



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee meeting held on Friday, 22 March 2019 at 10.00 am at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

Present:

Independent Members:

Mr M Jehu (Chair)

Mr D. Bowen

Mr C. Pallant

County Borough Councillors - Standards Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor M. Forey Councillor C. Willis

Community Councillor:

MR. R. Butler

Officers in attendance

Mr A. Wilkins- Head of Legal - Corporate & Democratic Services (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

31 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Members to a meeting of the Standards Committee and he introduced Mr Colin Pallant as the new reserve Member. In light of the Committee's new membership, the Chair asked Members and Officers to introduce themselves and the appropriate introductions were made.

The Chair also wished to place on record his personal thanks to the current Director, Legal & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and to wish him well in his retirement. Members endorsed the Chairman's comments.

32 Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from County Borough Councillor E. Webster and Independent member Mr J. Thomas

33 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

34 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 23rd of November as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

35 APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION - COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCILLOR M.POWELL

The Monitoring Officer referred Members to his report, which sought the Committee's endorsement to grant dispensation to County Borough Councillor M. Powell to speak and vote on all matters relating to the Children's Services department (within the Community and Children's Services Group) save for any specific matters that directly affect his wife who is employed by the Council in the Children's Services department as a Contact Worker, with such dispensation being reviewed on an annual basis by the Standards Committee

The grounds for granting a dispensation under which Councillor Powell has applied for his dispensation are as follows:

- (c) "in the case of a county or county borough council, the inability of the member to participate would upset the political balance of the relevant authority or of the committee of the authority by which the business is to be considered to such an extent that the outcome would be likely to be affected;
- (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;
- (e) the interest is common to the member and a significant proportion of the general public;
- (f) the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise;
- (j) it appears to the committee to be otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation. "

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED:--**

1. To grant County Borough Councillor M. Powell a dispensation to speak and vote on all matters relating to the Children's Services department, save for any specific matters that directly affect his wife, who is employed by the Council in the Children's Services department as a Contact Worker on the ground that the participation of the Member in the business to which the interest

- relates is justified by the Member's particular role or expertise as Leader of the Alliance Political Group.; and,
2. That such dispensation is reviewed on an annual basis.

36 Standards Committee Annual Report 2018 - 2019

Members were asked to consider the draft Standards Committee annual report for the Municipal Year 2018-19.

The Chair praised the report and reminded the Committee that photos of the Committee's Members will be included in the final version. He asked Members to send over headshots of themselves to the Council Business Unit as soon as possible.

Following consideration of the report, Members **RESOLVED:-**

1. To approve the draft Standards Committee Annual Report for the Municipal Year 2018-19.

37 Members' attendance at Meetings - An update

The Monitoring Officer provided Members of the Committee with an update in respect to the current position regarding the recording of Members' attendance at meetings.

Committee Members were informed that the recording of Members' attendance is now available on the Council Website and Members will now be able to provide reasons for non-attendance at Committee meetings using several categories, if they so wish.

The Chair informed Members that he recently met with the Chair of the Democratic Services Committee to discuss the changes and that it is evident that the system is now far more transparent. He praised the work of the Standards Committee and the role that it has played in achieving this outcome and noted that Members' attendance would now be taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee.

Discussions ensued and a number of Members raised concerns in respect of Elected Members who leave meetings early yet are still being recorded on the attendance sheet as being present at that meeting. The Monitoring Officer assured Members that this has never been a systemic problem within this Council. A Member queried whether this could be recorded; however, it was stressed that this information would be too difficult to capture given the nature of Committee meetings. The Chair emphasised that if Elected Members are persistently leaving meetings early then it is incumbent upon the Chair and other Elected Members to report it to the Monitoring Officer.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED:-**

1. To acknowledge the update in respect of Members' attendance at meetings and that this work would now be taken forward by the Democratic Services Committee.

38 UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT CUSTOMER POLICY - UPDATE AND ANNUAL REVIEW 2018 - 2019

The Monitoring Officer provided the Standards Committee with a summary of decisions made and action taken in respect of customers identified as unreasonably persistent in accordance with the Council's Unreasonably Persistent Customer policy during the period 1st March 2018 – 21st March 2019.

Committee Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report, which contains the Unreasonably Persistent Customer Policy.

Discussions ensued and whilst Members praised the policy, they emphasised that Elected Members must also apply a certain amount of leniency in respect of the policy. The Chair queried how customer complaints are recorded and decisions taken to implement the policy. The Monitoring Officer advised that officers explore all ways to resolve a complaint or issue a customer may have before having to resort to using the Unreasonably Persistent Customer policy where behaviour as outlined within the policy is being demonstrated. Members were informed that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services acts as the central point of referral for Unreasonably Persistent Customers and maintains a repository of all Unreasonably Persistent Customer cases noting such cases are kept under regular review. Members welcomed the addition of the Protocol provided for Members on how to deal with anonymous correspondence sent to Councillors.

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED:-**

1. To note that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services acts as the central point of referral for Unreasonably Persistent Customers and maintains a repository of all Unreasonably Persistent Customer cases; and,
2. To note the use of the Unreasonably Persistent Customer policy by the Council during the period 1st March 2018 – 21st March 2019

39 Local Government Ethical Standards

Committee Members were presented with the review on Local Government Ethical Standards undertaken by the Committee on Standards in public life.

The deputy Monitoring Officer acknowledged that the review undertaken concerned the application of the Standards regime within England

however there were many references to practices undertaken in Wales and ethical standards issues generally that were of relevance to this Council and its Standards Committee. Members agreed it was right to receive such information and that they should be kept abreast in respect of practices and procedures being undertaken elsewhere and any lessons that could be learnt.

The Chair noted that the report assures Members of the Standards Committee in RCT that Wales has continued to implement a consistent, fair and logical approach to ethical standards and the work of a Standards Committee, reflected by the examples of best practice in Wales being highlighted in the report and recommended as practices that should be adopted or re-adopted in some cases in England. The Chair emphasised how important the culture of an authority was in ensuring appropriate ethical standards were in place and promoted through the leadership of the Standards Committee.

Discussions turned to the use of Social Media by Elected Members which was highlighted in the review and the Chair emphasised that Elected Members need to be careful when using Social Media as a tool of communication.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note the review undertaken by the Committee on Standards in public life.

40 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

Members received the Ombudsman's Code of Conduct Casebook (Issues 18 &19) produced by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales produces quarterly Code of Conduct casebooks. Members were referred to Issues 18 & 19 of the Code of Conduct Casebook in Appendix 1 of the report.

Members were informed that the Casebook gives a general picture of what is happening across Wales in terms of complaints.

The Chair commented that the Casebook is useful as a terms of reference for Members. He advised Members of the Committee to use it as a benchmark of a national standard.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the Ombudsman's Code of Conduct Casebook (Issues 18 &19) published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

41 The Chair's Closing Remarks

The Chair reminded Members about the Council's aim to be a paperlight Authority and he urged Members to use their Council issued iPad to receive Committee agendas.

Members were also informed that the next meeting date would be set for the beginning of July and a diary marker would be sent out shortly.

This meeting closed at 11.00 am

**M Jehu
Chair**