



DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
STANDARDS SUB-COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2023-24

1 Introduction

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a statutory framework for standards in local authorities.

In accordance with this legislation, Dartmoor National Park Authority maintains a Standards sub-committee, constituted from the Authority's Audit & Governance Committee.

2 Annual Report

This Annual Report concerns the work of the Standards sub-committee for the period from 27 May 2023 to 22 May 2024*.

The purpose of the Annual Report is to summarise the activities of the sub-committee, including:

- (a) considering and determining Code of Conduct complaints against Members;
- (b) promoting high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority; and
- (c) assisting Members of the Authority to observe the Code of Conduct.

** the annual report is correct as of 22 May 2024 and Members of the Committee will be updated regarding any issues that may occur after this date at the meeting and the annual report amended accordingly.*

3 Membership

The Standards sub-committee comprises:

- Six Members of the Audit & Governance Committee (as re-affirmed at the Annual Authority meeting held on 30 June 2023), of whom at least two shall be Members appointed by a local authority.
 - Mr Cooper, Mr Dracup, Mr Harper, Mrs Morgan (Chair), Mr Nutley, Mr Renders, Mr Sanders and Ms Woods
- Up to three co-opted persons, as approved by the Authority, who shall have the right to receive the agenda and papers for meetings of the sub-committee, and to attend and participate at meetings of the sub-committee, but not to vote on any issue:
 - None

The Independent Person(s) appointed by the Authority pursuant to s.27(7) Localism Act 2011 are invited to attend meetings of the sub-committee and participate, but the legislation does not allow them to be a member or co-opted member of the sub-committee, nor are they entitled to vote on any issue.

4 Role

The terms of reference for the Standards sub-committee are set by the Authority as follows:

- *to promote high standards of conduct by Members and officers;*
- *to advise the Authority on the adoption of a Code of Conduct pursuant to s.27(2) Localism Act 2011*
- *to assist Members to observe the Code of Conduct*
- *to consider and determine complaints against Members under the Code of Conduct*

Standing Orders also state that without prejudice to its general functions, the Standards sub-committee shall have the following specific duties:

- (a) to monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct;*
- (b) to advise, train and arrange to train Members on matters relating to the Code of Conduct;*
- (c) to promote high standards of conduct within the Authority, through observation, advice and training;*
- (d) to monitor complaints alleging non-compliance with the Code of Conduct*
- (e) to hear and determine allegations of non-compliance with the Code of Conduct, as requested by the Monitoring Officer*
- (f) to consider and advise on other matters relating to conduct, ethics and propriety as requested by the Monitoring Officer;*

5 Independent Persons

The appointed Independent Persons for the Authority are currently Mrs Catherine Shewan and Ms Corinne Farrell.

6 Monitoring Officer

The Authority's Monitoring Officer is Neil White, Head of Organisational Development. The Monitoring Officer is appointed by Members under section 5 of the Local Government Act 2000, and in respect of his duties as Monitoring Officer is accountable directly to Members.

The Monitoring Officer has a statutory duty to report to the Authority on any proposal, decision, or omission by the Authority, or a committee or sub-committee or an officer of the Authority, which has given rise to, as is likely or would give rise to:

- (1) a contravention of law or any code of practice made or approved by or under an enactment; or*
- (2) maladministration or injustice... in connection with action taken by or on behalf of the Authority, in the exercise of the Authority's administrative functions.*

The Monitoring Officer also has an important role in advising on governance arrangements, ensuring probity, upholding standards in public life and in particular

advising Members on issues arising in connection with Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation, declaration of interests and the Code of Conduct.

7 Activity

There have been no formal complaints under the Code of Conduct.

The Independent Persons have continued the practice of attending meetings of the Authority and its committees as an observer. This brings benefits, both in introducing the Independent Persons to Members and officers and providing some useful feedback on behaviour observed at meetings.

The Standards sub-committee has met on one occasion since 26 May 2023, on 3 November 2023. The meeting was well attended; the Monitoring Officer reported on the Annual Member Workshop held in September 2023 and a separate discussion of the Chairs Advisory Group regarding Member engagement, Member appraisals and expectations with the following actions agreed:

- *To review the Member appraisal process (ongoing)*
- *To update the list of Link Member for PCs (completed)*
- *To promote the value of the Working Panels to all Members (completed)*
- *To review Member induction to ensure we are clear in terms of expectations (to be completed)*

The Monitoring Officer also reported on the observation reports which are completed by the Independent Persons and considered at each meeting of the sub-committee.

Following a recommendation by external audit, the Monitoring Officer has undertaken a review of the Members Code of Conduct. A new Code of Conduct has been drafted and will be presented to the Authority for consideration on Friday 28 June 2024.

8 Advice & Training

All Members are encouraged to seek advice whenever they are unsure about a possible pecuniary, personal or prejudicial interest, as well as any suggestion that they might be disqualified from participation in an item of business by pre-determination (having a closed mind).

9 Future Work

The Standards sub-committee will meet twice annually, normally on the same date as a meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee in May and November each year. The particular focus for 2024/25 will be:

- (a) continuing with a programme of observations at meetings
- (b) promoting high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority
- (c) support the implementation of the new Members' Code of Conduct (subject to Authority approval)
- (d) complete the review and introduction of a new Member appraisal process

Sally Morgan
Chair 2023/24