



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

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

11th March 2024

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

Standards Committees Forum - Wales

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the Committee with information about the third meeting of the national Standards Committees Forum – Wales, and an opportunity to consider the issues raised.

Background:

One of the recommendations made following the independent review of the ethical standards framework for Wales ('the Independent Review Report', published on 14th October 2021) was that there should be an All-Wales Forum for Independent Chairs of Standards Committees, to encourage consistency of approach and the adoption of best practice across Wales.

Standards Committee received a report on the proposed establishment of a National Standards Committee Forum, comprised of the Chairs of each Standards Committee in Wales, and its terms of reference previously. The purpose of the Forum is to share best practice and provide a forum for problem solving across the twenty two principal councils, three fire and rescue authorities and three national park authorities, in relation to the work of Standards Committees.

The Standards Committee Chair, attended the second meeting of the Forum, which was held remotely on in January 2024.

At the meeting, the Chairs confirmed their wish to share as much information as possible with their standards committees and the public and it was therefore agreed that the notes would be circulated to standards committees, provided that no individual complainant or councillor complained of could be identified.

In relation to the matters discussed (see Appendix A), the Committee may wish to note the following:

- (i) The Welsh Government's Summary of Consultation Responses to its consultation on the Independent Review of the Ethical Standards Framework was discussed.
- (ii) Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) and Joint Standards Committees - Members will recall that Neath Port Talbot Council has agreed for this Standards Committee to act as the standards sub-committee for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee. The Committee may be interested to hear the Chair's feedback on other authorities' experiences and views in relation to joint standards committees for CJCs.
- (iii) Remuneration for Independent Members— as Members may be aware, the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) has statutory responsibility for prescribing Members' remuneration, including for co-opted members such as independent members of standards committees. The IRPW sets out its determinations within its Annual Report for each year. The draft IRPW Annual Report 2024/25 makes no changes to the half / full day rates currently provided, but notes that an hourly rate may sometimes be more cost effective and fairer than the current full / half day rates, taking account of changes to working practices, and proposes that local authorities should be given local flexibility to decide when it will be more appropriate to apply a full/ half day or hourly rate, for example, when it may be sensible to aggregate a few short meetings. The IRPW proposals were considered by the Democratic Services Committee in November 2023 and the Committee agreed the importance of appropriate remuneration for recruitment and retention purposes. The proposed changes, if finalised by the IRPW, will take effect from 1st April 2024 and the Head of Democratic Services will consult with all relevant parties in developing guidelines for determining appropriate rates, within the IRPW's permitted local

flexibility, for inclusion in Neath Port Talbot Council's Schedule of Members' Remuneration.

- (iv) Local Resolution Protocol– the Committee will note that Neath Port Talbot's Local Resolution Protocol appears to be working well, with a significant proportion of complaints being informally resolved by the Monitoring Officer under the Protocol. The Committee will also recall that Community Councils in Cardiff have been encouraged to adopt their own local resolution protocols, based on the model protocol developed by One Voice Wales in consultation with the Ombudsman.
- (v) Group Leaders new statutory duties and membership of standards committees – the Committee will note the concerns raised by the Monitoring Officers Group about potential conflicts of interest arising from the role of standards committees to monitor compliance with Group Leaders' new statutory duties. No Group Leaders in Neath Port Talbot currently sit on the Standards and Ethics Committee.
- (vi) Gifts and Hospitality Registration Threshold – the Committee will be aware that the threshold adopted by Neath Port Talbot is £25, which reflects the proposed common national threshold of £25.
- (vii) Social media guidance – Committee will note that this is something that is currently being embarked on by the Committee.
- (viii) Town and Community Councils, Civility and Respect Pledge <https://www.slcc.co.uk/news-publications/civility-respect-pledge/> – the Committee may wish to note that this is an initiative introduced by a partnership of organisations working on behalf of Town and Community Councils, the SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks), NALC (National Association of Local Councils) and OVW (One Voice Wales), inviting Community Councils to sign the Pledge to publicly commit that it will treat councillors, clerks, employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles, with a number of specific supporting commitments. The Committee may wish to consider encouraging the Community Councils in Neath Port Talbot to sign up to the Pledge if they have not already done so, as part of its remit to promote and encourage high standards of conduct within the Community Councils in Neath Port Talbot.

The Forum is to meet biannually, and its next meeting is to be scheduled for June 2024.

Financial Impacts:

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any relevant payments and allowances associated with the activities of the Standards Committees Forum – Wales would be payable in accordance with the rates set by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales and met from the allocated budget

Integrated Impact Assessment:

An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

No implications

Workforce Impacts:

No implications

Legal Impacts:

The Forum has no formal decision making powers, which means that any formal decisions required would need the approval of each individual Standards Committee.

In relation to Town and Community Councils and their Members, the Standards and Committee has the same statutory functions as it has in relation to Neath Port Talbot Council and its Members (pursuant to section 56(1) of the Local Government Act 2000).

There are no other direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item

Recommendations:

The Standards Committee is recommended to note the information set out in the report and its appendices and make any appropriate comments

Appendices:

Appendix A – Standards Committees Forum – Wales, Agenda

List of Background Papers:

None

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