

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

15 January 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor K. Franks (Chair)

Councillors I. Fuller, S. Rajesh, J. Sosin, M. Steel, and S. Young

Also in attendance –

Parish Councillor K. Bentley

Independent Person –

Mr P Jeremiah

Mr D Lamb

Ms P Mills

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jackson and Mrs Gosling for the meeting.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 16 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda, none were made.

4. Public Question Time

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

5. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed the committee to the first meeting of the calendar year and wished them a happy new year.

6. Monitoring Officer Report

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on standards complaints and investigations for the year. It was recognised that a high proportion of complaints had not been complaints that the Monitoring Officer had authority to consider, thus were

invalid. Therefore, efforts have been made to help parish tier councils and other interested parties understand the jurisdiction of the Monitoring Officer and how they can support Councillors to ensure they effectively comply with the code of conduct.

The committee were also informed that officers and the Chair would consider the Council's response to the national consultation on the standards regime. Other organisations or individuals were encouraged to engage before the deadline of 26th February 2025, the link to do so would be circulated following the meeting:

[Consultation: Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.](#)

RESOLVED that the update be noted and the standards enquiries and investigations statistics for the period of March-October 2024 be published online.

(7.03pm to 7.06pm)

7. Polling District Review

The committee received a report detailing the recommendations from the recent interim polling district review. They heard that the purpose of the review was to realign the existing polling district boundaries with the new electoral boundaries due to come into effect through the Essex (Electoral Changes) Order 2024, following a review of the Essex County Council local authority area by the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE).

The committee heard that since the review commenced, there had been developments regarding devolution and local government reorganisation in Essex and that the upcoming elections may be postponed to accommodate this, with the implementation of the new Essex County Council boundaries also to be postponed. It was acknowledged that it would be important to ensure that the Electoral Registration Officer is able to respond to these developments accordingly.

RESOLVED that;

1. The amendment of the polling district arrangements as outlined in the report be approved. If arrangements are made for these elections to be postponed, the implementation of these boundaries may be postponed accordingly.
2. Future amendments required to ensure that the polling district arrangements match the relevant Essex County Council boundaries at the time also be approved. Any amendments relate only to ensuring that the polling districts are coterminous with the Essex County Council boundaries, not any other boundary changes.

(7.06pm to 7.09pm)

8. Update RE Member and Officer Code(s) of Conduct and register of interests

The committee heard an update regarding councillor and officer register of interest completion. All councillors had received a reminder to review their submission in December and amendments had been updated online accordingly.

They were also informed that officers were now also being invited to complete their register of interests online, using the same format as members. This will be for both

category one and category two officers. Category one officers (senior staff and selected other officers) must submit a mandatory return and complete an annual review and category two officers must only complete a return if required, but also receive reminders to do so.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

(7.09pm to 7.12pm)

9. Gifts and Hospitality Report

The committee received an update regarding offers of gifts and hospitality that members and officers had received from January-December 2024.

It was advised that a total of two declarations from members and three from officers had been made. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that in all cases, acceptance of the offers was appropriate.

It was noted that the number of reports were lower than previous years, but the Monitoring Officer advised that they were comfortable with this as we had previously received reports that were under the threshold, which influenced the statistics, and an outreach activity to promote reporting was already in the process of delivery.

RESOLVED that the report to be noted.

(7.12pm to 7.15pm)

10. Annual Whistleblowing Report

The committee heard a report outlining the Council's whistleblowing policy and the number of complaints received in comparison to previous years.

The committee were advised that there had been a total of 10 between December 2023 – December 2024. Of these, three had no public interest dimension so could not be dealt with as a whistleblowing complaint and seven were investigated.

Information regarding individual complaints could not be disclosed, due to the confidentiality protection for whistle-blowers. However, the Monitoring Officer reassured members that they were not concerned by the seven complaints.

In response to a question, the committee were advised that wherever possible, whistleblowers are updated on the outcome of the investigation. However, they do have the option to remain anonymous, so it is not always possible.

RESOLVED that the report to be noted.

(7.15pm to 7.18pm)

11. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on their work programme for 2024/25 and the plan to organise a training session in June.

RESOLVED that the work programme of the Committee be noted.

(7.18pm to 7.20pm)

12. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7:20pm

Chair