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THURSDAY, 11 APRIL 2024

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

I HEREBY SUMMON YOU TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** WHICH WILL BE HELD IN THE **CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, CARMARTHEN. SA31 1JP AND REMOTELY AT 2.00 PM ON MONDAY, 22ND APRIL, 2024** FOR THE TRANSACTION OF THE BUSINESS OUTLINED ON THE ATTACHED AGENDA

Wendy Walters

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Democratic Officer:	Kevin Thomas
Telephone (direct line):	01267 224027
E-Mail:	kjthomas@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
This is a multi-location meeting. Committee members can attend in person at the venue detailed above or remotely via the Zoom link which is provided separately.	
The meeting can be viewed on the Authority's website via the following link:- https://carmarthenshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home	

Wendy Walters Prif Weithredwr, *Chief Executive*,
Neuadd y Sir, Caerfyrddin. SA31 1JP
County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

9 MEMBERS

MEMBERSHIP: 9 MEMBERS

Independent Members (5)

1. Mrs Mary Dodd
2. Ms Caryl Davies
3. Mrs Daphne Evans
4. Mr Frank Phillips
5. Vacancy

Community Committee Member (1)

1. Town Councillor Phillip Rogers

Elected Members of the County Council (3)

1. Councillor Betsan Jones
2. Councillor Gareth Thomas
3. Vacancy

A G E N D A

- 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**
- 2. 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** 5 - 10
- 4. MEETING WITH POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS** 11 - 20
- 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.**

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 4 MARCH 2024

PRESENT: M. Dodd (Chair)

Independent Members (In Person):

D. Evans

Councillors (Virtually):

B.W. Jones

G.B. Thomas

Independent Members

(Virtually):

C. Davies

F. Phillips

Community Member (Virtually):

P. Rogers

Also Present (In Person):

R. Edgecombe, Legal Services Manager

J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer

E. Evans, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Also Present (Virtually):

D. Hall-Jones, Member Support Officer

Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 2.00 pm – 2.56pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

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 16TH JANUARY 2024

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 16th January, 2024 be signed as a correct record.

4. APPOINTMENT OF A NEW VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

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

Further to the departure of the previous Vice-Chair, the Committee considered nominations for the role of Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

Committee members extended their gratitude to the former Vice Chair of the Committee, Julie James, for her sterling contribution to the work of the Standards Committee in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected councillors and co-opted members within Carmarthenshire County Council.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Daphne Evans be appointed Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

5. REVIEW OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE ACTION LOG

The Committee considered a report detailing the progress achieved in relation to the actions, requests or referrals that had emanated from previous meetings.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING FOR TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS

In accordance with the Standards Committee terms of reference, consideration was given to a report regarding the provision and delivery of Code of Conduct training for Town and Community Councillors for 2024.

In considering the accessibility arrangements, the Committee was reminded that at its meeting in September 2023, the Committee endorsed that consideration be given to future sessions being held remotely due to the low level of in-person attendance and the additional resources required to facilitate hybrid / multi-location training. It was reported that the live webcast of a remote training session hosted on the Council's website would enable councils to access the training for a period of 6-months, therefore only one session was required. Committee emphasised the importance of the training and expressed that Town and Community Councils could assist the Council with its data gathering requirements by confirming their attendance at the session in writing using the online training chat facility or verbally by way of a roll call at the commencement of the training.

Committee reviewed the training presentation which had been updated to include the latest decisions by the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that one online code of conduct training session be provided for Town and Community Councillors in June/July 2024 according to the availability of the presenters, with the webcast made available on the Council's website for a period of 6 months.

7. TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT DATA GATHERING EXERCISE

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

The Legal Services Manager presented a report wherein the Committee was reminded that Town and Community Councils were annually requested to provide data regarding code of conduct compliance by their members and the responses received were combined with data held by the Council to provide a comprehensive overview of code compliance by these councillors covering:

1. Declarations of interest
2. Dispensation requests
3. Code of conduct complaints
4. Code of conduct training
5. Council Training Plan

The Committee's views were sought on the proposed scope and methodology for the 2024 data gathering exercise.

To ease the administrative burden associated with the data gathering exercise, it was proposed that the data be collected by way of an online snap survey, with a view to the results being presented to the Committee at a future meeting using a mixture of charts and graphs, enabling, where possible, for comparison with the preceding municipal year's results to be portrayed.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the questions detailed within the report, together with the use of an online snap survey be endorsed for the Town and Community Code of Conduct data gathering exercise.

8. DISPENSATION REQUEST BY COUNCILLOR RODERICK GRIFFITHS

The Committee considered an application submitted by Councillor Roderick Griffiths of Llansteffan and Llanybri Community Council for the grant of a dispensation under the provisions of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations to speak and make written representations only in relation to council business regarding 'The Green' in Llansteffan.

It was reported that Councillor Griffiths had a personal and prejudicial interest in this matter as

- he/his family owns land adjoining 'The Green';
- his family has the benefit of a restrictive covenant over part of the land in question. This covenant places restrictions on what can be done with, and on, land conveyed to the Council in 1980. This land forms part of the area covered by the proposed changes to 'The Green';
- his family own a business operating on land adjoining to The Green.

Councillor Griffiths sought dispensation by virtue of Regulation 2(d) – the nature of the member's interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business and Regulation 2(f) – the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the members particular role or expertise.

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

The Committee was advised that if it was minded to grant the dispensation request it would also need to determine the duration of that dispensation.

Following a discussion, it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that dispensation be granted under Regulations 2 (d) and (f) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensation) (Wales) Regulations 2001 for Councillor Roderick Griffiths to SPEAK AND MAKE WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ONLY BUT NOT VOTE at meetings relating to 'The Green' in Llansteffan and that the dispensation be valid until the end of his current term in office.

9. DISPENSATION REQUEST BY COUNCILLOR MARY MARGARET WENMAN

The Committee considered an application submitted by Councillor Mary Margaret Wenman of Burry Port and Pembrey Town Council for the grant of a dispensation under the provisions of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations to speak, vote and make written representations in relation to the former Copperworks School in Burry Port.

It was reported that Councillor Wenman had a personal and prejudicial interest in this matter as she is the Chair of the 'Friends of the Copperworks' a voluntary organisation which wishes to influence the Town Council over the future of the remaining building on the site and lease it. The application also detailed Cllr Wenman's membership of 'the Heritage and Historical society', but it was unclear from the application what direct interest this group has in the Copperworks site.

Councillor Wenman sought dispensation by virtue of:

1. Regulation 2(a) no fewer than half the members of the relevant authority by which the business is to be considered has an interest which relates to that business.
2. Regulation 2(d) the nature of the members interest in such that their participating in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence.
3. Regulation 2(e) the interest is common to the member and a significant proportion of the general public.
4. Regulation 2(f) the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise
5. Regulation 2(g) the business to which the interest relates is to be considered by an overview or scrutiny committee and the members interest is not a pecuniary interest.

The Legal Services Manager advised that of these grounds, Regulations 2(e) and 2(g) were unlikely to apply and there was nothing in the application to support the ground under Regulation 2(a). Regulations 2(d) and 2(f) were however deemed to be applicable.

The Committee was advised that if it was minded to grant the dispensation request it would also need to determine the duration of that dispensation.

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

Following a discussion, it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that dispensation be granted under Regulations 2 (d) and (f) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensation) (Wales) Regulations 2001 for Mary Margaret Wenman to SPEAK AND MAKE WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS ONLY BUT NOT VOTE at meetings relating to the former Copperworks School in Burry Port and that the dispensation be valid until the end of her current term in office.

10. GROUP DISPENSATION REQUEST ON BEHALF OF MEMBERS OF LLANLLAWDDOG COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The Committee considered a group application submitted by the clerk to Llanllawddog Community Council in respect of 6 of the 7 current members of that authority for the grant of a dispensation under the provisions of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations to speak and vote and make written representations in relation to council business regarding the Towy/Teifi overhead line proposed by Green Gen Cymru/Bute Energy.

It was noted that dispensations were sought by Councillors Deborah Dean, Elizabeth Gibbon, Havard Hughes, Darrell Lewis, Steven Mason and Peter Williams each of which had submitted declarations of interest as detailed in appendix 1 of the report.

The dispensations were sought by virtue of Regulation 2(a) no fewer than half the members of the relevant authority by which the business is to be considered has an interest which relates to that business and Regulation 2(d) – the nature of the member's interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business.

Members commented on the number of dispensation applications received in connection with the aforementioned scheme, and the possible implications in terms of the quorum for community council meetings.

The Committee was advised that if it was minded to grant the dispensation request it would also need to determine the duration of that dispensation.

Following a discussion, it was

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that dispensation be granted under Regulations 2 (a) and (d) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensation) (Wales) Regulations 2001 for Councillors Deborah Dean, Elizabeth Gibbon, Havard Hughes, Darrell Lewis, Steven Mason and Peter Williams to SPEAK, MAKE WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS AND VOTE at meetings relating to the Towy/Teifi overhead line proposed by Green Gen Cymru/Bute Energy and that the dispensation be valid until the end of their current term in office.

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

11. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme [FWP] for 2024/25 which identified the key reports it should expect to receive at its scheduled quarterly meetings.

In considering the FWP, the Committee suggested that the minutes of the National Standards Committee Chairs Forum (Wales) meetings, together with pertinent publications/reports from the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) and Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) be added to the scheduled quarterly meeting agendas.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the draft 2024/25 Forward Work Programme be adopted, subject to the inclusion of the above noted suggestions.

12. 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.

<u>Report on Compliance With the Group Leaders Duty</u>					
Report by:	Darren Price				
Political Group:	Plaid Cymru				
No. of members:	38	No. trained on Code:	31 (82%)		
For the period:	May 2023 – April 2024				
<u>Number, Source and Level of Complaints</u>					
From	Local Resolution	Public Services Ombudsman			Other
		No Action	Referred to Standards committee	Referred to APW	
Public	0	7	N/A	N/A	
Officers	0	0	0	0	
Councillors	1	0	0	0	
<u>Steps taken to Promote Compliance (To Be Completed by Group Leader)</u>					
Address such matters such as:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrating personal commitment to and attending and participating in relevant development or training around equalities and standards, including on the Code of Conduct. - actively encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards including in relation to the Code of Conduct. - ensuring nominees to a committee have received the recommended training for participating on that committee; 					
<p>As Leader of the Council, and the Plaid Cymru Group, ensuring that members maintain standards in public life, in line with the Nolan principles is important to me.</p> <p>During the year I have encouraged members of my Group who were unable to attend the Code of Conduct session in May 2022 to attend additional training sessions on the Code of Conduct which had been arranged in April and May 2023. An additional 10 Group members attended one of those training sessions, which I also attended.</p> <p>Of the 7 Plaid Cymru members that have not been able to attend Code of Conduct training in 2022 or 2023, 6 of them have undertaken training prior to this Council term.</p>					

For those that were unable to attend the sessions in April or May 2023, I urged them to access online resources that are available to them in terms of refreshing their appreciation of expected standards in public life.

Generally, I believe that my group have a strong grasp of the standards expected of them and we strive to ensure that senior members of the group can advise and support newer members in these matters, often advising in terms of the need to declare interests in Council meetings etc.

As a group, we are also well supported by Council officers who are always prepared to offer advice, often proactively, on the Code.

STEPS TAKEN TO PREVENT POOR BEHAVIOUR

Address such matters as:

- promoting civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal council meetings.
- promoting civility and respect in all online and social media communications.
- supporting informal resolution procedures in the council, and working with the standards committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution.
- encouraging a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity;

I strive to ensure that every group member feels that their views are being heard. The authority has faced some difficult decisions over that past year, and will continue to do so, as public finances reduce further over the next few years.

I have tried to ensure that discussions around these very sensitive issues are conducted within an environment of civility and respect, and am pleased to report that there have been very few instances where standards have not been met.

A tendency had developed within the group for sometimes complex policy issues to be discussed via our Group's social media platform. This sometimes led to tensions, as members weren't able to articulate themselves in the same way that they would in person. Some felt frustrated and this was reported to me by a number of members. During the year, I therefore clarified the policy development procedure for the group, which aims to ensure that all group members have the opportunity via our regular 'away days' to contribute in person to the Group's strategic direction. I believe this to be an important principle.

I have had reason this year to play my part in one informal resolution procedure between two members from two different political groups, which prevented escalation to the Ombudsman.

STEPS TAKEN TO WORK WITH THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND/OR OTHER GROUP LEADERS

Address such matters as:

- Attending any meeting of the council's standards committee if requested to participate in discussions on Code of Conduct issues.
- Implementing any recommendations from the standards committee about improving standards.
- Working with the standards committee to proactively identify, consider and tackle patterns of inappropriate behavior.
- Working together with other group leaders to collectively support high standards of conduct within the council.

During 2023-24 I have continued to try and change the way that politics takes place within the Council. I continue to push for early cross-party discussions – and inviting members from across the chamber to feed in their ideas. I want all members to feel that they have a contribution to make, and that their views are respected.

I appreciate that members of different political persuasions will not always agree, but I am certain that we can do so in a way which is respectful and maintains standards. Throughout the year, I maintained a respectful relationship with the former Leader of the Opposition, meeting regularly, sometimes informally, to discuss a range of matters. I will seek to develop a similar relationship with the newly elected Leader of the Opposition as we look to respond to a number of challenges to local government services over the next few years.

During the year, I confirmed my willingness to engage with the Council's Standards Committee, and am looking forward to working with members to make any necessary improvements in order to support high standards of conduct.

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Report on Compliance With the Group Leaders Duty

Report by:	Jane Tremlett		
Political Group:	Independent		
No. of members:	Eleven	No. trained on Code: None	X (Y%)
For the period:	2023-March 31 2024		

Number, Source and Level of Complaints

From	Local Resolution	Public Services Ombudsman			Other
		No Action	Referred to Standards committee	Referred to APW	
Public					
Officers					
Councillors	None	None	None	None	None

Steps taken to Promote Compliance (To Be Completed by Group Leader)

Address such matters such as:

- demonstrating personal commitment to and attending and participating in relevant development or training around equalities and standards, including on the Code of Conduct.
- actively encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards including in relation to the Code of Conduct.
- ensuring nominees to a committee have received the recommended training for participating on that committee;

Independent members attended the Induction Training and Development session on Compliance, Equalities and Standards and Code of Conduct following the 2022 election. Independent members are encourage to attend further training sessions and when they are scheduled. Where appropriate members receive recommended training for membership on that committee.

STEPS TAKEN TO PREVENT POOR BEHAVIOUR
<p>Address such matters as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promoting civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal council meetings. - promoting civility and respect in all online and social media communications. - supporting informal resolution procedures in the council, and working with the standards committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution. - encouraging a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity;
<p>As Independent Group Leader, I am fortunate in that members respect the views of others even if not their own. As a Group of Independent members, we do not follow party political disciplines. Each Independent member is just that and each member's views are respected even if they are not in the majority whether they be in Group discussions or formal Council meetings. Independent members enjoy a positive, courteous relationship with members of other political groups as well as officers. We work harmoniously as colleagues and support each other on issues within our Wards and behave appropriately with high standards of conduct and integrity in our Council work both in Council and on any outside bodies members sit on.</p>
STEPS TAKEN TO WORK WITH THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND/OR OTHER GROUP LEADERS
<p>Address such matters as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attending any meeting of the council's standards committee if requested to participate in discussions on Code of Conduct issues. - Implementing any recommendations from the standards committee about improving standards. - Working with the standards committee to proactively identify, consider and tackle patterns of inappropriate behavior. - Working together with other group leaders to collectively support high standards of conduct within the council.
<p>As Independent Group Leader, I am happy to make my self available to attend any requested attendance at a meeting of the Council's Standards Committee in discussions on Code of Conduct issues.</p> <p>Any recommendations from the Standards Committee would be implemented within the Independent Group to improve standards.</p> <p>Should any inappropriate patterns of behaviour be identified, I would, of course, proactively work with the Standards Committee to consider, tackle and eradicate any such behaviour.</p> <p>As Independent Group Leader, I work closely with the other group leaders to maintain and support high standards of conduct within the Council.</p>

Report on Compliance With the Group Leaders Duty

Report by:	Councillor Deryk Cundy		
Political Group:	Labour		
No. of members:	21	No. trained on Code:	21 (100%)
For the period:	8 th February 2024 until 31 st March 2024* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I did not become the Leader of the Labour Group until 8th February 2024. This report therefore deals only with matters arising since my appointment to that role. 		

Number, Source and Level of Complaints

From	Local Resolution	Public Services Ombudsman			Other
		No Action	Referred to Standards committee	Referred to APW	
Public	0	0	0	0	
Officers	0	0	0	0	
Councillors	0	0	0	0	

Steps taken to Promote Compliance (To Be Completed by Group Leader)

Address such matters such as:

- demonstrating personal commitment to and attending and participating in relevant development or training around equalities and standards, including on the Code of Conduct.
- actively encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards including in relation to the Code of Conduct.
- ensuring nominees to a committee have received the recommended training for participating on that committee;

I have personally attended code of conduct training prior to becoming group leader.

Since becoming Group Leader I have taken the following steps to promote compliance within the Labour Group

1. Spoken to Group Members collectively and stressed the importance of them acting in a professional manner and complying with the code.
2. Arranged for the agenda for the next AGM of the Group to contain specific items relating to the personal conduct of members.
3. Since becoming Group Leader I have not become aware of any code complaints against Group members

STEPS TAKEN TO PREVENT POOR BEHAVIOUR

Address such matters as:

- promoting civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal council meetings.
- promoting civility and respect in all online and social media communications.
- supporting informal resolution procedures in the council, and working with the standards committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution.
- encouraging a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity;

Since becoming Group Leader I have taken the following steps to prevent poor behaviour by Group Members

1. Continued my predecessor's efforts to ensure social media posts by Group Members do not breach the code.
2. Continued with using internal 'contracts' in which any new Labour councillor would commit to comply with the code

STEPS TAKEN TO WORK WITH THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND/OR OTHER GROUP LEADERS

Address such matters as:

- Attending any meeting of the council's standards committee if requested to participate in discussions on Code of Conduct issues.
- Implementing any recommendations from the standards committee about improving standards.
- Working with the standards committee to proactively identify, consider and tackle patterns of inappropriate behavior.
- Working together with other group leaders to collectively support high standards of conduct within the council.

Since becoming Group Leader I have taken the following steps to work with the Standards Committee and other Group Leaders

1. Submitted my Annual Report for consideration by the Committee and prioritised my attendance at the meeting with committee scheduled for the 22nd April 2024.
2. Looked to foster positive working arrangements with the other political groups and their Leaders, particularly around the budget setting process.
3. I would like to think I have a positive personal relationship with the other two group leaders.

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