
STANDARDS COMMITTEE 14/06/21

Present:-

Elected Members:- Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones, Beth Lawton and Dewi Roberts.

Independent Members:- Mr Aled Jones, Mr Hywel Eifion Jones, Miss Margaret E. Jones and Dr Einir Young (Chair)

Also in Attendance:- Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sion Huws (Senior Solicitor - Corporate), Miriam Roberts (Professional Trainee - Legal) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Dr Einir Young as chair of this committee.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Hywel Eifion Jones as vice-chair of this committee.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Mr Richard Parry Hughes (Community Council Member) and Dave Wareing (Independent Member).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 22 February 2021 as a true record.

Matter arising from the minutes
Item 5 – Self Assessment and Work Programme

The Monitoring Officer noted that it had not been possible to present an overview of the training arrangements for this meeting, but it was intended to report on this at the next meeting. It was also intended to reinstate the element of the training plan for community councils, when circumstances allowed.

7. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Submitted – the report of the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) enclosing a draft of the committee's annual report for 2020/21. The committee's observations and approval of the document were invited.

Members were asked to contact the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) if there were any updates to their biographies.

The Monitoring Officer noted that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 placed the annual report of the Standards Committee on a statutory basis from next year onwards.

It was suggested that a reference should be included in the annual report to a matter raised in the full Council on numerous occasions regarding the public interest test. In response, the Monitoring Officer explained that the Government was undertaking initial work on a review of the ethical framework in its entirety, and that it was likely that a discussion about the public interest test would arise as part of this. He did not wish to raise hopes as there were so many factors that could influence this. However, there may be an opportunity to contribute to this in order to highlight how the arrangements worked for community councils when the threshold was set on a county council level, and he agreed to draft a wording to that effect as part of the foreword to the annual report.

Referring to the proposal under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to place a statutory duty on the Leaders of Political Groups in relation to members' standards of conduct, it was suggested that the training provided to Leaders could assist in relation to the matter that had been raised on a number of occasions in the Council, as Leaders could explain to their members what problems faced the Standards Committee, the type of work dealt with by the committee, etc.

RESOLVED to approve the annual report to be submitted to the full Council on 8 July, subject to adding an introduction and foreword by the Chair and Monitoring Officer.

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021 – CHANGES TO THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Submitted - the report of the Monitoring Officer detailing the changes to the ethical framework as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, with specific reference to the statutory duty on Leaders of Political Groups in relation to the standards of conduct of their members.

It was suggested that it would be beneficial to arrange a workshop to include the Leaders of Political Groups and members of this committee in order to nurture a positive relationship between them.

DECISION

- (1) Subject to the publication of guidance by Welsh Government, steps should be taken to provide training for Political Group Leaders on the requirements and how they can be met.**
- (2) The Standards Committee should establish a Protocol for implementing, co-operating and monitoring implementation of the duty by December 2021, and do so in co-operation with Leaders and Deputy Leaders of the current Political Groups.**
- (3) These matters should be incorporated into the Committee's Work Programme.**
- (4) Invite the Monitoring Officer to continue with the work, and arrange a workshop at a particular point in order to nurture the relationship between Leaders of Political Groups and members of this Committee.**

9. THE OMBUDSMAN'S CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

Submitted – the report of the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) enclosing a copy of the Ombudsman's latest quarterly Casebook.

It was noted that it would be interesting to know the outcomes of the cases that were referred to the Standards Committee or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales. It would also be interesting to know whether there was a cumulative impact, e.g. whether the same complaints were submitted by the same person, or from the same area each time, were there any common themes, etc?

It was noted that it appeared that the outcome of a number of cases that were referred to a Standards Committee or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales were made public in the press, and it was suggested that it would be beneficial for the committee to be informed of them. It was also suggested, given that the Casebook was a public document, that it would be beneficial if more detailed reports of the cases were available to members of standards committees. In response, the Monitoring Officer noted that the Adjudication Panel had published guidance on how to deal with cases, and that it was available to the Standards Committee. He also explained that the outcome of cases that were referred to the Standards Committee and the Adjudication Panel were published on the websites of the relevant bodies. However, there was no central list of the outcomes of cases, apart from through the Ombudsman, and it would be difficult to achieve without approaching each individual council to ask for the outcome.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

10. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS

Submitted - the report of the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) presenting information about the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members.

RESOLVED to note the information and the intention to arrange a special meeting to deal with the outcome of an investigation that has been referred to the Standards Committee by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.20 am

CHAIRMAN