matters raised: of which 15 initial assessments required 'no further action' to be undertaken, 1 which was assessed as a Breach of the Code of Conduct and an apology issued; and 1 withdrawn; and
- ii. there have been another 3 matters that are currently being investigated since the 1st April 2025

To put these figures in context, the Standards Committee has within its purview, the unitary authority and 45 Parish and Town Councils: in total over 500 councillors.

In Bath and North East Somerset, the Standards Committee has two Independent Persons: Tony Drew, Roger Morris and in this authority, the Committee is chaired by an Independent Member. I am most grateful to all my colleagues for their help and support and wish to highlight the exceptional commitment of the Independent Person[s], Tony Drew and Roger Morris who both provide such valuable service to the standards regime.

Furthermore, I commend the Monitoring Officer Michael Hewitt, Deputy Monitoring Officer Donna Marks and their officers for their most professional and successful operation of the Standards regime.

Dr Axel Palmer
Chair of the Standards Committee

1. Introduction

The Standards Committee has agreed that it will submit an annual report summarising the work the Committee has carried out during the previous year for the consideration of Council. This report comprises the Annual Review covering the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, together with background information regarding the standards regime established within Bath & North East Somerset Council. All references to 2024-25 in the report refer to this time period.

The Standards Committee

The Standards Committee is responsible for the promotion of ethical standards within the Council, helping to secure adherence to the Code; monitoring the operation of the Code; conducting hearings following investigation and determining complaints made under the Code. The Standards Committee's terms of reference are set out in the Council's Constitution in Part 2, Responsibility for Functions. The Committee conducts proceedings using the Authority's Local Arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct for Members updated in 2022. The Committee is also responsible for granting dispensations to Members.

Where a Final Report from an Investigating Officer recommends a finding that there has been a breach of the Code, the Committee undertakes a hearing in accordance with the Council's Local Arrangements for dealing with complaints under the Code. The Committee will determine the facts, whether there has been a breach and if so any sanction. It can also make recommendations to Council.

The Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and for reporting any actual or potential breaches of the law and maladministration to the full Council and/or to the Cabinet (as set out in s.5 (1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989).

The Monitoring Officer and their team administer the local arrangements for addressing complaints made under the Code of Conduct. This includes the assessment of every complaint received under the Code of Conduct. Following consideration and consultation with one of the Authority's Independent Persons and Chair of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer decides whether the complaint will be investigated. The decision will be based on whether the allegation, if proved, would constitute a failure to observe the Code of Conduct and the application of the Council's adopted assessment criteria. The Monitoring Officer may also consider that a complaint can be reasonably resolved informally and will discuss this option with the complainant and subject member where appropriate.

Independent Persons

The Council has appointed two Independent Persons who are invited to attend all meetings of the Standards Committee. The Independent Persons must be consulted by the Council before it decides on a matter that has been referred to it for investigation; they can also be consulted by the Council in respect of a code of conduct complaint at any other stage; and can also be consulted by a member or co-opted member of the Council against whom a complaint has been made. It has been emphasised that the involvement and consultation of the Independent Person is important at all stages.

Standards Committee Membership

In 2024/25 the Standards Committee comprised the following Members:

2024 –Councillor Toby Simon, Councillor Michelle O'Doherty, Councillor Alan Hale, Councillor June Player and Councillor Alison Streatfeild-James

Alan Hale and Alison Streatfeild-James left during the year.

2025 - Councillor Toby Simon, Councillor Michelle O'Doherty, Councillor June Player, Councillor Tim Warren, Councillor George Leach

Independent Members Dr Axel Palmer (Chair), Sophie Sidonio (appointed March 2022). There is one vacancy for an independent member.

2. The Authority's Independent Persons

The Authority's Independent Persons are Tony Drew and Roger Morris who are non-voting observers of the Standards Committee. The Council also has access to a reserve Independent Person through informal arrangements with neighbouring local authorities.

3. Training for Standards Committee Members and Independent Persons

Initial and refresher training on the duties and responsibilities of members serving on the Standards Committee of the Authority is important to ensure the probity and credibility of the Authority's decision making processes. Members are required to undertake basic training through the Authority's member induction programme, on election or re-election, and this is refreshed annually, before they can serve on the Standards Committee. Training is also provided for the Independent Persons appointed by the Authority in order to ensure they are able to carry out their role.

Half day training sessions, were held jointly with the Avon Fire Authority, on the Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct for Members (adopted by BANES in 2021) provided for:

- 30 October 2023 between 10:00 -12:30 in person at Keynsham Civic Centre
- 15 November 2023 between 17:00 – 19:30 online via Zoom/Teams

A training session for Standards Committee Members on Holding Effective Hearings is to be arranged and delivered by the Monitoring Officer and the Legal Services Manager later this year.

5. Review of Standards Committee Work Programme and Action Plan for 2024/25

The Committee has not met in 2025 so far as there had been no significant matters to report back on . However, the Monitoring Officer has continued to monitor its Work Plan and noted the current position with complaints using the Complaints Tracker.

6. Committee Meetings and foremost workstreams

At the start of each year the Standards Committee agrees its Work Programme/Action Plan for the year, which is then monitored at meetings throughout the year. Standard Committee sessions are scheduled every 2 months in advance. If not required, these are cancelled. The Standards Committee were due to meet on the following dates but these were cancelled:

Tuesday 23 rd January 2024 at 5pm - (Kaposvar Room) CANCELLED
Tuesday 23 rd April 2024 at 5pm – (Kaposvar Room) CANCELLED

The following dates are pre-arranged up until 2025

Date of Despatch	Date of Standards Committee
Monday 13 th January	Tuesday 21 st January 2025 at 5pm (Kaposvar Room) cancelled
Monday 14 th April	Tuesday 22 nd April 2025 at 5pm (Kaposvar Room) cancelled
Monday 7 th July	Tuesday 15 th July 2025 at 5pm (Kaposvar Room)
Monday 6 th October	Tuesday 14 th October 2025 at 5pm (Kaposvar Room)

7. Progress on the Work that the Committee has undertaken since 31st March 2025

Training will be delivered for Standards Committee Members on Holding Effective Hearings and is to be arranged and delivered by the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer within the next year.

There has been a consistent approach to how investigations are handled in accordance with the Code of Conduct which has enabled a better management of complaints. To assist with the governance of dealing with Complaints an additional process for 'Conflict of Interest Checks' will be undertaken before the Independent Person is appointed in any complaint.

Continued 'horizon scanning' with neighbouring authorities is undertaken to seek to understand the types of complaint[s] being raised and to address this in further training with a focus on:

- Lessons-learned or good practice reports from other local authorities.
- Monitoring impact on Councillors' that may be subject to threats and if necessary the ability to withdraw details from the register if councillor[s] are harassed by the public to protect their home address and placing safeguards for sensitive information.

8. Complaints under the Code of Conduct for Members and Co-opted Members for the last 5 years

i. Complaints by complainant

Type of complainant	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total
BaNES Councillor	1	4	4	1	3	13
Parish / Town Councillor	1	0	0	1	0	2
Member of the public	13	13	11	8	14	59
Council Officer	0	1	0	0	0	1
Parish Clerk	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	16	18	15	10	17	76

ii. Complaints by subject member

Subject of the complaint	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/2024	2024/25	Total
BANES Councillor	5	13	14	4	13	49
Parish / Town Councillor	11	5	1	6	4	27
Total	16	18	15	10	17	76

iii. Complaints by type

Type of complaint	2022/23	2023/2024	2024/25	Total
1. Respect	6	1	8	15
2. Bullying Harassment, discrimination	6	0	6	12
3. Compromising Impartiality	0	0	1	1
4. Dealing with Information	0	1	0	1
5. Disrepute	5	2	6	13
6. Improper use of position	0	4	4	8
7. Improper use of resources	0	1	0	1
8. Co-operating with Code of Conduct	0	2	0	2
9. Registering/disclosi ng Interests	3	0	2	5
10. Gifts & Hospitality	0	0	0	0
Total	20	11	27	58

Note: A complainant may make several types of complaint about a councillor.

iv. Initial Assessments

Local Assessment Decisions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
No Further Action/no breach	11	11	10	8	15	55
Informal Resolution	2	2	0	0	1	5
Referred for Investigation	0	1	0	0	0	1
Ongoing	0	1	0	2	0	3
Withdrawn/rejected	3	3	5	0	1	12
Total	16	18	15	10	17	76

v. Outcome of complaints

Outcomes	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/2024	2024/2025	Total
Other Action	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ongoing	0	0	0	2	0	2
Apology/Breach	1	0	0	0	1	2
No Action Required	0	0	7	8	15	30
Withdrawn/rejected	3	0	5	0	1	9
Breach	0	0	0	0	0	0
No Breach	11	18	3	0	0	32
Total	16	18	15	10	17	76

9. Conclusion

The Committee has dealt with a variety of matters in the past year and aims to continue to develop and maintain the Council's ethical governance framework for the benefit of the Authority and ultimately local people. The Committee is looking forward to the next year.