

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 11 January 2021
Report Subject	Standards Forum & Ethical Liaison Pre-briefing
Report Author	Chief Officer Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a matter of good practice the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee meet the Chair and Leader of Council every 6 months. The meeting scheduled to take place during the response phase of the pandemic was cancelled.

A date and a suggested list of issues to discuss need to be suggested for the next meeting. The meeting would be a good opportunity to discuss how the forthcoming duty on Group Leaders to help promote good standards and co-operate with the work of the Standards Committee could be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee suggest items for discussion with the Leader and Chair of Council.
---	---

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING ETHICAL LIAISON MEETINGS
1.01	As suggested by the Committee on Standards In Public Life, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee meet with the Chair and Leader of Council to discuss any current issues or concerns relating to standards of behaviour and ethics. The meeting scheduled to take place during the response phase of the pandemic was cancelled, and it is therefore appropriate to arrange a further meeting.

1.02	As with the previous meeting, the purpose of the meeting is to allow the Committee to directly express its views on what Councillors could/should do, if anything, to improve compliance with the Code. At the first such meeting it was agreed to hold further meetings with Group Leaders, who do play a role in helping to establish and maintain standards of behaviour amongst their group members. Before meeting directly with the Group Leaders it would be as well for the Committee to establish with the Chair and Leader of Council expectations for such a meeting, and this next meeting should take place without Group Leaders present.
1.03	The informal role of Group Leaders to promote good behaviour is soon to be recognised in legislation by the Local Government and Elections Wales Bill (“the Bill”) which has been approved by the Senedd and is awaiting Royal Assent before being brought into law. The bill provides that Group Leaders must — “(a) take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group, and (b) co-operate with the Council’s Standards Committee ... in the exercise of the Standards Committee’s functions.”
1.04	The Committee should express its own aspirations for how that role will be fulfilled. This is, of course, “breaking new ground” and so the Committee could provide a lead by setting out its reasonable expectations for how Group Leaders might fulfil this duty e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating a culture of attendance at training by group members; • setting expectations of acceptable behaviour based on the Code and Flintshire Standard; • providing low level advice themselves on code issues; • encouraging group members to speak to the Monitoring/Deputy Monitoring Officer; • working with officers to tackle problems when they arise.
1.05	Independent Committee members are due to observe Council/Committee meetings, and those observations might also help to inform or suggest areas for discussion. It may be that the Committee would wish therefore to suggest the ethical liaison meeting is held once these observations have taken place.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Ethical liaison meetings will take place twice a year and can be supported within existing resources.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	The Leader and Chair of Council plus Group Leaders will be asked if they have any topics they wish to raise.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Clearly strategic discussions of this type to help promote observance of the code and maintain standards of behaviour will help to reinforce the culture of good behaviour and high standards.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Committee on Standards In Public Life – an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Cabinet Office. It advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in England. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders. Royal Assent – all legislation is made by the Monarch and every piece of proposed legislation (a Bill) must be signed by the Queen in order to complete its approval process (when it becomes an Act).