

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillor M. Dodd (Chair)

Councillors (In Person):

M. Dodd D. Evans P. Rogers R. James

Councillors (Virtually):

C. Davies J. James F. Phillips B.W. Jones
G.B. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor **Error! No document variable supplied.**

Also Present (In Person):

R. Edgecombe, Legal Services Manager
E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer
J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

M. Evans Thomas, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 2.30 - 4.30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. FINAL HEARING IN RESPECT OF REPORT ISSUED BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES REGARDING TOWN COUNCILLOR LOUISE WRIDE

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Town Councillor Louise Wride and Ms Sinead Cook and Ms Sarah Jones of the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Committee was reminded that at the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 25th August, initial consideration was given to the report issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales detailing the results of their investigation into allegations that Town Councillor Louise Wride had breached the Members' Code of Conduct. The Committee concluded that the report did disclose evidence

to suggest that there had been a breach of the Code of Conduct. The case then proceeded to the next stage and Councillor Wride was invited to make representations regarding the further progress of the case.

At the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 14th October, 2022 a Pre-Hearing Review was undertaken, the main aim of which was to consider Councillor Wride's request that the final hearing be heard in private. The Committee resolved that today's final hearing be held in public but with the Committee entering into private session should it be deemed in the public interest at any stage.

At today's final hearing the Committee was being asked to consider the case in full and determine whether Councillor Wride's conduct breached the Code adopted by Llandovery Town Council as suggested in the Ombudsman's report.

The Committee needed to determine whether Councillor Wride's conduct brought her office as a Town Councillor and/or her Council into disrepute. The conduct in question being Councillor Wride's conviction for a criminal offence, as set out in the Ombudsman's report.

If the Committee determined that Councillor Wride's conduct breached the Code, it would then need to consider what sanction (if any) it wished to impose. The maximum sanction that could be imposed was suspension from office for up to 6 months. Should the Committee conclude that Councillor Wride had breached the code and impose a sanction then Councillor Wride would have a right of appeal to the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Ms Cook of the Ombudsman's Office thereupon summarised the findings of the investigation undertaken and the Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions/seek clarification.

Councillor Wride was thereupon invited to address the Committee in her defence of the findings and the Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions/seek clarification.

At this point in the proceedings it was proposed and seconded, pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the reason that, if they were present, it was likely that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 namely information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to retire into private session to enable the Committee to consider exempt information as defined in Paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

The representatives from the Ombudsman's Office and Councillor Wride duly left the meeting and the webcasting of the meeting was paused. Following the conclusion of those deliberations, the Ombudsman's representatives and Councillor Wride re-joined the meeting and the webcast was re-commenced.

Decision as to breach

Based upon the undisputed facts in this case the Committee felt that a reasonable member of the public would consider that Councillor Wride's conduct had brought her office of Councillor and her Council into disrepute and therefore was satisfied that Councillor Wride had breached Paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Code of Conduct. This was especially given that at the time of the breach Councillor Wride held a senior position in the Council as Mayor and her conduct resulted in a criminal conviction.

At this point in the proceedings, in order for the Committee to receive confidential personal information from Cllr Wride to enable it to deliberate upon what sanction, if any, should be imposed, it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to retire into private session to enable the Committee to consider exempt information as defined in Paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

The webcasting of the meeting was therefore paused whilst that confidential personal information was provided to the committee

The committee then retired to consider what sanction, if any, it would impose and Cllr Wride and the Ombudsman's representative again left the meeting.

Having made its decision the private session was concluded and the Ombudsman's representatives and Councillor Wride re-joined the meeting and the webcast was re-commenced so that the decision as to sanction could be given.

Decision as to sanction

In considering the sanction to be imposed upon Councillor Wride for her breach of the Code the Committee had regard to the representations made on behalf of the Ombudsman and those made by Councillor Wride.

The Committee followed the five stage process set out in guidance issued by the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Having considered all the evidence and representations, the Committee

RESOLVED that it would be appropriate and proportionate to suspend Councillor Wride for a period of 2 months and that she should undertake Code of Conduct training within the next six months.

4. **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 to be considered.

CHAIR

DATE