

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025

PRESENT: **Independent Members**

Mr Trefor Owen (Chair)
Mr Brace Griffiths (Vice-Chair)
Mr T Rhys Davies
Mr John R Jones
Mrs Gill Murgatroyd

Representing the County Council

Councillor Dafydd R Thomas

Representing Town and Community Councils

Councillor Iorwerth Roberts (from 10:25 am)

IN ATTENDANCE: Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer (MY)
HR Learning and Development Manager (EP) (for Item 5)
Scrutiny Manager (for Item 3)
Assistant Human Resources Training Officer (LT) (for Item 5)
Committee Officer (SC)

APOLOGIES: None

The Chair paid tribute to Mrs Sharon Warnes, a former independent member of the Standards Committee, who sadly passed away recently. He stated that Mrs Warnes had been a member of the Standards Committee between December 2019 and January 2024 and had worked tirelessly for the Committee during this period. The Chair expressed his condolences and those of the Committee to her family.

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was received.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING

The draft minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 6 February 2025 were presented and confirmed as correct.

The Chair reported that the Committee has recently received a copy of actions undertaken on the minutes. He confirmed that the actions points have either been implemented or are in hand to be acted upon.

The draft minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Standards Committee held on 26 February 2025 were presented and confirmed as correct.

3. DEMOCRATIC SERVICES UPDATE

Submitted – a report by the Head of Democratic Services on the governance work that has been undertaken by Democratic Services.

The Scrutiny Manager gave an update on the democratic improvement plan, which has been developed to address democratic matters raised by the Standards Committee in its review of member registers. The plan was shared with the Committee last year, followed by an update in February this year.

It was noted that 15 of the 20 actions included in the plan have now been completed. Of the 5 that remain, two are continuous. The three actions remaining are: -

1. To provide the option for members to complete the standing register of interests in Mod.Gov in Welsh as well as English. Following a request to the software provider, this matter was considered low priority, as Anglesey is the only authority that has made such a request. Other local authorities in Wales do not allow direct access to members to use this facility. Therefore, the Council's officers will continue to offer to input information on behalf of members to mitigate any possible issues arising.
2. To provide the option for members to complete registrations of interest forms online, as well as paper copies. It was noted that the responses have been positive, with members completing their forms on time.
3. The issue of linking webcasts to agenda items has been completed.

It was suggested that the action point to complete the standing register of interests in Mod.Gov in Welsh and English be itemised on the Standards Committee Forum agenda, to get a broader picture of the situation in other local authorities across Wales. The Chair responded that he would be happy to raise this issue in a Forum meeting in due course.

The Scrutiny Manager reported that 22 elected members have completed their annual reports for 2024/25. Members were reminded to submit their reports by 6 June 2025, for publication by the end of June.

It was noted that members need to update any registers of interests within 28 working days of any change in circumstances. There is a separate additional register that must be completed for the purpose of finalising the Council's annual accounts.

Discussion focused on quarterly updates on member training and attendances for mandatory training, which are sent to group leaders for monitoring purposes. It was noted that information on elected members' training needs has been received from two of the four group leaders through the annual conversation process.

RESOLVED: -

- **To note the content of the report.**
- **That the Chair raises the issue of completing the standing register of interests bilingually on the next available Agenda of the National Standards Committee Forum.**

Action: See Resolution above

4. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Submitted - the report of the Human Resources Learning and Development Manager (HRLDM) on the training and development provision that has been offered to elected members since the Standards Committee's last meeting.

The HRLDM reported that 55 training and development opportunities have been offered to members since April 2023. She stated that this represents the Learning and Development Team's commitment to offer a wide variety of training to members. Emphasis was placed on completing mandatory training, where positive tendencies have been recorded. The updated figures include the following number of attendees: -

Health and Safety	35/35
Data Protection	33/35
Cybersecurity	35/35

The expectation continues to be that each member should complete the mandatory training sessions as a minimum. Over the next period, the focus will be on the titles with the lower completion numbers which include Equality and Safeguarding. It was noted that corporate training sessions on Equality will be convened on 2 and 8 July 2025.

The HRLDM reported that her staff will be working closely with Democratic Services to meet the training needs that will arise from the proposed changes to the local Scrutiny arrangements.

Discussion focused on the progress made in implementing Phase 1 of the Development Plan for Group Leaders. All group leaders have completed a DiSC (personality) Profile, and where relevant, have participated in a 1:1 analysis session with an external trainer.

Arrangements are in place to proceed to Phase 2 of the process, which includes a series of four bilingual formal coaching sessions, which will start next month.

The HRLDM highlighted that a great deal of useful information is available to members on the member dashboard on Learning Pool.

Concerns were expressed that some training sessions noted in Appendix 1 of the report had zero attendances. It was noted that no specific reasons could be attributed to this.

The Chair reported that he has asked for information on those members who have not completed mandatory training, so as to discuss with the relevant group leader(s) at their meetings later in the month.

RESOLVED that the independent members raise the issue of mandatory training with the group leaders of those members who have not completed each module.

Action: See Resolution above

(Councillor Iorwerth Roberts joined the meeting at 10:25 am)

5. CONDUCT COMPLAINTS TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW)

Submitted – the report of the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer on quarterly complaints received by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in relation to (a) County Councillors, and (b) Town and Community Councillors.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that two historic cases involving County Councillors were included in Enclosure 1, detailing matters referred to the PSOW during Quarter 4, 2024/25. No new matters were reported.

The PSOW had investigated the first complaint, received in August 2023, and referred the case to the Standards Committee for a local hearing, which was convened in May 2025. The second complaint against a County Councillor was received by the Ombudsman in February 2024 and is currently being investigated.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that two complaints were reported upon for Community Councillors during Quarter 4, 2024/25, one of which is historical and has been under investigation since January 2024. The Ombudsman has decided not to investigate the second complaint.

RESOLVED to note the content of Enclosures 1-2.

Action: None

6. DECISIONS BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

Submitted – a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer summarising the PSOW's published findings of Code of Conduct complaints in Wales between January and May 2025.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer raised the following points from the 11 cases that have been referred to the PSOW: -

- Llansteffan and Llanybri Community Council – the member failed to disclose a personal and prejudicial interest. It was apparent to the Ombudsman in her assessment of the case that the Councillor lacked experience and training;

there was no personal benefit for the individual; no harm had been caused to others; there was no intention to use his position to disadvantage others; had the member not been present at the meeting, the conclusion would not have been different. The member had accepted his failings, even though he was no longer a member. The circumstances of the complaint, and public benefit regarding the two step threshold fed into the Ombudsman's decision in this case.

- Flintshire County Council and Saltney Town Council – the member had breached the Code by not expressing an interest when requesting sandbags in an emergency situation involving flooding. The Ombudsman considered that the Councillor had breached the Code as he had not expressed an interest. Had he done so, that might have led to a different breach of the Code, such as using his influence to get the sandbags. This was an emergency situation, and members should not rely on the outcome of this case.
- Monmouthshire County Council – as with the above case, members should not depend on its outcome, as each case turns on its own facts.
- Llanharan Community Council – similar factors were considered as per the 1st case, including the Councillor had resigned and not benefitted personally.

It was noted that members need to be careful not to depend too much on the information presented in these cases, as the full facts have not been disclosed as part of the published decision.

Discussion focused on how other authorities present the Ombudsman's case summaries? It was suggested that this question be raised in a Standards Committee Forum meeting.

RESOLVED: -

- **To note the content of the case summaries presented in the report.**
- **That the Chair raises the way the PSOW's Case Summaries are presented at other authorities on the next available Agenda of the National Standards Committee Forum.**

Action: See Resolution above

7. DECISIONS BY THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES (APW)

Submitted – a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer summarising 3 decisions published by the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) from 1 January to 31 May 2025.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that in considering the case against Former Councillor Freya Bletsoe, the APW differentiated between her two roles as a Bridgend County Borough Councillor and as Town Councillor. The member received a sanction whereby she was disqualified for 21 months, but the sanction was not relevant to her role as a County Councillor. The Panel concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that the member was not undertaking that role professionally and appropriately.

An appeal was lodged by Former Councillor Gareth Baines, a former Wrexham County Borough Councillor and Chirk Town Councillor against the Standards Committee's decision. The appeal was rejected on the grounds that it had been received by the APW outside the 21 day deadline to lodge an appeal.

Councillor Steven Bletsoe, a Bridgend Town Councillor lodged an appeal against the local Standards Committee's decision to suspend him for 6 months. The APW considered that as the breaches were not the most serious type, a sanction of 6 months was considered excessive, as this was the maximum period that could be imposed. The Panel referred the matter back to the Standards Committee with a recommendation that the Councillor be suspended for 10 weeks.

RESOLVED to note the content of the case summaries.

Action: None

8. APPLICATION(S) FOR DISPENSATION

No report was presented, as it was noted that no application(s) for dispensation has been received during the period since the last meeting of the Standards Committee and the date of publishing this agenda.

9. UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORUM

Submitted – the report of the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer on the above.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that no Forum meeting has been held since the last Standards Committee in February 2025.

It was noted that the next Forum meeting will be held on 23 June 2025, and the Chair will attend. Following the meeting, the Chair will share his notes and the minutes from the meeting with the Committee in due course.

The Chair welcomed any items for him to request to be included on the agenda at a future forum meeting.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

Action: none

10. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Submitted - a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer on the above.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that it is a statutory requirement for the Standards Committee to prepare and publish an annual report. She stated that the draft report is incomplete and must include the Committee's assessment on the group leaders' compliance with their statutory duty in relation to

the conduct of their members. Members of the Standards Committee will meet with group leaders to discuss these matters, commencing next week. Feedback from the meetings will be included in the annual report, and any changes to the draft report will need to be agreed by the Standards Committee. The final report will be presented to full Council in September 2025.

The following minor corrections were highlighted in the electronic versions of the draft annual report: -

1. Page 66 - Foreword - It was suggested that next to the Chair's name, (August 2024) be changed to (from August 2024).
2. Page 69 - Section on "work with the area's Town and Community Councils" - paragraph - "The Committee's programme of work noted that it would conduct a review 'was' one Community Council", which should read 'with'.
3. Page 72 - Section bulleted Newsletters. Typo in the word 'Newsletters' on 1st line.

RESOLVED: -

- **To approve the content of the draft annual report for 2024/25 and its enclosures, as included in Enclosure 1 to this report, subject to the minor amendments noted above.**
- **That the current draft annual report (Enclosure 1) be updated in accordance with information obtained during the process of gathering information from the group leaders; and**
- **That any changes to the annual report (Enclosure 1) be made in either an informal meeting or via correspondence with all Committee members, in accordance with the Chair's instructions, having discussed with the Monitoring Officer.**
- **To present the final annual report to full Council in September 2025.**

Action: See Resolution above

11. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING FOR THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS (T&CCs)

Submitted – a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer on the Code of Conduct training offered to Town and Community Councils in Autumn 2024.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Committee arranged training on the Code of Conduct for T&CCs in Autumn 2024. This training was a mid-term refresher, as the Standards Committee had arranged similar training following the May 2022 Elections.

The Legal Service Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that T&CCs were offered 4 online training events conducted by One Voice Wales, i.e. 2 Welsh and 2 English sessions. Correspondence was sent to T&CCs to draw their attention to the training, and information was shared via their quarterly Newsletter and in a

presentation to the Town and Community Council Forum held on 19 September 2024. Of the 80 spaces available, 66 Councillors registered and 48 attended the training. It was noted that 19 of the 40 T&CCs sent at least one representative to the training. This was considered encouraging compared to the previous training for attendees. It was further noted that it is beneficial for Councillors to attend training on the Code of Conduct, although it is not statutory. Failure to attend training on the Code is considered an aggravating factor, as noted in the Adjudication Panel for Wales Guidance.

Concerns were expressed that 20 T&CCs had no representatives at either the 2022 or the 2024 training events.

RESOLVED: -

- **That the Standards Committee considered the content of the report and Enclosure 1 and the information included particularly in relation to the (a) number of attendees at the training sessions and (b) the number of Town and Community Councils that did not have any attendees at the training sessions.**
- **That the Chair writes to the 20 Town and Community Councils who have not had a representative at either the 2022 or 2024 training events, expressing the Committee's disappointment, and to highlight the importance of training and the benefit that can be gained from attending these sessions.**

Action: See Resolution above

12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED to adopt the following: -

“Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during discussion on the following item on the grounds that it may involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act and in the attached Public Interest Test.”

13. CONDUCT ISSUES

Submitted - the report of the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer, providing further information on a decision notice that was received by the PSOW during Quarter 4, 2024/25 in relation to a breach of the Code of Conduct by a specific Town and Community Councillor, as previously reported publicly in Item 5 on today's agenda.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that the PSOW considered that the breach of the Code of Conduct was not serious enough to be investigated, and not in the public interest. However, the Ombudsman advised the individual to undertake relevant training on the Code of Conduct without delay.

The Committee discussed the emphasis placed by the PSOW on the need to undertake training on the Code and considered this in light of the discussion held under Item 11 today, considering the assistance of training in educating Councillors.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report for information.

Action: None

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED to adopt the following: -

“Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during discussion on the following item on the grounds that it may involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act and in the attached Public Interest Test.”

15. APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Submitted – a report by the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer on the process of appointing new independent members to the Standards Committee by its Selection Panel.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that one independent member's term of office will cease in December 2025. This will require a recruitment process by the Standards Committee in Summer 2025.

The Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Committee's views would be useful for the Selection Panel to consider whilst making its arrangements for the recruitment process. The Standards Committee's opinion was sought on the criteria and documentation provided in Enclosures 1, 2 and 3 to the report, as part of the appointment process.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee considered and accepted the questions posed in italics in the report, and recommended that its views on the following matters be presented to the Selection Panel via correspondence by the Standards Committee Chair, following a discussion with the Monitoring Officer: -

- (a) Only the statutory requirements should be requested of applicants (no additional local choice criteria), in an effort to appeal to a broad range of individuals.**
- (b) It is considered that the application form and the information provided to prospective candidates is clear and substantive.**
- (c) That the Selection Panel discusses how it can ensure the advertisement appeals to a cross section of society with the Human Resources Section.**
- (d) That the order of the interview questions be amended – proposed amendments to the numerical order and use of more open questions in**

relation to Questions 3, 4 and 5.

Action: See Resolution above

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm

**MR TREFOR OWEN
CHAIR**