

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House on Thursday, 31 July 2025.

PRESENT: Ms G Foster, Mr M Harrison, Ms S Roots, Mr S Dixon, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr N Williams

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Tristan Godfrey (Senior Governance Manager), Katy Reynolds (Governance Advisor) and Ruth Emberley (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

7. Apologies and Substitutes (Item 1)

Apologies had been received from Mr Palmer, with Mr Bradshaw acting as substitute, Mr Waters, with Mr Dixon acting as substitute, and Mr Moreland.

8. Election of Chair (Item 2)

It was proposed and seconded that Ms Georgia Foster be elected as Chair of the Committee. There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED that Ms Georgia Foster be elected Chair of the Committee.

In a change to the published agenda, the Chair permitted an additional item, the election of the Vice Chair.

9. Election of Vice Chair (Item 3)

It was proposed and seconded that Mr Richard Palmer be elected as Vice -Chair of the Committee. There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED that Mr Richard Palmer be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee, in his absence.

10. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda (Item 4)

There were no Member declarations of interest.

11. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024

(Item 5)

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 were taken as a correct record and a paper copy to be signed by the Chairman.

12. Introduction to Standards Regime - visual presentation

(Item 6)

1. The General Counsel, Mr Ben Watts, delivered a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee.
2. Mr Watts confirmed that copies of the reports and guidance referenced in the presentation could be circulated to Members before the next Committee meeting.
3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the presentation.

13. Appointment of Hearing Panel

(Item 7)

1. The report was presented by the General Counsel, Mr Ben Watts.
2. Mr Watts highlighted the key points to Members, some of which included the following:
 - a) The Hearing Panel needed to be established early in a Council term to allow it to convene if required.
 - b) The Panel must consist of three Members from the Standards Committee.
 - c) The Panel must be politically proportionate and therefore two Panel Members must be selected from the majority ruling party and the other from the second largest party.
 - d) It was acceptable to nominate Panel Members in their absence.
3. It was indicated by the Chair, and agreed by the Committee, that the Hearing Panel would consist of Ms G Foster, Mr R Palmer and Mr J Moreland.
4. RESOLVED that the Standards Committee appoint a Hearing Panel to consist of Ms G Foster, Mr R Palmer and Mr J Moreland.

14. Proposed Revisions to Arrangements for Dealing with Code of Conduct Complaints

(Item 8)

1. The report was presented by the Senior Governance Manager, Mr Tristan Godfrey. It was explained that the Council's Code of Conduct had been revised following the production of a new model code by the Local Government Association and this was an opportune time to review the arrangements.
2. Mr Godfrey highlighted the key sections of the Code of Conduct which had undergone revisions, for Member attention.
3. In answer to Member questions, the following was said:
 - a) Learning taken from dealing with a previous Member complaint helped to recognise and reflect on how the complaints process could be improved. The proposed revisions were before the Committee today as a finalising step and could be brought back for review in due course.
 - b) The standard of proof for dealing with complaints was on the balance of probabilities. Mr Watts reminded the Committee that beyond reasonable doubt was the criminal standard of proof and not applicable.
 - c) It was confirmed that only in exceptional circumstances would the parties involved in a complaint remain anonymous. Through natural justice, if a complaint had been made openly, the response should also be open. Anonymity made it difficult for the subject of the complaint to respond.
 - d) The proposed timetable of changes to the Code of Conduct arose due to the increased workload for Monitoring Officers and the complexities involved in investigating complaints. Sufficient time was required to ensure complaints were treated fairly which meant flexibility in timescales was key.
 - e) It was explained that a 90 day timeframe to complete an investigation provided flexibility, although it was highlighted that not all complaints would necessarily take this time to complete. It could be that a threshold was introduced, and Members were reminded that resources continued to be a factor for consideration. It was discussed and agreed that the timeframe could return to the Committee for review in the future.
4. RESOLVED that the Standards Committee approved the revised Arrangements for handling Member Complaints and delegate to the Monitoring Officer the authority to take the necessary actions to implement the new arrangements.

