

MINUTES

Meeting date: Monday 11 December 2023

IN ATTENDANCE IN PERSON

Members:

- Paul Walker (Convener)
- Ashleigh Dunn
- Suzanne Vestri
- Helen Donaldson

Executive Team Members:

- Lorna Johnston (Executive Director)
- Richard Wilson (Case Manager)

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE ONLINE

- Anne-Marie O'Hara

ITEM	CONTENT	ACTION
STANDING ITEMS		
1.	<p>APOLOGIES Not applicable.</p> <p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST No declarations of interest were made.</p>	
2.	<p>MATTERS ARISING Members noted that all matters arising, as noted, were complete with one item ongoing.</p>	
CONSENT ITEMS		
3.	<p>DRAFT MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING Members reviewed and approved the minute of the meeting on 13 November 2023.</p>	
4.	<p>ANNUAL REVIEW OF RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY Members undertook their annual review of the Standards Commission's Risk Management Policy and agreed some minor changes to the wording. Members asked the Executive Team to publish the revised version of the policy on the website.</p>	Executive Team
5.	<p>REVIEW OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT PLAN Members noted that the annual progress update review of the records management plan had been submitted to National Records of Scotland on 23 November 2023. A small number of updates had been made to the plan, mostly to remove references to paper records and to update the document retention schedule. It was anticipated that a response would be received from National Records of Scotland in approximately three months' time.</p> <p>Members noted that, in the meantime, the updated records management plan would be published on the Standards Commission's website.</p>	Executive Team
STRATEGIC MATTERS		
6.	<p>ETHICAL STANDARDS COMMISSIONER'S DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2024/28 Members noted that the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) sent an initial draft of his Strategic Plan for 2024/28 to the Standards Commission for comment in early November 2023. Members noted that the majority of changes suggested by the Standards Commission had been accepted and incorporated into the consultation version issued to stakeholders.</p> <p>Members undertook a formal review of consultation version of the plan. Members agreed that the plan was comprehensive and, in particular, welcomed the clear description of the link</p>	

	<p>between conduct and public trust, and the emphasis on this being fundamental to a well-functioning democracy. Members were also pleased to note the emphasis on stakeholder engagement and the focus on timely and high-quality investigative work. Members asked the Executive Director to revert formally to the ESC with this feedback.</p>	Executive Team
7.	<p>PROMOTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK AND UPDATE ON OUTREACH WORK Members noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Executive Director had presented on the Model Code to Members of Clackmannanshire Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board on 29 November 2023. Ms O’Hara had attended the session as an observer, as part of her induction. • The Executive Director and Case Manager were due to present on the Model Code to Members of the Judicial Appointments Board on 18 December 2023. • The Executive Director and Case Manager had been asked to present on the Model Code to Members of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and on the Councillors’ Code to elected members of Argyll & Bute Council in the new calendar year (dates yet to be confirmed). • It was proposed that the Executive Director and Case Manager would be presenting webinars for councillors, in conjunction with the Improvement Service, on assisting constituents and social media, respectively, on 16 January and 2 February 2024. <p>Members further noted that the Executive Director had been invited to give evidence on the Standards Commission’s Annual Report for 2022/23 at the Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee meeting on 12 December 2023.</p> <p>Members noted that they were due to attend a session with the SPCB, at its meeting on 21 December 2023 to discuss the Standards Commission’s priorities, any issues, and its new strategic plan. Other topics to be discussed included the overall officeholder landscape, funding, shared services and any new functions. Members noted that the Executive Team had circulated a briefing note covering these matters.</p> <p>The Convener noted that he had met with an organisation working to assist armed forces veterans to consider a career in politics, and advised that he had suggested that training on ethical standards should be an important aspect of any such initiative.</p>	
8.	<p>CONSULTATION ON DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN 2024/28 Members noted that the Executive Team had sent the draft Strategic Plan for 2024/28 to the ESC on 14 November 2023. The ESC replied with some suggestions, which were incorporated into the plan. The amended draft plan was then published on the Standards Commission’s website and issued to the consultees on 20 November 2023.</p> <p>Members noted that all feedback received to date had been positive. Members asked the Executive Team to circulate any further feedback received, and to suggest any changes to be made in light of this, for consideration at the next meeting in January 2024.</p>	Executive Team
BUSINESS MATTERS		
9.	<p>DECEMBER 2023 STANDARDS UPDATE Members noted that the next Standards Update would be circulated by email for approval before being issued and published, as proposed, on 18 December 2023.</p>	Executive Team
10.	<p>QUARTER THREE REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2023/24 Members reviewed the progress made to date in the first three quarters against the actions outlined in the Business Plan for 2023/24. Members were pleased to note the majority of tasks identified had been completed or progressed.</p>	Executive Team

	Members noted that some new activities have been added to the plan as a result of suggestions made at the Monitoring Officers' workshop. Members agreed that these would be carried over to the plan for 2024/25, if time constraints prevented them from being completed before the year-end.	
11.	<p>PROPOSED MEETING DATES FOR 2024/25</p> <p>Members noted that, at their meeting on 13 November 2023, it had been agreed that the number of Standards Commission 'Board' meetings should be reduced from 10 per annum to six, from the start of the 2024/25.</p> <p>Members agreed that the six Commission meetings be held in May, July, September, December, January and March, to tie in with the dates and work of the Audit & Risk and Human Resources committees. Members further agreed that the other dates already scheduled, in April, June, November and February, could then be used for training and themed development sessions or for discussions.</p> <p>Members agreed that the Standards Commission meetings in April, June, December and February would be held in person. The remaining meetings would be held online, with the one in September being held in public (via a livestream). Members asked the Executive Team to circulate a revised schedule of meetings to reflect this.</p>	Executive Team
12.	<p>DRAFTING OF BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25</p> <p>Members noted that the Executive Team would start drafting a Business Plan for 2024/25 at the beginning of the new calendar year. Members agreed to email the Executive Team with any suggested actions to be included in the draft plan.</p>	Members
CASES UPDATE		
13.	<p>REPORTS FROM THE ESC & SECTION 14 LETTERS</p> <p>(a) LA/ED/3832: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about an East Dunbartonshire councillor.</p> <p>(b) LA/G/3846: Members noted that a 'do neither' decision had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Glasgow City councillor.</p> <p>(c) LA/AN/3822: Members noted that they were due to make a decision on a report received from the ESC about an Angus councillor.</p> <p>(d) LA/G/3816: Members noted that they were due to make a decision on a report received from the ESC about a Glasgow City councillor.</p> <p>(e) LA/Mo/3857: Members noted that that they were due to make a decision on a report received from the ESC about a Moray councillor.</p>	
14.	<p>CASES</p> <p>(a) LA/WL/3790: Members noted that a Hearing was held on 30 November 2023. The Respondent was found not to have breached the Councillors' Code.</p> <p>(b) LA/AC/3812: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place online on 17 January 2024.</p> <p>(c) LA/NA/3707: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 26 January 2024 at the Council Chambers, Irvine.</p>	

	<p>(d) LA/H/3759: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place on 6 February 2024 at the Council Headquarters, Inverness.</p> <p>(e) LA/WL/3698: Members noted that a Hearing was scheduled to take place at the West Lothian Civic Centre, Livingston on 16 February 2024.</p> <p>(f) LA/H/3838: Members noted that a decision to hold a Hearing had been made on a report received from the ESC about a Highland councillor. The Hearing was scheduled to take place online on 1 March 2024.</p>	
15.	<p>INVESTIGATIONS EXCEEDING 3 MONTHS – INTERIM REPORTS</p> <p>(a) LA/E/3865: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a City of Edinburgh Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p>(b) LA/S/3867: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Stirling Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p>(c) LA/DG/3817: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor had taken more than three months to investigate.</p> <p>(d) LA/R/3886: Members noted the contents of an interim report from the ESC advising that an investigation into a complaint about two Renfrewshire Councillors had taken more than three months to investigate.</p>	
16.	<p>FEEDBACK INCLUDING ANY HEARINGS SURVEY RESPONSES</p> <p>None received.</p>	
ANY OTHER BUSINESS		
17.	<p>TRAVEL TO HEARINGS</p> <p>Members agreed that Panel Members should liaise with each other about their travel arrangements to Hearings, for example to determine whether they could car share (if public transport was not a viable option).</p> <p>ANY EMERGING RISKS</p> <p>None identified.</p> <p>RECORDING AVAILABILITY</p> <p>It was agreed that the Executive Team would circulate protocol indicating how Members should mark their availability on a shared calendar.</p> <p>AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING</p> <p>Members agreed to advise the Executive Director of any items to be included in the agenda for discuss at the next meeting.</p>	<p>Executive Team</p> <p>Members</p>
18.	<p>2023 DIARY DATES AND WORKPLAN</p> <p>Members noted the diary dates and ongoing workplan.</p> <p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>Members noted that the next meeting of the Standards Commission was scheduled to take place in the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday, 30 January 2024.</p>	