

AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

27th July 2020

MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor David Thain (for Governance)
Portfolio Holder consulted	No
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Wards affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor consulted	N/A

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report sets out the position in relation to key standards regime matters which are of relevance to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee since the last meeting of the Committee in January 2020.
- 1.2 It has been proposed that a report of this nature be presented to each meeting of the Committee to ensure that Members are kept updated with any relevant standards matters.
- 1.3 Any further updates arising after publication of this report, including any standards issues raised by the Feckenham Parish Council Representative(s), will be reported by the Monitoring Officer (MO) at the meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that, subject to Members' comments, the report be noted.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

Legal Implications

- 3.2 The Localism Act became law on 15th November 2011. Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 ('the Act') introduced a new standards regime effective from 1st July 2012. The Act places a requirement on authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and co-opted (with voting rights) Members of an authority. The Act also requires the authority to have in place arrangements under which allegations that either

**AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

27th July 2020

a district or parish councillor has breached his or her Code of Conduct can be investigated, together with arrangements under which decisions on such allegations can be made. The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 were laid before Parliament on 8th June 2012 and also came into force on 1st July 2012.

Service / Operational Implications

Member Complaints

- 3.3 There have been a number of Member-to-Member complaints since the last meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. These complaints have been managed locally and resolved following consultation with the Monitoring Officer.

The New Normal

- 3.4 Following the nation being placed in lockdown in March 2020 the way Council meetings have been held has become very different. Following new legislation Councils are now able to hold their meetings virtually, which not only ensures that the Councils' business continues but also that the public are able to participate where necessary and observe public meetings.
- 3.5 Democratic Services have worked closely with the IT Team to ensure that all Members were able to access the appropriate software on their Council equipment and were confident in its operation. They have also worked with other teams, such as Planning to ensure these meetings were conducted in the appropriate manner, to enable decisions to be made.
- 3.6 In order for these meetings to run smoothly there has been the need to make small amendments to the Council's constitution, which were agreed by both Group Leaders and agreed through the Urgent Decision process. All Urgent Decisions that have been taken are available on the Council's website to ensure transparency.
- 3.7 As it was appreciated that virtual meetings would need careful planning and management, officers created a Remote Meeting Protocol which detailed a number of key areas for both Members and officers to consider when attending such meetings. This included how meetings were called, access to documents, pre meeting arrangements, the inclusion of external participants at meetings, changes to the role of the Chair, etiquette when attending a virtual meeting, the meeting itself and how the debate would be run, how exempt items would be dealt with and how any technical problems would be handled.

**AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

27th July 2020

- 3.8 Officers held one to one sessions with Members initially to check connectivity and then a number of practice and mock meetings were held. Whilst it was appreciated that there would be a number of teething problems Officers were keen to ensure that any virtual meetings ran as smoothly as possible and were a satisfactory experience for both those participating and those viewing the meeting.
- 3.9 In order to meet the requirements of the new legislation all public meetings have been live streamed to the Council's You Tube channel, with a link being provided on the Council's website to access these. This allows the public to continue to see that Council business is carrying on and that decisions are being made in an appropriate manner.
- 3.10 To date a number of Planning Committee meetings have taken place remotely, together with Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee meetings. A meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board, which was made up of representatives from all districts at which this Council was represented at, has also taken place. The Council's Annual meeting took place virtually on 22nd June and the next meeting of the Council is planned for 20th July, which will also take place virtually.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.11 There are no direct implications arising out of this report. Details of the Council's arrangements for managing standards complaints under the Localism Act 2011 are available on the Council's website and from the Monitoring Officer on request.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Risk of challenge to Council decisions; and
- Risk of complaints about elected Members.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Remote Meeting Protocol

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011.

**AUDIT, GOVERNANCE AND
STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

27th July 2020

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Claire Felton

Email: c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk