

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**HELD AT CABINET CONFERENCE ROOM, GUILDHALL, SWANSEA ON
FRIDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 9.30 AM**

PRESENT: Meirion Howells (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

J A Hale

Councillor(s)

C E Lloyd

Councillor(s)

L G Thomas

Independent Member(s)

Jill Burgess

Independent Member(s)

Gareth Evans

Independent Member(s)

Jennifer Gomes

Officers

Tracey Meredith, Deputy Monitoring Officer

Huw Evans, Head of Democratic Services

Allison Lowe, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Philip Downing, Margaret Williams, Independent Member and Patrick Arran, Monitoring Officer.

19 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City & County of Swansea, the following interest was declared:

- 1) Meirion Howells declared a Personal Interest in Minute 22 "Interview Community / Town Councillors to sit on the Standards Committee" as both applicants were known to him. Mr Howells withdrew from the meeting prior to consideration of the item.

20 **ANNUAL MEETINGS WITH POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS**

The Chair reminded the Committee of their intention to hold annual meetings with the Political Group Leaders, Chairs of Committees and the Chief Executive in order to seek their opinions on the work of the Standards Committee. Discussions with three Political Group Leaders were scheduled to take place at the meeting.

The themes for discussion which had been circulated in advance were as follows:

- 1) What is the role of the Standards Committee?
- 2) What is the future role of the Standards Committee?

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- 3) How can Political Group Leaders / Committee Chairs promote standards and good governance through Leadership?
- 4) How can the Standards Committee become more active in promoting ethical conduct among Councillors / Co-opted Members?
- 5) What is your understanding of the Nolan Principles and how they impact on public life?
- 6) Are you aware of the Calver decision and do you think that it's had an influence on Councillors / Co-opted Members?
- 7) What are your views on the Authority's Code of Conduct training? How could it be improved so as to raise the ethical standards of Councillors / Co-opted Members?
- 8) Training for Councillors / Co-opted Members is vitally important. How can the Standards Committee tackle those that don't see training as important?
- 9) How could Standards Committee encourage the use of the Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Process (Cllr v Cllr)?
- 10) During the past year, members of the Standards Committee have attended a number of meetings. Has this had an impact on behaviour and standards? What Committees do you feel the Standards Committee members should attend as observers?

The Chair welcomed Councillor Chris Holley to the meeting. Councillor Holley outlined the following in response:

- He felt that the behaviour of Councillors had improved, resulting in the role of the Standards Committee having changed over the last few years.
- Councillors felt there was little point in reporting cases to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Standards Committee should be the arbiter and have more visibility in order to be more productive in what is happening in the Authority.
- Councillor Holley agreed it was useful that members of the Standards Committee had attended various meetings as observers, however suggested that they should target their attendance to Council and Planning Committee as they tended to be the most controversial, particularly those meetings involved in the LDP process.
- In relation to Declarations of Interests, he outlined that members now carry out block declarations at Committee, however there was still great nervousness amongst members.
- He felt that the Nolan principles had gone beyond what they were originally intended for.
- He was aware of the Calver case and felt it had made a difference.
- Code of conduct training provided by the Legal Department was very good and provided on a regular basis.

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- Agreed all Senior Salary holders should undertake a personal development review. However, it was more difficult to enforce non-Senior Salary holders as they had no 'authority' to do it.
- Councillor Holley encourages members of his group to undertake training, however the Head of Democratic Services reiterated that under the new framework, Group Leaders would be informed on a monthly basis of which members had attended training. He went on to clarify that Council had no authority to impose sanctions for non-attendance.
- Councillor Holley had no knowledge of the internal Dispute Resolution Process having been instigated.

The Chair thanked Councillor Holley for his responses.

The Chair then welcomed Councillor Wendy Fitzgerald to the meeting.

- Councillor Fitzgerald was aware of the Standards Committee Annual Report presented to Council but as an Independent Group they hadn't had much contact with the Standards Committee.
- She felt there was a certain code of conduct within the group. Disagreements did arise but they were managed. Robust political debate would need to be resolved amongst the different political groups.
- Confirmed that the Independent Group had not signed the 'Swansea Pledge'.
- In relation to Calver, she agreed that Councillors had to have a 'thicker skin'.
- Councillors know their own needs in terms of personal development, however Councillors have various different responsibilities and cannot always attend the scheduled training events.
- As an Independent member she didn't feel in a position to tell the Independent Members which training events to attend.
- Felt the informal Cllr –v- Cllr resolution is working.
- She thought it would be beneficial for members of the Standards Committee to attend other Committees as observers, in particular Scrutiny meetings to gain an understanding of how the committee system works.

The Chair thanked Councillor Fitzgerald for her views.

The Chair then welcomed Councillor Paxton Hood-Williams to the meeting.

- Councillor Hood-Williams understanding of the role of the Standards Committee was to demand high standards of behaviour across Swansea at both Local Authority or Community Council level and to resolve cases as and when necessary.
- He felt that Councillors behaviour had improved over the years in the Chamber.
- He agreed that training is essential and that Councillors are regularly provided with training on the Code of Conduct.
- Understood the Calver case and agreed that robust political debate was to be expected.
- Members of the Conservative group had excellent attendance at the various training courses provided by the Authority.

- Internal Resolution Process appeared to be working.

The Chair thanked Councillor Paxton Hood-Williams for his comments.

21 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC.**

The Committee was requested to exclude the public from the meeting during the consideration of the item of business identified in the recommendation to the report on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the exemption paragraph of 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007 relevant to the items of business as set out in the report.

The Committee considered the Public Interest Test in deciding to exclude the public from the meeting for the item of business where the Public Interest Test was relevant as set out in the report.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded for the following item on the agenda.

CLOSED SESSION

NOTE: Meirion Howells (Chair), Councillors Clive Lloyd and Joe Hale withdrew from the meeting prior to the next item.

Jill Burgess (Vice Chair) presiding.

22 **INTERVIEW COMMUNITY / TOWN COUNCILLORS TO SIT ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE.**

The Committee interviewed two candidates for the Community / Town Councillor vacancy on the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that a report be submitted to Council recommending PC be appointed to the Standards Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm

CHAIR