



Report of the Monitoring Officer

Standards Committee – 24 June 2022

Standards Committee - New Duties

Purpose:	To consider the Committee's new duties and agree actions to ensure compliance.
Policy Framework:	Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Standards Committee Terms of Reference – Council Constitution.
Consultation:	Legal, Access to Services and Finance.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that the Standards Committee: 1) Agree an action plan as set out in paragraph 2.5 to ensure compliance with their new duties under legislation.
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provided new duties for both the Standards Committee and Group Leaders.
- 1.2 The duty on Group Leaders is to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group and to co-operate with the council's Standards Committee in the exercise of the Standards Committee's functions.
- 1.3 The duty on the Standards Committee is to monitor compliance by Group Leaders with the new duty imposed on them and to make an annual report to Council and as a minimum the report must:
 - describe how the committee has discharged its functions during the preceding financial year;
 - include a summary of reports and recommendations made or referred to the Committee by the Ombudsman relating to the investigation of alleged breaches of the Code and any subsequent action taken by the Committee;

- describe the advice it has provided on training for all members and how that has been implemented; and
- include the Committee's assessments of how political group leaders have complied with the new duty to promote high standards of conduct, including the advice the standards committee has provided and the training it has suggested.

2. Action to Date

2.1 The Standards Committee's will recall that in January and March they interviewed the Group Leaders in relation to their new duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The questions posed to the Group Leaders were:

Question 1 – The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act provides that Leaders of political groups must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their group. We are interested to hear as to what actions you take now in terms of maintaining standards within your own group and how are you proposing to meet the new duty going forward?

Question 2 – The Standards Committee also has new functions under the Act to ensure that group leaders have access to advice and training to support their new duties and to monitor group leaders' compliance with those duties. Is there any support that you feel would be beneficial either from the Standards Committee/Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer in carrying out your duty and whether we can assist you in any way.

2.2 The Group Leaders broadly welcomed the legislative changes and the new duty and referred to the Local Dispute Resolution process which the council has adopted and also welcomed regular meetings with the Standards Committee.

2.3 The Standards Committee was consulted on the draft Welsh Government Guidance at their meeting on 9 March 2022. By way of summary the draft Guidance set out that:

- The political group leaders and its standards committee should agree on the form and frequency of a report from each group leader to the standards committee. The standards committee should then consider each report and provide feedback to the group leaders
- The standards committee chair may wish to meet with group leaders periodically to review behaviour
- The minimum which should be included in any annual report including the committee's assessment of how political group leaders have complied with the new duty to promote high standards of conduct, including the advice the standards committee has provided and the training it has suggested

2.4 The guidance makes clear that the Committee should arrange to train the Group Leaders on the duty within 6 months of the elections and annually

thereafter. It suggests meeting periodically with Group Leaders to review behaviour which this Committee already does and has been doing for many years.

2.5 The Committee is therefore asked to consider their approach to the new duties and in particular consider the following course of action:

- The Committee meets formally with the Group Leaders on an annual basis
- The Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee meet with the Group Leaders on an informal basis to monitor their compliance with the duty
- That a template report is drafted to be sent to Group Leaders to complete in terms of members of their group who have attended training (mandatory and recommended) and any steps they have taken during the year to promote high standards within their group.

3. Integrated Impact Assessment

3.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

3.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

3.4 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report is not required as this report is to identify how the Committee will

comply with its new duties for the forthcoming year and therefore there are no integrated impact implications.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with the report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None