

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

(Committee Room 1/2 - Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

13 January 2025

Chairperson: L.Fleet

Vice Chairperson: T.Ward

Independent Members: A.Davies and D.Lewis

NPTCBC Members: **Councillors** S.Thomas and W.Carpenter

Community Committee Members: **Councillor** C.Edwards

Officers In Attendance: C.Griffiths, M.Shaw and T.Davies

Invitees: **Councillors** B.Woolford, J.Henton, S.Rahaman and G.Rice

1. **WELCOME AND CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following Officer made a declaration of interest at the start of the meeting:

Mike Shaw - Minute No's 7 and 9 - As his wife works for the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. He considered this interest as personal, and left the meeting for the discussion and voting thereon.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 October 2024, be agreed as an accurate record.

4. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING WITH ELECTED MEMBERS**

The Standards Committee welcomed four elected Members from various political groups, to discuss the remit of the Standards Committee and how the Standards Committee can assist elected Members in discharging their own personal duties.

Numerous topics were covered, including training on how to deal with Town/Community Council issues, Code of Conduct, and equalities and diversity. Committee Members noted that the design of the learning and development was key, and Members suggested that training could be made more interactive, with group work and small workshops.

Attendance at hybrid meetings was discussed, and it was noted that although attendance at meetings had risen since the introduction of the option to attend via Microsoft Teams, attendance was not the same as participation, and a lot of Members were simply present, without taking part. Members were currently being encouraged to participate more, and to turn their cameras on during all meetings.

Members felt it was important to attend certain meetings – such as Licensing Committees, and Appeal Panels – in person, due to the sensitive nature of the meetings. Officers explained that Welsh legislation was currently different to that of England, and as such the Council could not enforce attendance in person. Similarly, the Council could not enforce attendance at training sessions.

RESOLVED: That the report and discussion be noted.

5. **TEMPLATE FOR GROUP LEADERS ANNUAL REPORT**

Discussion took place around the wording of the template, and overall, Members felt it should be worded in the present tense, to indicate its nature as an ongoing process, rather than a one off.

RESOLVED: That the revised Group Leader Annual Report template (as detailed at Appendix 1 to the circulated report) be agreed.

6. **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Members spoke about the similarities between the Standards Committee, and the Governance and Audit Committee, and were enthusiastic about creating opportunities for joint working, options for shared learning and development, and regular liaison meetings.

RESOLVED: That the following be agreed, to help strengthen the relationship between Standards Committee and Governance and Audit Committee:

- a. Introduce Regular Liaison Meetings: Facilitate bi-annual meetings between the Chairs of both committees to discuss shared priorities.
- b. Develop a Collaboration Protocol: Establish a formal protocol outlining areas for collaboration, ensuring clarity and avoiding duplication.
- c. Contribute to the Annual Governance Statement: Ensure the Standards Committee provides input into the Annual Governance Statement to highlight its role in promoting ethical governance.
- d. Encourage Joint Training: Coordinate training programs to address common themes such as governance, risk management, and ethical conduct.

7. **CONSULTATION FROM PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW)**

The Committee debated whether a Councillor should be informed of a complaint against them before/ during its investigation. Currently elected Members were notified of the complaint at the stage the decision letter was issued. Members expressed views for and against, including vexatious complaints; transparency; concern for the affected Member, and the time period for an investigation. All views would be represented in the response from the Committee to the consultation.

RESOLVED: That a response be drafted by the Monitoring Officer, on behalf of the Standards Committee, detailing the points raised during the discussion at the meeting. The response will neither be a for nor against, but will highlight the mixed views of the Committee.

8. **TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT MATTERS**

RESOLVED: That Town and Community Council Chairs be invited to a meeting of the Standards Committee, to discuss how the Committee can help ensure compliance with the standards regime and ethical behaviours in Town and Community Councils.

9. **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF INVESTIGATION BY PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES INTO CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS**

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

10. **ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT**

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES - EQUALITY ACT 2010**

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

RESOLVED: That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

13. **URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent items were received.

CHAIRPERSON