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## STANDARDS COMMITTEE AGENDA

**Membership:** Councillor Wilson (Chairman)

Councillors Redsull, Crellin, Payter, Raines, Mrs Shimbart, Turner and Wade

**Meeting:** Standards Committee

**Date:** Wednesday 7 December 2022

**Time:** 5.00 pm

**Venue:** Hurstwood Room, Public Service Plaza

The business to be transacted is set out below:

Kim Sawyer  
Chief Executive

29 November 2022

Contact Officer: Emma Carlyle 02392 446151  
Email: [emma.carlyle@havant.gov.uk](mailto:emma.carlyle@havant.gov.uk)

	Page
<b>1 Apologies for absence</b>	
To receive and record any apologies for absence.	
<b>2 Declarations of Interest</b>	
To receive and record any declarations of interest.	
<b>3 Approval of the previous minutes</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022.	
<b>4 Guidance for Councillors on dealing with abuse and intimidation</b>	<b>3 - 10</b>
Report number: HBC/097/2022 enclosed for decision.	

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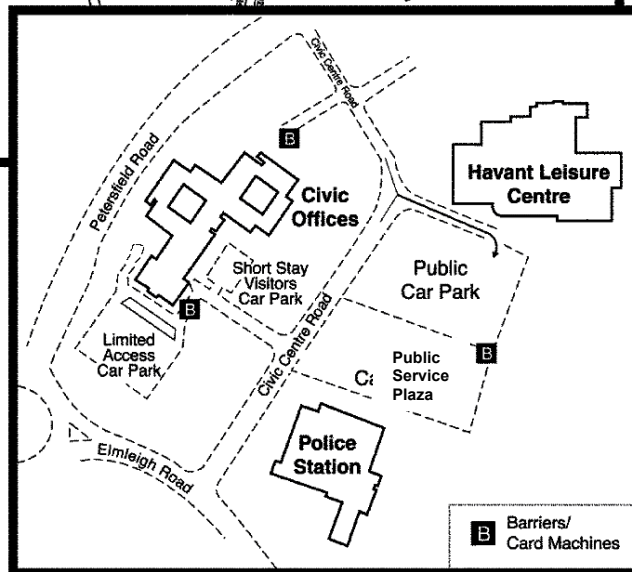
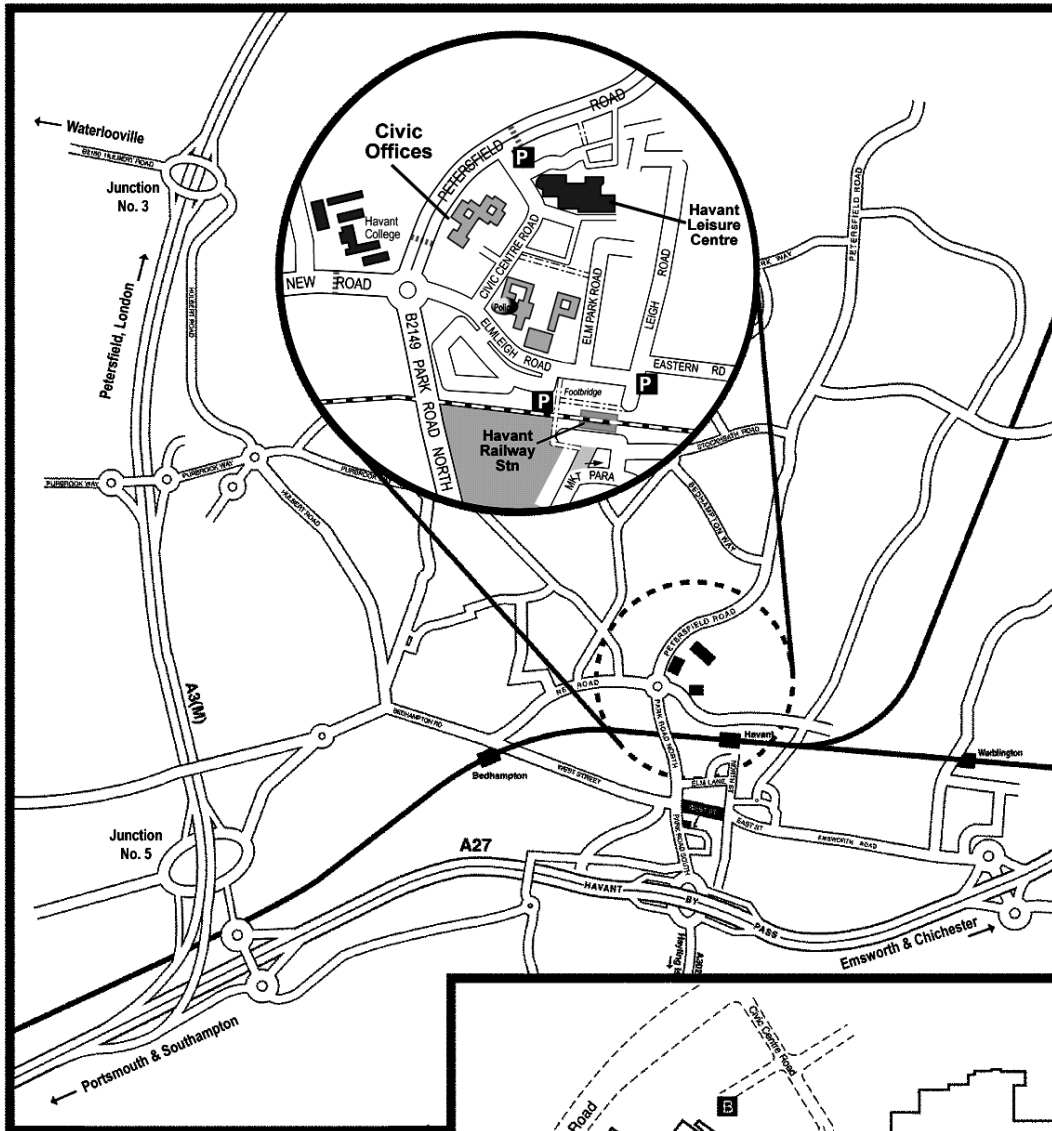
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## HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Standards Committee held on 3 November 2022

Present

Councillors Wilson (Chairman), Crellin, Payter, Raines, Mrs Shimbart, Turner and Wade.

In Attendance

Councillor A Rennie.

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Crellin and Raines declared an interest in Item 5 on the Agenda and undertook to leave the meeting for that item.

### **3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were approved as a correct record.

### **4 Constitution Changes - Coastal work with third parties and electronic signatures**

The Committee noted a report on proposed constitutional changes in relation to working for third parties and the use of electronic signatures.

The Leader introduced the report and said that it was important that the council become increasingly commercially focused in the future. It was being hampered by the current provision in the Constitution where the total value of new work for third parties could not exceed £50k. An example of the need for change was the position of the Coastal Service. The opportunity for growth in this area was being hampered by this provision as it was anticipated that the future would provide more opportunities for growth through wider sharing of experience and supporting other public authorities.

Whilst the recommendation was to increase the financial limit set out within the rule concerned to £250k, the rest of the rule would remain unchanged. This meant that any potential arrangement above the new threshold or where the Chief Finance Officer had concerns over risk, would be referred to Cabinet for decision. Cabinet were very supportive of the suggested change.

In reply to questions, from the Committee the following points were made:

- That this change would not be limited to one Service, but that other Services were not currently in a position to undertake larger contracts for third party clients.
- That the change had been proposed in order to ensure that the Service did not lose any contracts. Contracts that were taken on would be risk assessed throughout the process. Any contract between the £100k and £250k amounts would be discussed on an operational level with the Chief Finance Officer, the Section 151 Officer and the Portfolio Holder.

The Committee went on to discuss the matter of electronic signatures. The Monitoring Officer said that the recent pandemic had led to changes in working practices with a significant increase in remote working and an even greater reliance on electronic practices. It had become necessary to accept and formally recognise the validity of electronic signatures on documents such as contracts, deeds, minutes and resolutions.

RESOLVED That the Committee recommend to Council that:

- 2.1 The value contained within Financial Procedure Rule G143 in Part 3 Section G be raised to £250K; and
- 2.2 Amendments be made to the Constitution relating to the use of electronic signatures, as per the wording set out in paragraph 3.2.4 of the report.

## **5 Councillor Code of Conduct Complaints**

Councillor Crellin and Councillor Raines left the meeting.

The Committee noted the report.

**The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and concluded at 5.30 pm**

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NON EXEMPT

## HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022

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### Guidance for Councillors on dealing with abuse and intimidation

#### FOR DECISION

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Tony Denton

**Monitoring Officer:** Mark Watkins

**Key Decision:** No

**Report Number:** [HBC/097/2022]

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#### 1. Purpose

This report seeks a decision to establish a working group of this Committee, with a view to developing recommendations and investigating issues of interest relevant to the above topic.

#### 2. Recommendation

The Standards Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to:

Establish, with immediate effect, a working group to be known as the Safety and Wellbeing of Councillors Working Group in accordance with the terms of reference appended at Appendix 1 of this Report.

#### 3. Executive Summary & Background.

- 3.1. Havant Borough Council's Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected from amongst their local community and forming a vital link between councils and residents. However, increasing levels of abuse and intimidation in political and public discourse are negatively impacting politicians and democracy at both local and national levels.

- 3.2. Although constructive challenge is a key component of democracy, abuse and intimidation cross the line into unacceptable behaviour and serve to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics.
- 3.3. There is a considerable volume of evidence of the impact of abuse, intimidation, and aggression at a national level, including extreme incidents such as the murders of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP.
- 3.4. To understand the impacts on local government and councillors, the LGA launched a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors in October 2021. This report summarises the findings and also details what more, according to the LGA, could be done to improve support moreover to reverse these worrying national trends which are so harmful to democracy.

The following themes were identified in the responses to the call for evidence:

- a. Variability of support – The support offered by councils, political parties, and the police varied across the country. In particular, respondents identified a lack of proactive support from some councils and responses from some police forces to threats made against councillors and their families.
- b. Targeted abuse – Evidence from the qualitative responses indicated that councillors and candidates with protected characteristics were more likely to receive personalised abuse. Misogyny, racism and homophobia were particularly highlighted in the responses.
- c. Personal and democratic impacts – Abuse and intimidation can significantly impact councillors and their families, and the wider community. Several respondents described the negative impacts of ongoing abuse on their mental health and wellbeing. In addition, respondents supported the idea that abuse can impact councillors' willingness to stand for re-election or deter others from considering standing for public office.
- d. Vulnerability of councillors – Many respondents highlighted the visibility and accessibility of councillors in their local community, particularly when councillors' home addresses are available online. Councillors are therefore vulnerable to physical abuse, particularly compared to national politicians who may have greater protections and access to specialist police support.
- e. Normalisation – There is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised. Attitudes around councillors



expecting abuse and being expected to manage abuse with little support were prevalent in the responses

- 3.5. This report suggests that councils should now take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against elected members. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously
- 3.6. In terms of how a council might go about considering the detail of this topic moreover working up some recommendations, a number of other councils' committees have utilised the "working group approach". This has been found to greatly assist with and develop policy and or guidance. The holding of these meetings has proven to be popular as a mechanism to allow greater time for issues to be considered and discussed by Members in detail, outside of the formal Committee setting and allowing for an outcomes report and recommendations being submitted for consideration to formal meetings. It should be noted that there is also the option with such groups to hold meetings by remote means as opposed to in person bringing with it the added flexibility that this also affords.
- 3.7. It is recommended that a selection of Committee Members (and other individuals and officers – see Appendix 1) are involved with the working group itself who then proceed to undertake the work required, in accordance with the Term of Reference (again – see Appendix 1).

#### **4. Additional Budgetary Implications**

- 4.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **5. Options considered**

- 5.1. Do nothing and not to establish any such working group thereby giving no further consideration to the subject matter concerned. However, it is hoped that Members will welcome the background and key considerations detailed in this Report when determining if they wish to establish a group.

#### **6. Resource Implications**

- 6.1. Financial Implications:
  - i. None

**Section 151 Officer comments**

Date: 29 November 2022

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

**6.2. Human Resources Implications**

- i. None

**6.3. Information Governance Implications**

- i. None

**6.4. Other resource implications**

- i. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report other than to make reference to the fact that holding meetings including that of the Officer Support Group (see TOR in Appendix 1) has a consequential impact on staffing, placing demands on officer time and resources.

**7. Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications.

**Monitoring Officer comments**

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022

In addition to the comment made throughout this Report, it should be noted that working groups do not have to comply with political proportionality requirements. Committee will need to approve specific terms of reference and membership, which may include invited persons holding relevant expertise or knowledge and Members who are not members of the parent committee.

**8. Risks**

- 8.1. There are no direct risks arising from this report.

**9. Climate & Environment Implications**

- 9.1. None

**10. Consultation**

10.1. Consultation has already been had with the Leader and Chair of Standards Committee

**11. Appendices**

Proposed Terms of Reference

**12. Background papers**

None

Agreed and signed off by:

Monitoring Officer: Mark Watkins – 29th November 2022  
Section 151 Officer: Malcolm Coe – 29th November 2022

**Contact Officer**

Name: Mark Watkins

Job Title: Monitoring Officer

Telephone: 07403 020 255

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# Safety and Wellbeing of Councillors Working Group

## Terms of Reference

The Safety and Wellbeing of Councillors Working Group will be convened as an advisory group to Standards Committee and will consist of a cross party working group. It is not part of the formal decision making process and will be supported by the Officer Working Group, the Monitoring Officer and Cabinet. It is anticipated that the Group will make regular recommendations to Standards Committee for consideration in accordance with and limited to its terms of reference as below.

Meetings may be held in private or public

**Composition: A maximum of 14 members at any one time consisting of:**

- Chair of Standards Committee (who shall be Chairman and who shall have a casting vote, as required) (Deputy Chair of Standards Committee to chair where the Chairman is not available)
- Representation from the independent member(s)
- Representation from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Representation from other members not part of any group
- The Chair may invite external representatives who may have certain expertise relevant to the topics of consideration and who are not elected Members, to join for defined purposes.

**Quorum:** a minimum of 6 members

**Meetings:** as frequently as considered necessary

**Timing:** As arranged by the officer working group

**Venue:** The Plaza

**Reports to:** Standards Committee in relation to matters falling within its scope and remit

**Administration:** Democratic & Electoral Services

**Expenditure:** Nil

**Scope and Remit**

- a) Review suggestions, proposals, and input on the subject area from the Officer Working Group; and
- b) Develop guidance and policy on the prevention of and handling abuse and intimidation (whether in person or across social media) against councillors which should address the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing; and

- c) Any other work required to be undertaken as requested by Standards Committee; and
- d) The Working Group shall make recommendations to the Council's Standards Committee

**Meetings**

The Working Group shall meet as frequently as considered necessary.

**Recommendations**

The Working Group shall only be permitted to make recommendations to Standards Committee in relation to matters falling within its scope and remit.

**Administration**

The Working Group shall be administered and supported by the Democratic & Electoral Services and the Monitoring Officer