

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**HELD AT CHAMBER MEETING ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA ON
FRIDAY, 22 JANUARY 2016 AT 9.35 AM**

PRESENT: M Howells (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
J A Hale

Councillor(s)
L G Thomas

Councillor(s)

Co-opted Member(s)
J Burgess

Co-opted Member(s)
P Crayford

Co-opted Member(s)
J Gomes

Officer(s)

Huw Evans
Allison Lowe
Tracey Meredith

Head of Democratic Services
Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Monitoring Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): C E Lloyd

Independent Member(s): G Evans and M Williams

29 **MINUTE SILENCE.**

The Chair informed the Committee that sadly Clive Walton, former member and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee had recently passed away. The members held a minute silence as a mark of respect.

30 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City & County of Swansea no personal interests were declared.

31 **ANNUAL MEETING WITH POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS, CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE.**

The Chair reported that annual meetings with Political Group Leaders, Chair of Committees and the Chief Executive would continue in order to seek their opinions on the work of the Standards Committee. Discussions with the Political Group Leaders, Chief Executive and other Chairs of Committees had already taken place. The interviews with the Chair of General Licensing Committee and Democratic Services Committee were the last two scheduled for the current municipal year.

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

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

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- 2) What is the future role of the Standards Committee?
- 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 P M Matthews, Chair of General Licensing Committee to the meeting. Councillor Matthews responded as follows:

- She outlined that the role of the Standards Committee was to investigate complaints and breaches of the Code of Conduct.
- Councillor Matthews indicated that the role of the Standards Committee might change in the future if the Code of Conduct were amended as a result of the Localism Bill.
- As Chair of General Licensing Committee, Councillor Matthews felt she provided a calming influence to the other Members and tried to offer a guiding hand.
- Awareness raising sessions or walk-in sessions were suggested as a way of the Standards Committee being more active in promoting ethical conduct among Councillors / Co-Opted Members.
- In addition, she felt that Community / Town Councils would benefit from attending awareness raising sessions.
- She felt that Councillors of the City & County of Swansea had always adhered to the Nolan principles.
- Councillor Matthews was aware of the Calver decision and the expectation that people in public life should have "thick skins".

- She stated that the Code of Conduct training provided by the Authority was very thorough.
- Councillor Matthews had never had to utilise the Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Process (Cllr- v-Cllr).
- She would be happy for members of the Standards Committee to attend Licensing Committee meetings, however much of the business conducted would be in closed session so they would not be able to stay for those agenda items.

The Chair thanked Councillor Matthews for her comments.

The Chair then welcomed Councillor Paul Meara, Chair of Democratic Services Committee to the meeting.

- Councillor Meara commenced by stating that he was proud of the fact that he had not had any previous dealings with the Standards Committee.
- He was aware that the Committee looked at breaches of the Code of Conduct when cases were referred by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- In relation to the future role of the Standards Committee, he felt that would depend on the future of the Authority in general. He did go on to say that the Standards Committee used to have a greater workload under the previous administration, however the number of complaints reported to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales had decreased considerably over the past few years.
- Councillor Meara felt that Political Group Leaders and Committee Chairs were already promoting ethical conduct amongst their members.
- He did not think it was the role of the Standards Committee to promote ethical conduct among Councillors / Co-Opted Members.
- Councillor Meara was aware of the Nolan Principles and how they impacted on public life.
- He was also aware of the Calver decision but was not sure that it had an influence on Councillors / Co-Opted Members.
- The Authority's Code of Conduct training provided at Induction was acceptable however it needed to be repeated several months later. He felt that political group whips could play a role in this process.
- As Chair of Democratic Services Committee he had worked with the Head of Democratic Services in order to formalise a new training programme for Councillors / Co-Opted Members which would be presented to Council on 28 January 2016. No sanction could be imposed for Councillor non-attendance at training sessions; however Political Group leaders would be informed after each training session which of their group members had not attended. He did however understand the difficulty that some Councillors encountered in attending training due to workload.
- The Standards Committee had been invited to attend the Democratic Services Committee held on 16 June 2015 to discuss Councillor / Co-Opted Member training.
- He was aware of the Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Process (Cllr-v-Cllr) which was currently not being utilised due to the drop in complaints being made.

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- Agreed that Standards Committee attending other Committee meetings as observers was positive and should continue. He suggested they attend Audit Committee and Planning Committee in particular.

The Chair thanked Councillor Meara for his attendance.

RESOLVED that all of the comments received from the Political Group Leaders, Chief Executive and Chairs of Committees be amalgamated and reported to the meeting scheduled for 4 March 2016.

The meeting ended at 10.56 am

CHAIR