

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

17TH MARCH 2017

PRESENT: Mr M.A. Morgan (Vice-Chair Presiding)

Independent Members:

M. Dodd, A. Williams

Councillors:

S.M. Allen and G.B. Thomas

Community Member:

J. Gilasbey

The following Officers were in attendance:

L.R. Jones, Head of Administration and Law

R. Edgecombe, Acting Legal Services Manager

J. Owen, Democratic Services Officer

Chamber, County Hall, Carmarthen - 10.00am - 10.55am

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr C. Downward.

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 13TH JANUARY 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 13th January, 2017 be signed as a correct record.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

The Committee received for information a report the Ombudsman's Code of Conduct Casebook, Issue 11, which contained summaries of code investigations that had been brought to a conclusion. The Committee noted two particular cases relating to members of Monmouthshire County Council and Tywyn Town Council.

The Acting Legal Services Manager asked if Committee Members wished to continue to receive and consider the Code of Conduct Casebook on a quarterly basis. The Committee agreed that the information within the Casebooks were beneficial and that future Casebooks would be welcomed to the Committee.

Following a query regarding resignations being tendered during the investigation period of a complaint, the Head of Administration and Law stated that in normal circumstances a resignation would not stop a complaint process.

In relation to a case involving Monmouthshire County Council, a discussion ensued regarding public perception of equality and respect. The Head of Administration and Law stated that one of the requirements of the Code of Conduct was to treat people with respect which should be adhered to at all times.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

5. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING FOR COUNTY COUNCILLORS

The Committee considered a report on the Code of Conduct Training for County Councillors which included a training presentation and an ethics and standards briefing pack for facilitators.

The Committee noted that following the local government elections in May 2017, arrangements had been made to hold a training session for newly elected Councillors on the Members' Code of Conduct which was scheduled to take place on 15th May 2017. Furthermore, a separate induction session for any new members of the Standards Committee had been scheduled to take place on 9th June 2017. Co-opted members of the Committee were welcome to attend both training sessions.

The Acting Legal Services Manager stated that as in previous years, it was proposed to utilise training materials developed by the Welsh Local Government Association when delivering training. He added that whilst bespoke training sessions were not currently available for the Standards Committee, he would be happy to provide specific training should the Committee deem necessary.

The Head of Administration and Law stated that it had been necessary to change the date for the Standards Committee training session to the 5th June 2017 and requested that the new date be noted.

Based on previous training sessions, it was suggested that a microphone would be beneficial to ensure that all attendees were able to hear the speaker. The Acting Legal Services Manager agreed and noted accordingly.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the report be received.

6. CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING FOR TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILLORS

The Committee was reminded that for several years it had arranged training sessions on the Member's Code of Conduct for Town and Community Councillors. In accordance with that practice, it gave consideration to the proposed presentation for the 2017 sessions, incorporating feedback from the 2016 events.

The Committee noted that the main changes included the re-writing of the section on Personal Interests and although the reference to the 'easy use' guide had been retained, the slides setting out the various grounds that gave rise to a personal interest, had been re-inserted to better explain to new Councillors their obligations under this part of the Code. Furthermore, in addition, a new section had been inserted setting out those personal interests which the Code states are NOT prejudicial and further new sections advising where advice could be sought and emphasising the role of the Clerk.

After a discussion regarding the number and locations for the 2017 training sessions, it was proposed to hold two training sessions in County Hall, Carmarthen during June, and that no limit would be placed on the number of delegates that could attend from each Authority. This was seconded and agreed, as this format would provide Town and Community Councillors the opportunity to meet each other.

The Acting Legal Services Manager stated that he would forward the dates of the training sessions to the Committee in due course.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:

- 6.1 the presentation for the 2017 Members Code of Conduct Training Sessions for Town and Community Councillors be approved.**
- 6.2 two training sessions would be held in County Hall with no limit on the number of delegates that could attend from each Authority.**

7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year. The draft programme was developed to achieve an even distribution of work throughout the year.

The Acting Legal Services Manager proposed that the presentation of the Chairman's Annual Report to full council be moved from December 2017 to January 2018. This move would allow the draft Annual Report to be considered by the Committee at its meeting in December 2017, along with the Annual Report on Code Compliance by Town and Community Councils allowing additional time to include necessary information.

Furthermore, the Committee noted that a standing item on the agenda of all meetings had been included in order for the Committee to consider any developments in case law or guidance and to consider the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Code of Conduct Casebook.

The Head of Administration and Law stated that the Annual Report for the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) would also be added to the forward work plan. In addition, the Committee was informed that the bi-annual Annual Standards Conference would be taking place later this year and that the location was yet to be confirmed.

The Head of Administration and Law highlighted that the White Paper: Reforming Local Government which was currently out for consultation, included a number of proposed changes that would impact on the Standards Committee. One of the proposed changes included was that Standards Committees would hear cases of alleged failure by members to perform prescribed performance duties, as well as breaches of the member code of conduct.

In order to ensure that the Committee was fully informed, the Acting Legal Services Manager stated that he would provide a report detailing all the proposed changes and a report on the Code of Conduct Compliance for Town and Community Councils to the future Committee meeting.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Standards Committee Forward Work Programme 2017/18 be approved.

CHAIR

DATE