

# Report

## Council

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### Part 1

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020

**Subject** Standards Committee Annual Report 2019/2020

**Purpose** To present the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2019/20

**Author** Head of Law and Regulation  
Chair of Standards Committee

**Ward** General

**Summary** This Report presents to Council the sixth Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2019/20. The Annual Report provides information to the Council about the work carried out by the Committee during the previous 12 months, identifies any specific issues that have arisen and sets out the forward work programme for the forthcoming year.

This fifth Annual Report covers the period from November 2019 to November 2020 and follows on from the last report presented to Council in November 2019.

**Proposal** To receive the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2019/20 and to note the forward work programme

**Action by** Head of Law and Regulation

**Timetable** Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Standards Committee
- Head of Finance
- Head of People and Business Change

**Signed**

## **Background**

1. The Local Government Act 2000 Part III requires the Council to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of ethical conduct by Councillors, co-opted members and Community Councillors. This role involves advising and training Members on the Code of Conduct, determining any complaints of misconduct, the imposition of sanctions, where appropriate, and considering any applications for dispensation under the Code.
2. The composition and membership of the Standards Committee is prescribed by the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended) and comprises:-
  - 5 independent members (including an independent chair and vice-Chair)
  - 3 Councillors
  - 1 community council representative.
3. The Standards Committee is required to meet at least once annually in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. In practice, the Committee meets on a scheduled quarterly basis and additional special meetings are arranged, as necessary, to deal with specific matters such as misconduct hearings and requests for dispensation.
4. The Annual Report provides information to the Council about the work carried out by the Committee during the last 12 months, identifies any specific issues that have arisen and sets out the forward work programme for the forthcoming year.
5. This seventh Annual Report covers the period from November 2019 to November 2020 and follows on from the last report presented to Council in November 2019.
6. There have been no changes to the membership of the Standards Committee during the past year. However, the Committee will need to consider succession planning next year as the second term of office of two of the independent members of the Committee, including the Chair, will come to an end. Therefore, new independent members of Standards Committee will need to be appointed

### **The Committee's work in 2019/20**

7. The Annual Report summarises the work carried out by the Standards Committee during the past 12 months. The Committee has met on 2 occasions during this period. The meetings scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020 had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus lock-down. All face-to-face Council meetings were cancelled in March 2020 due to the lock-down restrictions and remote meetings were re-introduced on a phased basis as from June 2020 in accordance with the remote meetings Protocol adopted by the Council and the Coronavirus Meetings (Wales) Regulations 2020. Future meetings of Standards Committee will be conducted remotely and webcast live using MS Live Events. A recording of the meeting will also be uploaded onto the Council web site for public viewing.
8. The training requirements of the community councils and their compliance arrangements will continue to be monitored and reviewed as part of the Committee's forward work programme. The need for any refresher training for City Councillors will be reviewed in the light of responses to the Ethical Standards questionnaire.
9. An Ethical Standards Questionnaire was sent to members and senior officers to assess the culture within the organisation and the relationship between officers and members, to identify any areas of concern and need for improvement. In an effort to generate a better response than last time, the Chair of Standards Committee met with the Group Leaders of the main political Groups to get their support for this initiative and to encourage their members to respond to the questionnaire. However, despite this, only 9 responses were received, which

is extremely disappointing. Nevertheless, this still represented a 20% return and the responses that were received were generally positive about the culture within the organisation and the effectiveness of standards Committee and the policies and procedures that are in place. There appears to be a lack of clarity in terms of the respective roles and responsibilities of members and senior officers and further work needs to be done here which may also improve levels of trust and respect

10. The Report highlights the fact that there were no formal findings of misconduct against any local Councillors or community councillors during the past 12 months. Five complaints have been made to the Ombudsman about City Councillors, but only one has been accepted for formal investigation. One complaint was made to the Ombudsman about a local community councillor but he did not consider the failure to declare an interest to be a sufficiently serious breach as to warrant formal action. One “low-level” complaint was successfully resolved under the Local Resolution Protocol.

### Forward Work Programme

11. The Annual Report also contains a draft forward work programme for the forthcoming 12 months.

### Financial Summary

12. There are no financial implications as the costs of operating and supporting the Standards Committee are covered within existing budgets. Independent members of Standards Committee receive a fixed fee for attendance at and preparation for meetings in accordance with the half daily rates prescribed by the IRP for Wales.

### Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
An ineffective Standards Committee would undermine public confidence in local government and would lead to poor quality decision-making, with the risk of legal challenge, reputational harm to the Council and sanctions imposed on individual Members	H	L	By proactively promoting high standards of ethical conduct among elected Members and officers and delivering effective training, there have been no findings of misconduct and no serious complaints of breaches of the Code.	Standards Committee Monitoring Officer Deputy Monitoring Officer

Failure to agree key priorities and a structured forward work programme could lead to a reduction in standards and behaviour and undermine the effectiveness of the Committee	M	L	The forward work programme sets out a structured basis for reviewing all ethical standards policies and procedures and reviewing training needs and development.	Standards Committee Monitoring Officer Deputy Monitoring Officer
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\* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

### **Links to Council Policies and Priorities**

The promotion of high standards of ethical conduct among elected Members and officers maintains public confidence in local government and helps to make Newport a Fairer City

### **Options Available**

- (a) To receive the Standards Committee Annual Report and note the forward work programme
- (b) To reject the report and/or ask for further work to be undertaken

### **Preferred Option and Why**

To receive the Standards Committee Annual Report and note the forward work programme

### **Comments of Chief Financial Officer**

There are no financial implications.

### **Comments of Monitoring Officer**

Included in the Report.

### **Comments of Head of People and Business Change**

There are no staffing or policy implications.

### **Background Papers**

Committee reports and background papers November 2019 to November 2020

Dated: 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020.