

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Friday, 13 September 2019

PRESENT: M.A. Morgan (Chair)

Independent Members:

M. Dodd, D. Evans and A. Williams

Councillors:

S.J.G. Gilasbey, R. James and G.B. Thomas

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Edgecombe, Legal Services Manager

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law

K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP. - 10.00 - 10.50 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Julie James and Philip Rogers.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST.

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 14TH JUNE, 2019

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 14th June, 2019 be signed as a correct record.

4. CODE COMPLIANCE DATA

Further to the meeting held on the 14th June 2019 the Committee received an update on the number of town and Community Councils that had provided Code Compliance Data and noted that 53 of the 72 Town and Community Council's within Carmarthenshire had now replied with responses awaited from the 19 councils identified in the report, some of which had not provided a response for the previous 2 and 3 years.

The Legal Service Manager reported that following publication of the agenda for the meeting, replies had been received from Llansadwrn, Llanwrda, Meidrim and Dyffryn Cennen community councils, increasing the total number received to 57, with 15 councils yet to respond.

The Committee expressed concern that 15 councils had yet to respond to the request for information, with some not having responded for two or three years, and considered a letter should be sent to the Chairs of those authorities (copy to the Clerks) requesting the relevant information be provided as soon as possible.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- 4.1 That the report be received**
4.2 That a letter be sent to the Chairs of the 15 Town and Community Councils who had yet to provide Code Compliance Data requesting they do so as soon as possible and that a copy of the letter be sent to the Clerks of those Councils

5. CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

The Committee considered the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales' latest issue of the 'Code of Conduct' Casebook, published in May 2019, detailing summaries of 2 code investigations undertaken where evidence of a breach of the Code was found but that the Ombudsman had not considered it necessary to take any action.

The Committee noted that none of the cases related to councillors from within Carmarthenshire.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING 2019

Further to minute 9 of its meeting held on the 14th June 2019 the Committee received a report on the level of attendance at the Code of Conduct Training events hosted by the Authority and aimed primarily at Town and Community Councils. It was noted that two events had been held on the 10th and 16th July with 49 attending on the 10th and 45 on the 16th representing a total of 43 different councils, an increase on the 30 represented in 2018.

A discussion was held on various ways of increasing the level of town and community councillors' attendance at the training which included retention of the existing training format in County Hall and the production of an online training video. Reference was also made to the benefits of arranging training for County Councillors. The Legal Services Manager advised he would examine the potential of producing a training video and arrange training for County Councillors

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

7. OMBUDSMANS ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales' Annual Report for 2018/19 incorporating the Statement of Accounts and providing information on both maladministration and Code of Conduct cases dealt with by his office during the period of the report.

In the context of the Code of Conduct, the key points from the report detailed:

- A 4% overall increase in complaints over the previous year from 270 to 282
- A total of 308 code complaints were closed during the year (including those brought forward from the previous year) an increase of 25%
- Of the cases closed, 51 (16.5%) were investigated with 8 being referred to the relevant Standards Committee or adjudication Panel for Wales. The remaining 83.5% were closed after initial assessment and without a full investigation,

- Of the 282 complaints received 67% (190) related to Town and Community Councillors, 32% (91) county councillors and the remaining 1 being a member of a National Park Authority
- The Ombudsman had expressed comments on the further increase in complaints against Town and Community Councillors and was concerned that many related to allegations of the failure to promote equality and respect, with there being an increase in complaints received from council clerks and employees,
- Since 2011/12 there had been an overall reduction of 32% in code complaints received.

In relation to maladministration, a total of 2253 complaints had been closed of which 647 (28%) were subject to detailed consideration or investigation, with 532 (82%) being resolved or upheld.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

8. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR DECIDES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY PURSUANT TO SECTION 100B(4)(B) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972.

There were no items of urgent business.

CHAIR

DATE