

Governance Committee

23 November 2020

Governance and Standards Committees

Report by Director of Law and Assurance

Electoral division: Not applicable

Summary

The Standards Committee met on 2 November 2020. It raised the question of merging the Governance and Standards Committees and is inviting the Governance Committee to consider whether there is any merit in such a proposal.

Recommendation

That the Committee considers whether work should be carried out to explore a potential merger of the Governance and Standards Committees for consideration by the Committee at a future meeting.

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 At a meeting of the Standards Committee on 2 November 2020, it was noted that Worthing Borough Council had recently merged its Governance and Standards Committees. The Standards Committee resolved to ask the Governance Committee to consider this as a possible option for the County Council.
- 1.2 The Governance Committee oversees the County Council's constitution, political management arrangements, including membership and terms of reference of committees, the scope of delegations to officers and member allowances. It is responsible for electoral arrangements, including boundary reviews, which are carried out by its advisory Electoral Review Panel.
- 1.3 It is also responsible for many non-executive functions on human resources, particularly the terms and conditions of staff. This includes the consideration of the annual pay policy statement and other corporate HR policies. It oversees the appointment of executive directors through the Appointing Committee. It oversees staff dismissal and grievances policies and hears final appeals against dismissal or grievances through the Board of Appeal. It also oversees the arrangements for the governance of pension scheme administration, mostly exercised through the Pensions Committee.
- 1.4 The County Council's Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members. It

oversees the Code of Conduct, which includes rules on the register and declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality, rules on probity in planning and the protocol on member and officer relations. It appoints sub-committees to consider any complaints about member conduct received by the Council's Monitoring Officer. The Committee is advised by two independent persons who will be involved in the individual consideration of complaints about member conduct and can also advise the Committee more generally.

- 1.5 Both committees are chaired and vice-chaired by the County Chairman and County Vice-Chairman respectively. For the Governance Committee, this is in view of the Chairman's apolitical role in having an overview of governance arrangements in the Council, ahead of any changes to the Constitution going to full Council for decision. For the Standards Committee, this is because of the Chairman's role as the most senior member of the Council having a duty to promote high standards of conduct amongst members of the Council.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to consider whether any work should be done to explore any benefits or risks from the potential merger of the two committees.
- 2.2 Neighbouring East Sussex, Hampshire, Kent and Surrey County Councils currently have separate Governance (or equivalent) and Standards committees.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 The Committee may choose to commission a report into a potential merger or may not choose to do so.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 No consultation has been taken, but this would be done if a report is commissioned. The views of the Independent Persons who advise the Standards Committee would be considered.

5 Finance

- 5.1 None.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Reputational risks by loss of a stand-alone Standards Committee.	Risk to be considered as part of any work commissioned.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 Not applicable.

Tony Kershaw

Director of Law and Assurance

Contact Officer: Charles Gauntlett, 033 022 22524
charles.gauntlett@westsussex.gov.uk

Background papers - None