



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – MR CRAIG GRIFFITHS

9th September 2024

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Internal Audit in respect of Member's Ethics

Purpose of the Report:

1. To provide Standards Committee with a copy of a report undertaken by the Council's Internal Audit Section with regards to Members' Ethics

Executive Summary:

2. An audit in respect of Members ethics was undertaken in accordance with the provision made in the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.
3. The ethical conduct of all elected members is of paramount importance to the Council as a whole. Not only must elected members comply with the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code) and associated protocols they must be seen to behaving with integrity to ensure that the electorate have confidence that decisions taken by them are lawful, considered and free from any personal gain. The role of officers is to ensure that members have the necessary protocols to guide them, to provide advice when required and to take robust action when inappropriate behaviour is reported to them.

4. Following this audit reasonable assurance can be provided that there are appropriate internal processes in place to help ensure that members act in an ethical manner.
5. This assurance rating will be reported to the next Governance & Audit Committee.

Background:

6. An audit in respect of Members ethics was undertaken in accordance with the provision made in the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.
7. The ethical conduct of all elected members is of paramount importance to the Council as a whole. Not only must elected members comply with the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code) and associated protocols they must be seen to behaving with integrity to ensure that the electorate have confidence that decisions taken by them are lawful, considered, and free from any personal gain. The role of officers is to ensure that members have the necessary protocols to guide them, to provide advice when required and to take robust action when inappropriate behaviour is reported to them.
8. Following this audit reasonable assurance can be provided that there are appropriate internal processes in place to help ensure that members act in an ethical manner.
9. This assurance rating will be reported to the next Governance & Audit Committee.
10. The following recommendations were however made by the Audit Manager and the views of the Monitoring Officer are included below:

Recommendation	Comment
<p>If he has not already done so the Monitoring Officer should arrange additional training on Declarations of Interest and the use of Social Media and explore providing training to all members on conflict resolution.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to updating the Code to take account of</p>	<p>Specific training on Declarations of Interest is provided to elected members as part of Code of Conduct training and subsequent refresher sessions. A guidance document has also been prepared and issued to all members along with Public Service Ombudsman for Wales guidance. Future code of conduct training will</p>

<p>hybrid attendance at Council meetings.</p> <p>Standards Committee should continue the good practice shown by continuing to invite members to their meetings to gain their views in relation to compliance with the Code and ethical behaviour.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer should share with Group Leaders the views expressed by the members who attended the Standards Committee Meeting.</p>	<p>continue to emphasise the pertinent issues.</p> <p>Work undertaken at a national level in respect of the standards regime will be looking at how code obligations can be amended to reflect hybrid attendance.</p> <p>Standards Committee will continue to invite members to their meetings to gain their views in relation to the compliance with the Code and ethical behaviour. A future meeting is scheduled for late 2024/early 2025.</p> <p>A copy of the minutes and recording of the meeting have been forwarded to Group Leaders.</p>
<p>The Local Resolution Process should be promoted to members and training undertaken on this core process.</p>	<p>A copy of the Local Resolution Process was issued to all members at member induction and a further copy was forwarded on the 23rd May 2024</p> <p>The terms of the Local Resolution Process will now be incorporated into member training and development sessions relating to the Code of Conduct.</p>
<p>All Senior Officers to be reminded of the need for them to be vigilant in ensuring that all member contact with staff is appropriate and that members are no getting involved in operational issues. When instances of inappropriate behaviours/contact is identified the Monitoring Officer should be made aware of it in order that it can be addressed appropriately.</p>	<p>The Member/Officer Protocol has been discussed on a number of occasions at the Council's Corporate Directors Group and Corporate Management Group and will be discussed at future meetings.</p> <p>The protocol will be reviewed by officers in late 2024.</p> <p>General emails of advice to senior officers have also been distributed.</p>

Financial Impacts:

11. No implications.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

12. An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

13. No implications

Workforce Impacts:

14. No implications

Legal Impacts:

15. The Council has adopted a Whistleblowing Policy in line with the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Consultation:

16. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item

Recommendations:

17. That Members note the content of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Internal Audit Report and provide any comments or as they consider appropriate.

Appendices:

18. Appendix 1 - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Internal Audit Report on Member Ethics

List of Background Papers:

19. None

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