# CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

## MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

### HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 3, CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA ON
### FRIDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2014
### AT 9.30 AM

**PRESENT**: A Novis (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

L G Thomas

**Independent Members:-**

J Burgess
J Gomes
C Walton

**Officers:-**

P Arran     -   Monitoring Officer
T Meredith  -   Deputy Head of Legal, Democratic Services and Procurement
H Evans     -   Head of Democratic Services
J Tinker    -   Democratic Services Coordinator

## 31   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Downing and C E Lloyd and M Howells.

## 32   DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.

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

## 33   MINUTES.

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Standards Committee held on 10 October 2014 be accepted as a correct record.

## 34   FEEDBACK FOLLOWING DISCUSSION WITH CHIEF EXECUTIVE, POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS AND CHAIRS OF REGULATORY COMMITTEES AND SCRUTINY PROGRAMME COMMITTEE.

The Head of Democratic Services presented the Monitoring Officer's Report which reminded the Committee of the discussions with the Chief Executive, Political Group

Leaders, Chairs of the Regulatory Committees and the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. Recurring Themes and Key Issues raised at discussions were highlighted in the report.

The Committee discussed these recurring themes. It was stated that for Standards Committee to raise its profile there was a need to explore this further. It was also suggested that best practices could be investigated with other authorities. It was considered beneficial that refresher training be encouraged. The Committee were supportive of attending other Committees especially Scrutiny Committee. It was also considered important that an audit be produced of the achievements of the Standards Committee.

**RESOLVED** that:

(1)     A workplan be formulated and issues be prioritised.

(2)     This workplan be distributed to all Councillors.

35     **CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK ( FOR INFORMATION).**

The Code of Conduct Casebook Issue 3 for October 2014 was submitted for information. The Cardiff Council Integrity case was highlighted together with the Gwynedd Council case in respect of social media. It was also mentioned that the Ombudsman had stated in his opening remarks regarding this casebook that he took a dim view of vexatious complaints.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

36     **MEETING WITH THE OMBUDSMAN TO DISCUSS HIS ANNUAL REPORT.**

The Ombudsman, Nick Bennett and Katryn Shaw attended to discuss the Annual Report. The Ombudsman gave an overview in relation to the number of complaints and provided a breakdown in respect of these. He referred to  Calvert v Adjudication Panel for Wales and that his view was that there should be an indemnity cap on both sides. He had been engaging with staff regarding processing the volumes of work and intended to use the complaints data to gain a clearer picture of what was going wrong and what was in the public interest. Reference was also made to a review of the Code of Conduct Guidance.

Members  asked questions in respect of why complaints could not be dealt with locally first or whether The Ombudsman could refer these back to the local authority to deal with.

The Ombudsman's view was welcomed in respect of vexatious complaints. The volume of complaints in relation to Community Councillors was discussed together with the reasons for these with the Ombudsman drawing particular attention to the number of Community Councillor complaints in the City and County of Swansea. The role of the Chair and Community Council Clerks was discussed and the difficulty in that only members were bound by the Code of Conduct.

The Ombudsman was thanked for his useful contribution to the above issues.

The meeting ended at 10.30.a.m.

**CHAIR**