



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Standards Committee**

Committee Room 5 - Guildhall, Swansea

Friday, 20 July 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:

Councillor(s)

L G Thomas

Co-opted Member(s)

Gareth Evans
Margaret Williams

Co-opted Member(s)

Michaela Jones

Co-opted Member(s)

Mike Lewis

Community / Town Council Rep:

Philip Crayford

Officer(s)

Huw Evans	Head of Democratic Services
Allison Lowe	Democratic Services Officer
Tracey Meredith	Head of Legal, Democratic Services & Business Intelligence

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): J A Hale and M B Lewis
Independent Member(s): J Burgess

1 Election of Chair for the Municipal Year 2018-2019.

Resolved that Jill Burgess be elected Chair of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2018-2019.

2 Election of Vice Chair for the Municipal Year 2018-2019.

Resolved that Margaret Williams be elected Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the Municipal Year 2018-2019.

Margaret Williams (Vice Chair) Presided

3 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

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

4 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Standards Committee held on 20 April 2018 be approved and signed as a correct record.

5 Annual Meeting with Political Group Leaders, Chairs of Committees and Chief Executive.

The Vice Chair reported that each year the Standards Committee invited each Political Group Leader, the Chief Executive and a selection of Chairs to attend the Committee to seek their understanding and opinions on the work of the Committee.

Due to the Local Government Elections 2017 and there being a new influx of Councillors, the invitations were delayed to allow Councillors to settle into their new role.

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

- 1) Do you consider that it is still appropriate to have a Code of Conduct in Wales, which applies to all councillors and co-opted members?
- 2) What do you understand the role of the Standards Committee to be?
- 3) Is there any work you feel the Standards Committee should be undertaking over the next year?
- 4) How can Political Group Leaders / Committee Chairs promote standards and good governance through Leadership?
- 5) How can the Standards Committee become more active in promoting ethical conduct among Councillors / Co-opted Members?
- 6) The Ombudsman, Adjudication Panel for Wales and the High Court has taken a view on politicians (and in some cases senior officers) having a "thick skin" and on political banter being part of the political landscape. What are your own views and how would you as a Political Group Leader ensure that the line is not crossed?
- 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 do not see training as important?
- 9) The Authority's Internal Dispute Resolution Process (IDRP)(Cllr v Cllr) has not yet been utilised. In the event of a dispute will you be encouraging your party to use the process? Do you consider the lack of referrals to the IDRP demonstrates that councillors are behaving within the Code?

10) What is the future role of the Standards Committee?

The Vice Chair welcomed Councillors Peter Black, Chair of Democratic Services Committee and Penny Matthews, Chair of General and Statutory Licensing Committee to the meeting. They outlined the following:

- Both felt that it was still appropriate to have a Code of Conduct in Wales that applies to all Councillors and Co-Opted Members;
- They stated the role of the Standards Committee was to police the Code of Conduct and to promote and safeguard the integrity of Councillors and its staff;
- Cllr P Matthews Suggested that the Standards Committee could consider looking at the Community & Town Councils;
- Most Group Leaders spend a considerable amount of time dealing with disciplinary matters and most will try to resolve any relevant issues through good governance;
- Group Leaders/Chairs can promote standards and good governance through leading by example, via good decision making and being open and transparent;
- They were not aware of any unethical conduct amongst Councillors / Co-Opted Members;
- Agreed with the view of the PSOW that those in the Political arena do need a thick skin. Many have strong views and occasionally some can cross the line but those that overstep the mark should be dealt with appropriately by the PSOW;
- Code of Conduct training is excellent, however suggested that refresher training be held for Councillors in relation to declaration of interests;
- Also suggested that on-line training or more interactive training be developed as training delivered via a powerpoint presentation can be dis-engaging for Councillors;
- Discussed compulsory training for those on Licensing Committee or Planning Committee and the difficulties for making other training deemed as compulsory;
- Cllr P Black suggested that Councillors could also be provided with certain “skills” training such as how to scrutinise / interrogate documents or how to manage a Councillors’ workload;
- Agreed that the lack of referrals to the PSOW demonstrated that Councillors were behaving within the Code, however it was unclear where Councillors could find details of the Internal Dispute Resolution Protocol;

The Vice Chair thanked both Councillors for attending.

6 Standards Committee Annual Report 2017-2018.

The Head of Democratic Services outlined the Standards Committee Annual Report 2017-2018.

The report sets out the work of the Standards Committee during 2017-2018.

The Head of Democratic Services stated that he would like to include an additional paragraph in the report in order to outline information in relation to the Authority not having to utilise the Local Resolution Protocol for Councillors.

Resolved that:

- 1) An additional paragraph be inserted to outline information relating to the Local Dispute Resolution Protocol for Councillors;
- 2) The report be forwarded to Council for information.

7 Report on R (Harvey) v Ledbury Town Council.

The Monitoring Officer presented a “for information” report to update the Standards Committee on a recent High Court decision which sets out how a council should deal with a complaint against a councillor.

The case related to a Councillor who had served as a Ledbury Town Councillor since 2011.

Resolved that the report be noted.

8 Code of Conduct Casebook.

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the latest Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Code of Conduct Casebook.

The latest issue – Issue 16 May 2018 covered the period January to March 2018 and was attached at Appendix A.

Resolved that

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) The report be circulated to all Councillors.

9 Breach of Code of Conduct - Complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee of the decisions made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in relation to allegations that Local Authority and Community Town Councillors had breached the Code of Conduct.

Resolved that the report be noted.

10 Standards Conference Wales 2018. (Verbal)

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Standards Conference Wales 2018 would be held at Aberystwyth University on Friday, 14 September 2018. The invitation allowed up to 4 delegates which would include the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Several Co-Opted Members expressed an interest in attending.

Resolved that the Democratic Services Officer email the Co-Opted Members to agree attendance.

11 Workplan 2018-2019. (Verbal)

The Head of Democratic Services stated that the interviews with Group Leaders, Chairs and Chief Executive would continue for the next few meetings. The Leader of the Council had accepted the invitation to attend the next meeting.

Resolved that the Chief Executive also be invited to attend the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chair