

Standards Committee

Monday, 20 September 2021

PRESENT: M.A. Morgan (Chair)

Independent Members:

M. Dodd, D. Evans, J. James, and A. Williams

Community Member:

Town Councillor P. Rogers

Councillors:

W.T. Evans (substitute for Councillor G.B. Thomas) and S.J.G. Gilasbey

The following Officers were in attendance:

R. Edgecombe, Legal Services Manager;
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer;
A. Eynon, Principal Translator;
M.S. Davies, Democratic Services Officer.

Virtual Meeting: 10.00 am - 11.00 am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor G.B. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. MINUTES - 12TH JULY, 2021

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on the 12th July, 2021 be signed as a correct record.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING

The Committee considered a report on the code of conduct virtual training sessions held for Town and Community councillors on the 21st and 22nd July 2021. Attendance had been slightly down on previous years with a total of 23 councils (roughly a third of the total number) represented. Copies of the training presentation, a briefing note on recent code of conduct cases and a feedback questionnaire had been sent to all Town and Community Councils. It was noted that Carmarthen Town Council had also arranged its own code training events with One Voice Wales on the 20th and 21st July which had been attended by 9 of its councillors plus the clerk and deputy clerk.

It was suggested that future sessions, whether held at a specific venue, virtually or on a hybrid basis, be recorded to allow them to be viewed by individuals at a later date should they choose and that case studies be replaced with reviews of the most recent cases

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the report and endorse the above suggestions.

5. CODE OF CONDUCT DATA

Further to minute 7 of the meeting held on the 25th March 2021, at which it had been agreed to undertake another annual exercise collecting code compliance data from Town and Community Councils, it was reported that a letter had been sent to all 72 councils on the 13th April 2021 asking for replies by the 1st June 2021. The Committee was informed that the total number of councils that had responded remained 54 out of 72 as indicated in the report. The Legal Services Manager stated that he would send out a further reminder to those Town and Community Councils that had not responded.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the progress made to date in obtaining data from Town and Community Councils.

6. REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT GUIDANCE

The Committee considered a report detailing two sets of revised guidance issued by The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales on the application of the Members Code of Conduct. The first set of guidance was directed at members of county borough councils, fire and rescue authorities, national park authorities and police and crime panels whilst the second set was directed at Town and Community councils. The revised guidance reflected legislative changes introduced by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

In response to a comment the Legal Services Manager advised that it would be appropriate to defer submission of the Committee's draft Annual Report until the meeting scheduled in March 2022.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

6.1 to note the revised guidance issued by the Public services Ombudsman for Wales and that Town and Community Councils be provided with a link to the on-line guidance;

6.2 that Town and Community Councils be encouraged to adopt the 'Model Local Resolution Protocol for Community and Town Councils' which was available from One Voice Wales.

7. ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES - CLLR DAVID POOLE

The Committee considered a report detailing the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) decision on the case of Councillor David Poole, former leader of Caerphilly County Borough Council.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note the Panel's decision.

8. REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Further to minute 5 of the last meeting at which concern had been expressed that the Chair of the Committee was named in the Whistleblowing Policy as a possible contact for whistleblowers it was reported that a study of the whistleblowing policies of neighbouring authorities had shown that none of them included the Chair of Standards Committee as a possible contact for whistleblowers. It was considered important, however, given the role that the Committee had in exercising oversight of the policy, that the Chair's details were not removed completely but that only his/her council e-mail address be provided. It was therefore suggested that the Policy be amended in accordance with proposals

outlined in the circulated draft, which clarified that the Chair of Standards would not act as a contact officer if approached by a whistleblower.
It was suggested that any person named as a contact officer within the Policy should have specific training for that role.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to note and approve the proposals outlined subject to it being emphasised that the officers in the table headed by the Chief Executive [which included the Chair of the Standards Committee] were not 'contact' officers in regard to whistleblowing.

9. 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