

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 22 APRIL 2024

PRESENT: M. Dodd (Chair)

Independent Members (In Person):

C. Davies D. Evans P. Rogers

Independent Members (Virtually):

F. Phillips

Councillors (In person)

B. Jones

Councillors (Virtually)

G.B. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillors D. Cundy and D. Price in connection with agenda item 4.

Also Present (In Person):

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer
K. Thomas, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

R. Morris, Members Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 2.00 - 3.00 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Tremlett, Leader of the Council's Independent Group, who was engaged on alternative Council Business.

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 4TH MARCH 2024

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on the 4th March 2024 be signed as a correct record.

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.

4. MEETING WITH POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS

The Chair welcomed Councillors Darren Price, Leader of the Council's Plaid Cymru Group, and Councillor Deryk Cundy, Leader of the Council's Labour Group, who had been invited to attend the meeting in connection with agenda item 4 – Meeting with Political Group Leaders. She advised that whilst Councillor Tremlett was unable to attend the meeting, she had submitted some written observations and advised that she would be able to attend a future meeting if that was the committee's wish.

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 the Committee considered whether the Annual Reports received from the Leaders of the Council's three political Groups complied with their duties under the 2021 Act to:

- take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their group and;
- co-operate with the Council's Standards Committee in the exercise of the Standards Committee's functions.

The Act also placed a duty on the Standards Committee to monitor compliance by leaders of political groups on the council with their duties under the Act, and to publish an annual report which must include the committee's assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the council have complied with their duties under the 2021 Act.

Statutory guidance issued by the Welsh Government expanded upon these duties and provided that Group Leaders should meet with the whole Standards Committee at the start of each year to discuss.

- (1) the frequency of meetings between the Committee and Group Leaders during the year,
- (2) the compliance by the Group Leaders with their duties under the 2021 Act,
- (3) the annual reporting process and
- (4) any issues arising from the analysis of complaints in respect of standards of behaviour

In accordance with the above requirements the Committee received presentations from both Councillor Price and Councillor Cundy on their annual reports and obligations under the 2021 Act with the following issues being discussed:-

- Reference was made to the Code of Conduct Training provided to elected members and to the frequency of its provision. It was felt all newly elected members should receive training following their election with returning councillors receiving refresher training. Thereafter, views were expressed that refresher training should be provided for all members mid-way through the electoral term, which could include on-line provision.
- With regard to the frequency of meetings between the Group Leaders and the Committee, it was expressed they should be held annually.

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- Reference was made to case studies received by the Standards Committee on the outcome of investigations of complaints made against elected members throughout Wales, whether following Standards Committee hearings or Adjudication Panel for Wales hearings. It was felt circulation of those reports to the Council's elected members would be beneficial as a means of shared learning, especially so in relation to complaints relating to the use of social media. The Monitoring Officer advised that arrangements could be made for the Group Leaders to be provided with a link to the Standards Agenda when case studies were being considered for subsequent dissemination to their members.
- Several references were made to the use of Social Media by elected members and on the need for members to be mindful of the pitfalls associated with that platform.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to accept that the annual reports submitted by the Council's three political Group Leaders complied with their duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5. 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

Note: These minutes are subject to confirmation at the next meeting.