



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Standards Committee**

Multi-Location Meeting - Gloucester Room, Guildhall / MS

Teams

Friday, 17 February 2023 at 10.00 am

Present: Mike Lewis (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

M B Lewis

Co-opted Member(s)

Michaela Jones

Janet Pardue-Wood

Co-opted Member(s)

Mark Rees

Margaret Williams

Community / Town Council Representative

Councillor Carlo Rabaiotti

Officer(s)

Tracey Meredith

Huw Evans

Allison Lowe

Chief Legal Officer / Monitoring Officer

Head of Democratic Services

Democratic Services Officer

Also present

Councillor C A Holley

Councillor R C Stewart

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): L G Thomas

35 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

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

36 Group Leaders Duty.

As part of the new duties for Group Leaders as part of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Standards Committee agreed to meet with political Group Leaders to discuss how they maintain high standards of behaviour within their group.

Group Leaders were requested to submit a completed template to the Standards Committee in advance of discussions (see Appendix A).

In addition to the completed templates, the Committee invited Councillors Rob Stewart (Labour) and Chris Holley (Liberal Democrat & Independent Group) to the meeting scheduled for 20 February.

Unfortunately Councillor Lyndon Jones was unable to attend on this occasion and an alternative date for him and Councillor Peter May would be arranged.

Councillors Stewart and Holley provided the following supporting information during discussions:

Councillor Rob Stewart

- Training

Councillor Stewart stated that in terms of the new duty, it was not a new way of working for Swansea Council as it had been operating this system for quite some time, however he welcomed the formalisation of the process.

The Labour Group provided training to its group members, which ran in parallel to the Councillor Training Programme delivered by the Authority. Regular sessions were arranged within the Group including refresher training sessions.

Whilst the template indicated that not all Councillors had completed Code of Conduct training, he explained that recordings of the training had been forwarded to those who had not attended the physical training sessions, however updating their on-line records relied on those Councillors informing Democratic Services of the information. Therefore, the list might not be 100% accurate, however he was addressing this with the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services. Recordings of training sessions were available for any Councillor to access as and when required. He also stated that some Councillors had to complete mandatory training to sit and vote on certain Committees such as Licensing and Planning.

Councillor Stewart indicated that feedback on training was also provided to the Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services in order to improve the process for future training / induction programmes.

- Code of Conduct Issues

Councillor Stewart stated that the number of code of conduct issues raised was very rare, with the number of referrals to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) extremely low. There was currently a very good working relationship with the other Group Leaders. Should any issues arise within the group, he would work with the 2 Deputy Group Leaders and Group Whips to provide support, guidance and training if and when required.

He went on to say that the Local Internal Dispute Resolution Protocol had worked extremely well and had been used successfully in the past to avoid the escalation of reporting to the PSOW.

The Chair thanked Councillor Stewart for meeting with the Committee and looked forward to meeting informally after the summer period.

Councillor Chris Holley

- Training

Councillor Holley commenced by stating that it was only just over 8 months since the Local Government Elections and the new members were very much still in the learning phase. Being a Councillor was a unique experience and not something that could be learned quickly. He did however feel that maybe more could be done to provide Councillors with additional details on the role of the Standards Committee.

Whilst the template provided by Councillor Holley only outlined the training undertaken by the Liberal Democrats, the training records of all Councillors could be found by accessing each of the individual Councillors profiles on the Council website www.swansea.gov.uk/councillors.

Councillor Holley stated that he would welcome meeting with the whole Committee, not just with the Chair and Vice Chair.

- Code of Conduct Issues

Councillor Holley stated that the main Code of Conduct issues centred on family connections, procedural matters and the difficulty that some Councillors experienced with declaration of interests at Council meetings, particularly in relation to budget meetings and when redundancies of staff were being considered. However, he stated that the general behaviour of Councillors had improved immensely over recent years.

In terms of the Local Dispute Resolution Protocol, Councillor Holley wished that the protocol had been introduced a long time ago. Since its introduction, there had not been many occasions to utilise it as the behaviour of Councillors had improved over the years.

Councillor Holley admitted that being the Group Leader of a group that included Independent Members could be challenging on times, however he had to be diplomatic and aware of sensitivities regardless of political affiliation.

The Chair thanked Councillor Holley for meeting with the Committee and looked forward to meeting informally after the summer period.

37 Dispensation Form & Guidance.

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to review the Councillor Dispensation form.

Resolved that the amended Dispensation form and associated guidance outlined at Appendix 2 be approved.

Minutes of the Standards Committee (17.02.2023)
Cont'd

The meeting ended at 10.48 am

Chair