
Standards Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 23 September 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.18 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Angela Harrison (Chair), James Hunt (Vice-Chair), Mark Last, Charlie Miller, Tom Nundy, Richard Palmer and Ashley Wise.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Monique Bonney.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Patricia Richards (Independent Person).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris and Jo Millard.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Tim Gibson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Rich Lehmann, Pete Neal and Hannah Perkin.

331 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

332 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2025 (Minute Nos. 229 – 235) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

333 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

334 **Forward Plan**

The Chair advised that there were currently no items due for discussion for the scheduled meeting in December 2025, and if this remained the case closer to the time, the meeting may be cancelled. She added that if any additional meetings were required throughout the civic year, these would be arranged.

335 **Member-officer protocol**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which sought to review the Member Officer Protocol which was initially adopted by Full Council in April 2024. He explained that following the adoption, a request for minor amendments, clarity and consistency of the document were received and these were agreed in December 2024. The Monitoring Officer advised there had been limited opportunities to test the protocol due to the low number of complaints received and therefore insufficient data.

The Chair proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Members were invited to make comments and there was a discussion around the number of complaints received in the previous two civic years, and whether it was necessary to discuss the protocol every 12 months if there had been no complaints. The

Monitoring Officer reminded Members that Council had agreed a yearly review.

A Member commented that the protocol was well laid out and as there had been so few complaints, it was doing its job.

Councillor James Hunt proposed a minor amendment to condition 2 to add “.....**if it had been relatively tested**”. This was seconded by Councillor Nundy and on being put to the vote, Members agreed.

Resolved

(1) That the protocol at Appendix I remains fit for purpose.

(2) That delegated authority be granted to the Monitoring Officer to make any amendments to the text in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, and for a further review of the protocol in 12 months' time if it had been relatively tested during that time.

336 Member Development Update

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report which was an update of training carried out during the civic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, and outlined the action plan the Member Development Working Group (MDWG) would follow in the current civic year. She explained that shortly after the current Members were elected in 2023, a survey had been circulated to Members. Following the survey, MDWG had created a schedule of training events requested by Members, whilst also developing a Member Development Strategy, and this was agreed at Full Council in October 2024.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager advised that from the 2023 civic year, officers recorded Members' attendance at training sessions and she drew attention to the attendance statistics set out at Appendix 1. She highlighted that not all attendance records were available and it was currently not possible to verify if a Member had viewed a recording of a session on the Members' Team Channel after live training had taken place.

Members were invited to speak and made points including:

- There had been a lot of useful Member training that Members could benefit from, and some training had not been well attended;
- many training sessions could be attended remotely and Members were missing out by not attending;
- stressed how important being knowledgeable and well informed was, particularly with the upcoming changes in local government;
- the MDWG reps for each group should feedback to understand why some sessions were poorly attended;
- it was a challenge to find days and times to suit all Members;
- some Members did watch recordings of sessions retrospectively;
- disappointed that the external training was so poorly attended when there was a choice of four sessions at different times;
- some Members may have had training elsewhere that was not recorded;
- suggested including a Microsoft form at the end of a training session for those

- Members that viewed retrospectively to confirm they'd viewed the session;
- suggested an evaluation form at the end of a recorded session; and
- speed reading and public speaking skills were important and should be offered immediately after a Member was elected.

The Monitoring Officer advised that some officer training included pre-reading and other training included short questions to respond to in order to progress the training slides, and this could be considered in recorded training sessions.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager agreed to feed back to the MDWG the suggestion that they should encourage Members of their groups to attend the relevant training, receive feedback on why sessions were not attended and seek confirmation that they had viewed the recorded sessions retrospectively. She advised that, as part of the survey that was sent out, changes to times of sessions to suit more Members and holding briefings before relevant Committees was introduced. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager agreed to feed all other suggestions of ways to capture training needs, skills and training attended to the MDWG.

Resolved:

(1) That the Member Development Update be noted.

337 Code of Conduct Arrangements

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report and gave a brief history of the previous work carried out to create a new set of arrangements on how complaints were handled and investigated, which sat behind the Code of Conduct. He reminded Members that central Government had been considering amendments to the Standards regime and the work was then paused. The Monitoring Officer advised that as Government had not progressed this, the Standards Committee requested that the draft Swale arrangements be progressed, and Members be consulted on it before being considered by Full Council.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Highlighted a minor error on page 45 of the document at 13.1, the word 'put' should be added in front of '...in place of process'; and
- would be good for the document to go out to consultation now after all the work carried out.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft code of conduct arrangements had been considered and necessary amendments made.

(2) That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to consult with all Members as to the content of the arrangements.

(3) That the Monitoring Officer be delegated to make any further amendments, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee.

(4) That following the outcome of the consultation with all Members, the

arrangements be recommended to Full Council.

338 Standards Complaints - verbal update

Following requests at the previous Standards Committee meeting in July 2025, the Monitoring Officer gave a verbal update on Standards complaints received. He said it was difficult to give an average number of complaints being dealt with as the figure fluctuated. He gave a recent example of there being no complaints from July 2025 to August 2025, with a rush of complaints in September 2025. The Monitoring Officer explained there were sometimes triggers to complaints, and he described the nature of the complaints received in September so far. He said going forward figures for full quarters would be provided. The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that it was not possible to say at this stage whether any of the complaints would be investigated further and reach a Standards sub-committee.

Members were invited to ask questions which included:

- Were most complaints received about social media activity?; and
- it was useful to know whether complaints were being received.

The Monitoring Officer advised there was a mixture of complaints and some involved social media activity.

Resolved:

(1) Members noted the verbal updated.

339 Update on Members Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks - verbal update

The Chair explained that the original directive came from the Housing and Health Committee, was referred to the Standards Committee and Full Council agreed to request voluntary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks from Members. She said there was a presumption from members of the public that those who were elected had been DBS checked. The Chair said Democratic Services had supported Members that needed help to obtain a DBS check and continued to remind Members who had not submitted evidence yet.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager advised that 39 out of the current 47 Members had provided evidence of a DBS check. She advised that at the current time the figures for individual groups were:

Labour	-	15 received (all Group Members)
Conservative	-	9 received (1 yet to provide)
SIA	-	6 received (2 yet to provide)*
Liberal		
Democrats	-	3 received (2 yet to provide)
Reform UK	-	3 received (2 yet to provide)
Green	-	2 received (1 yet to provide)
Independent	-	1 received (Group Member provided)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager acknowledged that two Members were currently unwell and this may have impacted providing DBS checks.

Members made comments which included:

- Suggested contacting Group Leaders to encourage their Members to submit or assist if necessary;
- needed to get to the stage where Members advised they have either chosen not to or are unable to carry out a DBS check;
- the upfront cost, which could be claimed back, might be a barrier for some Members;
- said central Government should insist that those elected were DBS checked;
- could SBC carry out the DBS checks on behalf of Members?;
- could SBC make it a policy that Members were DBS checked?; and
- said that post Local Government Reorganisation, Councils would have responsibility for children and Councils should consider implementing the requirement for elected Members to have DBS checks in preparation.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that Council had agreed for the Standards Committee to arbitrate the scheme, but it was down to individuals to voluntarily submit a DBS check, and Members of the Standards Committee to consider whether they wished to report back to Council which might be an exempt report as it was personal data.

Members noted the verbal update and agreed that Democratic Services should contact Group Leaders in the first instance to establish if there were reasons some Members had not provided evidence of a DBS check.

Resolved:

(1) The verbal update was noted by Members.

*Immediately following the meeting, a Member of the SIA group provided evidence of a DBS check.

340 Recruitment of Independent Persons - verbal update

Before the Committee were updated, Patricia Richards (Independent Person), left the meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that at the Full Council meeting held in July 2025, Members had resolved to extend the contracts of the current Independent Persons to September 2026, whilst the Standards Committee reviewed the mechanism of recruitment in order to broaden the scope to appoint future independent persons.

The Monitoring Officer explained that in his experience at SBC and other nearby Councils, the role was not widely applied for and urged caution that as the roles were not easy to appoint to, Members may wish to consider how much resource they used to find interested parties. He suggested approaching independent persons at other Kent Councils to gauge interest, in the first instance, and then following up with advertisements to attract further candidates if that was not successful.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Supported the Monitoring Officer's idea to approach other known independent persons and should not waste money on adverts that may not receive a response;
- suggested an advert published on social media and Inside Swale?;
- sought clarification on how the role was ordinarily advertised;
- suggested displaying an advert on the SBC website; and
- suggested sending emails to organisations such as Swale Community & Voluntary Services.

Members agreed the Monitoring Officer should contact independent persons at other Councils in the first instance and then explore the free options suggested by Members, and report back to a future meeting.

Resolved:

(1) The verbal update was noted by Members.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel