

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2022

PRESENT: Independent Members

Mr John R Jones (Chair)
Dr Thomas Rhys Davies (Vice-Chair)
Mrs Gill Murgatroyd
Mrs Sharon Warnes

Representing the County Council

Councillor Trefor Lloyd Hughes MBE
Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas

IN ATTENDANCE: Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer
Human Resources Training Manager (MW) (for Item 3)
Committee Officer (SC)

APOLOGIES: Mrs Celyn Menai Edwards (Independent Member)

The Chair welcomed all those present to the meeting. He extended a warm welcome to Councillors Trefor Lloyd Hughes MBE and Councillor Dafydd Rhys Thomas, returning Members on the Standards Committee. He also extended his best wishes to Councillor Keith Roberts, a former member of the Standards Committee, in his new role as an Elected Member.

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING

The draft minutes of the Standards Committee held on 15 December 2021 were confirmed as correct, subject to the following:-

Matters arising from the minutes of 15 December 2021:-

- Agreed that the Monitoring Officer circulate an updated Action Log to the Committee as soon as possible after today's meeting.
- The Monitoring Officer confirmed that Mr Richard Penn has forwarded his recommendations to Welsh Government and a National Consultation will begin in the Autumn with regard to proposals arising from Mr Penn's review.

- The Committee expressed concern that only fourteen Elected Members had produced annual reports last year, despite support being provided by the Council and despite the encouragement of the Standards Committee.

It was therefore decided to invite the Business Manager for Democratic Services to the next formal meeting of the Standards Committee to discuss the support which the Council provides to Members, what process and timing will be for producing and publishing Members' Annual Reports and what more the Standards Committee might do to encourage the practice.

RESOLVED to invite the Business Manager for Democratic Services to attend the next formal meeting of the Standards Committee to discuss the support the Council can provide to Members in terms of preparing Members' Annual Reports.

Action: See Resolution above

- In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that no trends were currently detectable, owing to the very few complaints filed against Elected Members in recent years.
- The Committee's Chair and Vice Chair will be attending the Town and Community Council Forum in September and they will discuss the content of the Newsletter, to include possible discussion about extending the local resolution protocol and informal monitoring of proceedings, to Town and Community Councils.

3. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

The Human Resources Training Manager (HRTM) reported on the Induction Programme available to Elected Members between the election period and the end of June 2022. She reported that it has been a very busy period for new Members, with 23 induction/training sessions having been held.

The HRTM referred to the Elected Members' Development programme that has been compiled, and is based on the Welsh Local Government Association Framework, which runs from the initial Induction date to the end of June with a follow up plan arranged for July to October. The Plan has been amended since being first published due to the Scrutiny sessions being rescheduled.

It was noted that there may be an opportunity for Elected Members/lay members/members of the Standards Committee who may have missed a particular training session to attend at a future date. Details of attendance at arranged training sessions over the Induction period will be complete by the end of July.

Members will have access to training information electronically on the Elected Members' Dashboard within Learning Pool. Training modules available from the "WLGA" will be made available via the Authority's online portal, Learning Pool as well as information being included in the Members' Induction Bulletin.

The Monitoring Officer reported that Data Management and Cyber Awareness training are mandatory for Council staff, Elected Members and Co-opted members. Concerns were expressed that some members do not appear to be attending mandatory training sessions. It was therefore suggested that the HRTM provide the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee with current data on training, for the purpose of attending a Group Leaders' meeting to discuss mandatory training.

It was noted that training sessions will continue to be held virtually for now. It was further noted that the possibility of recording in house training sessions will also be explored, as well as developing a hybrid method of training delivery in future.

RESOLVED:-

- **To note the content of the Plan.**
- **That the HRTM will use best endeavours to provide current data on attendance at mandatory training by Members to the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee prior to their attendance at the next Group Leaders' meeting to share general compliance data with the Group and separate data for each Group Leader concerning compliance with mandatory training within each individual Group.**
- **That the Monitoring Officer, HRTM, Head of Audit and Scrutiny Manager notify HR as to which sessions shall be mandatory for the non-elected Committee Members.**
- **That the HRTM will make enquiries to establish whether or not it might be feasible for in-house trainers to record their sessions and make them digitally available to Members.**

Action: See Resolution above

4. CONDUCT COMPLAINTS TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

Submitted - a report by the Monitoring Officer in the form of an updated matrix on quarterly complaints received by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in relation to (a) County Councillors, and (b) Town/Community Councillors.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the PSOW received one complaint against a County Councillor from a member of the public between October - December 2021 (Q3), which the PSOW decided not to investigate. No complaints were received against a County Councillor between January 2022 – March 2022 (Q4).

It was noted that one complaint was presented to the PSOW against a Town Councillor during Quarter 3, 2021, and the investigation is ongoing. One complaint was also received against a Town Councillor for Quarter 4, which the PSOW rejected following an investigation.

RESOLVED:-

- **To note the contents of Enclosures 1-4.**

- **That the Monitoring Officer distributes Enclosures 1-4 to Elected and Co-opted members of the Council, and members of the Town and Community Councils via the Newsletters.**

Action: See Resolution above

5. ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES DECISIONS

Submitted – a report by the Monitoring Officer summarising 4 decisions published by the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) since the Standards Committee’s last meeting on 16 December 2021.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the APW’s decisions will be included in the Newsletter to County Councillors and Newsletter to Town and Community Councillors.

The Monitoring Officer summarised the key issues and learning points from each of the reported cases, which were then discussed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- **To note the content of the case summaries.**
- **The Newsletter to County Councillors and Town and Community Councillors shall include links to the APW’s reported cases and the case summaries of learning points in this Agenda.**
- **That the Principles of Conduct in Public Life (being the Nolan Principles as adopted by Statute in Wales) shall be used as the primary focus of the next Newsletter.**

Action: See Resolution above

6. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Submitted - a report by the Monitoring Officer on the above.

The Monitoring Officer reported that under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act), the Standards Committee is required to prepare and publish an Annual Report, and present it to the full Council as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the last financial year. She stated that the Chair will submit the Committee’s first Statutory Annual Report to the full Council in September 2022.

The Monitoring Officer reported that there are specific requirements in the Act, as to what must be included in the Annual Report. She stated that the Standards Committee already complies with the criteria of the new legislation. It was noted that it will be a statutory requirement for all Standards Committees to present Annual Reports in future.

Points raised during discussion:-

- Where the number of complaints permits, any trends or patterns will be noted in the future. The recruitment of Town and Community Council members to the Standards Committee. The Monitoring Officer explained the procedure and timetable. If more than two nominations are received, then a postal ballot will follow with the choice being made by the Town and Community Councils and sign off via a report to full Council in December 2022.
- In light of the new statutory duty on group leaders with regard to the conduct of members of their group, next year's Standards Committee Report will address how the Group Leaders have addressed their new duty and how the Standards Committee has supported them in so doing; including arranging training in the discharge of the new duty.
- The consultation has now closed in relation to the draft guidance on the new statutory duty. When the final version is published, we should be looking further at how the Standards Committee is to train/support the Group Leaders.

RESOLVED:-

- **To approve the Standards Committee's Annual Report, subject to minor changes agreed during discussion.**
- **That the Standards Committee's Annual Report be presented to the County Council in September 2022.**

Action: See Resolution above

7. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23

The Standards Committee's Draft Work Programme was submitted for discussion.

- In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer explained that it would not be possible to attach specific deadlines to the Committee's annual work programme. This is because many of its statutory responsibilities, like conducting hearings upon referral from the PSOW, or deciding dispensation applications, depend upon the referrals or applications being made by others. Once that has happened, there are timetables set out within the processes that have been published by the Standards Committee. Other matters, such as local resolution, are also reactive as are government consultations, and the fixing of the National Standards Forum and meetings with Group Leaders.
- Informal meetings had already been agreed with the Chair and Vice-Chair and an invitation circulated by committees to the Standards Committee Members to discuss, at the first meeting, the content of the newsletters and the pro-forma to be used for the informal monitoring of Committee Meetings. The second informal meeting of the Standards Committee had been arranged to discuss the draft local resolution protocol. The draft of the Committee Pro-forma and the local resolution protocol have both been shared with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.
- With regard to observing proceedings, it was agreed that a timetable will need to be set out and that can be discussed at the informal meeting together with how and when the Committee Members will report back.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer update the Standards Committee on its programme of work and its action log in advance of formal meetings and that the work programme, action log and “housekeeping” issues shall be discussed in informal meetings to be arranged prior to the Standards Committee’s formal meetings. This will be in addition to the usual briefing meetings for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Action: See Resolution as above

The meeting concluded at 4.00 pm

**MR JOHN R JONES
CHAIR**