



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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

13th January 2025

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Relationship Between Standards Committee and Governance and Audit Committee

Purpose of the Report:

This report outlines the relationship between the Standards Committee and the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) within Welsh local authorities. It examines their distinct roles, areas of overlap, and opportunities for collaboration to enhance accountability, transparency, and good governance.

Background:

Neath Port Talbot Council has a number of different Committee and decision making forums that have responsibility for accountability, transparency and good governance.

Two of relevance are the Standards Committee and GAC.

The Standards Committee has the responsibility to promote and maintain high standards of conduct among elected and co-opted members and will have a number of key responsibilities

- Oversee the Members' Code of Conduct.
- Consider complaints and referrals from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).
- Provide advice, guidance, and training to members on ethical standards.

- Monitor compliance with declarations of interest, gifts, and hospitality registers.

The GAC provide independent assurance on the council's financial and operational performance, risk management, and internal controls. Its key responsibilities include

- Reviewing and approve the authority's financial statements.
- Monitor internal audit reports and risk management frameworks.
- Ensure compliance with governance standards and statutory responsibilities.
- Oversee the council's response to external audit recommendations.

Although the Standards Committee and GAC have distinct functions, there are areas where their roles intersect, including:

- Governance and Ethical Standards
 - Both committees contribute to promoting a culture of good governance and ethical behaviour through an unbiased and apolitical approach.
 - The GAC may review governance arrangements, while the Standards Committee ensures members' conduct aligns with these principles.
- Complaints and Accountability
 - The Standards Committee addresses complaints against members, while the GAC oversees complaints-handling processes for broader council services.
 - Collaborative discussions can help ensure consistency in promoting accountability.
- Training and Development
 - Both committees identify training needs: the Standards Committee for ethical behaviour and the GAC for governance and risk management. Joint training sessions can improve understanding across both areas.
- Annual Governance Statement (AGS)
 - The GAC is responsible for reviewing and approving the AGS, which often includes sections on member conduct and ethical governance.
 - Input from the Standards Committee ensures accurate representation of its work in the AGS.

Both of these Committees are unique in that they also have lay members appointed which can bring additional benefits.

- Independent Perspective: Lay members provide an unbiased viewpoint, which helps ensure that decisions are made objectively and without internal biases.
- Enhanced Scrutiny: Their involvement strengthens internal auditing processes, making it easier to identify and address issues effectively.
- Public Confidence: Including lay members can increase public trust in the governance system, as it demonstrates a commitment to transparency and accountability.

- **Diverse Expertise:** Lay members often come from various professional backgrounds, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience that can enhance the committee's deliberations.
- **Ethical Oversight:** Lay members can ask questions and challenge established norms, promoting new ways of thinking about ethical and governance issues.

Overall, the inclusion of lay members helps create a more robust and trustworthy governance framework.

To strengthen the relationship between the Standards Committee and GAC, the following measures could be implemented.

- **Regular Liaison and Communication.** Chairs of both committees should meet periodically to discuss shared concerns and areas of overlap, such as governance issues related to member conduct.
- **Joint Reporting.** When appropriate, the Standards Committee should contribute to reports reviewed by the GAC, particularly those addressing governance and ethical issues.
- **Shared Training and Development.** Organise joint training sessions for members of both committees to enhance understanding of their roles and interdependencies.
- **Cross-Committee Representation.** Consider appointing a representative from each committee to attend the other's meetings as an observer to foster collaboration and mutual understanding.
- **Coordinated Work Plans.** Align work plans where there are common objectives, such as improving public trust and transparency.

However, given the two distinct functions, avoiding duplication will be important to ensure there are clear delineation of roles to avoid overlap and duplication of effort, particularly regarding governance and complaints-handling. While collaboration is valuable, each committee must retain its independence to fulfil its statutory duties effectively. Collaborative initiatives may require additional resources, such as time for joint meetings or shared training sessions.

To enhance the relationship between the Standards Committee and GAC, it would be proposed to:

- (1) **Introduce Regular Liaison Meetings:** Facilitate bi-annual meetings between the Chairs of both committees to discuss shared priorities.
- (2) **Develop a Collaboration Protocol:** Establish a formal protocol outlining areas for collaboration, ensuring clarity and avoiding duplication.
- (3) **Contribute to the AGS:** Ensure the Standards Committee provides input into the Annual Governance Statement to highlight its role in promoting ethical governance.

- (4) Encourage Joint Training: Coordinate training programs to address common themes such as governance, risk management, and ethical conduct.

Financial Impacts:

No implications.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No implications

Workforce Impacts:

No implications

Legal Impacts:

There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item

Recommendations:

That members of the Standards Committee endorse the proposals included in this report at steps 1 to 4 above and

Appendices:

None

List of Background Papers:

None

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