



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Standards Committee**

Committee Room 5 - Guildhall, Swansea

Friday, 16 November 2018 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Jill Burgess (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

J A Hale

**Councillor(s)**

M B Lewis

**Councillor(s)**

L G Thomas

**Independent Member(s)**

Philip Crayford

Gareth Evans

**Independent Member(s)**

Mike Lewis

Margaret Williams

**Officer(s)**

Huw Evans

Allison Lowe

Tracey Meredith

Head of Democratic Services

Democratic Services Officer

Chief Legal Officer

**Apologies for Absence**

Independent Member(s): Michaela Jones

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**12 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.**

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

**13 Minutes.**

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

**Matters Arising:**

Minute 10 – Standards Conference Wales 2018

Feedback was provided by the attendees (Monitoring Officer, Chair and Co-Opted Member Mike Lewis).

All had attended the various workshops delivered on the day and overall the feedback was positive, however the format of the day differed from that previously delivered and it was felt that there had not been as much opportunity for as much interaction with the PSOW as in previous years.

The Monitoring Officer would check as to what documentation had been circulated by email or include in the papers for the next meeting.

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

The Chair welcomed Mr Phil Roberts, Chief Executive to the Committee.

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 you as Chief Executive 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?

He outlined the following:

- He agreed that it was essential to have a Code of Conduct in Wales, which applied to all Councillors and Co-Opted Members. The Nolan Principles formed a good base. In addition, as Head of Paid Service he had a duty of care to all the staff employed by the Authority, therefore it was equally

important that there was a framework in place to ensure that the behaviour of both officers and Councillors was reasonable.

- Since he had taken up the role of Chief Executive, he had introduced regular meetings between the Corporate Management Team and the Cabinet Members as well as regular 1-2-1 meetings with the Political Group Leaders in order to encourage better communication. Due to these discussions any issues that arose were now resolved at an early stage.
- There had been many other positive changes in the Authority over recent years and this was in part due to the establishment of a more inclusive culture. In addition the temperament of and relationships that now existed with the Group Leaders was much improved. Robust political debate still existed but there was now more mutual respect between political parties.
- He thanked the Committee for the continued work they undertook in relation to standards, however he suggested that the Committee consider raising their profile so that more staff understand the content of their work.
- He had posted in his weekly "Blog" of his invitation to attend the Committee in order to discuss relations and behaviours between officers and members in the Council. He stated that perhaps Senior Officers would be more aware of their work than junior ones – maybe some internal communication could be circulated.
- He agreed that he also played a role in promoting standards and good governance by leading by example.
- He felt there was a team ethic whereby officers and councillors were all committed to doing the best for the citizens of Swansea.
- He agreed that there was always scope to improve staff training and perhaps reference to the Standards Committee could be included. He also outlined the innovation programme that had been commenced a few years ago whereby a team of staff developed a range of activities aimed to prevent bullying in the workplace (by both staff and the public). "Show bullying the red light" was developed and a "bully buddy" scheme had also been established, together with a range of other activities. However, he was conscious that staff morale could suffer as a result of austerity. Some staff were working at capacity in some areas and struggling to do the day job. He would need to monitor the situation.
- He suggested the Standards Committee promote its role via the publication of their Annual Report which outlines the work the Committee undertakes during a municipal year.
- Although he was content that the number of Code of Conduct complaints against Swansea Councillors and the number of Councillor –v- Councillor disputes had fallen, he was not complacent and would continue to ensure that standards remained high.
- He commented that the Market Place event held during the 2017 Local Government Elections had been well received by Councillors and he had received requests from those who were not able to attend for it to be repeated.
- A buddying system was in place for newly elected Councillors, but it was organised within the political groups – there was scope to develop this further at the next Local Government Elections.

- Standards could affect the reputation of an organisation, in particular recruitment, therefore it was important that the culture was right. He acknowledged that a mature political organisation assisted in this process.
- Code of Conduct training is included in the Induction training for both new and returning Councillors and refresher training provided periodically. Perhaps some cases from the Code of Conduct Casebook could be included in the training.
- The Standards Committee should continue to monitor cases as well as the PSOW Code of Conduct Casebook and continue their yearly meetings with Political Groups Leaders, Chairs and Chief Executive. In addition, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) also provided “good practice” examples.

The Chair thanked Mr Roberts for his attendance.

## **15 Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report and Accounts 2017-2018.**

The Monitoring Officer updated the Standards Committee on the Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2017/18, which was outlined at Appendix A.

The Annual Report sets out performance over the year including both complaints about public service providers as well as code of conduct complaints.

The Monitoring Officer specifically outlined the statistics on pages 34-36 of the agenda pack, which were most relevant to the Committee.

**Resolved** that the report be **noted**.

## **16 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 17 July 2018 covered the period April to June 2018 and was attached at Appendix A.

A general discussion ensued in relation to Minute No's 16 & 17 in relation to whether there was a role for the Standards Committee to assist in cases where Councillors who had been found to have breached the code of conduct but where the PSOW had decided to take no further action. This could be seen as a learning tool to assist in the complaints process.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) The report be circulated to all Councillors
- 3) The Monitoring Officer write to the PSOW to enquire how the Standards Committee could widen their role in order to assist in the complaints process.

**17 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 Councillors had breached the Code of Conduct.

It was noted that since the agenda pack had been published, notification had been received from the PSOW that he would not be investigating case no. 201804579 outlined in the report.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.20 am

**Chair**