

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT
2018-2019

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

As the Chairman of the Standards Committee, I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Standards Committee which provides an overview of the Committee's work during the 2018-2019 Municipal Year in continuing to promote high standards of conduct within the Council. It is essential that such standards are being communicated, understood and practised across the Council both by Members and Officers.

Firstly, I would like to welcome our new members to the Committee who joined us during the Municipal Year; Independent Member Mr D. Bowen, reserve Independent Member Mr C. Pallant and reserve Community Councillor Member, Ms C. Willis. All bring with them a wealth of personal experience and knowledge and I look forward to them providing their expertise and adding another perspective as we undertake the Committee's work. It is pleasing that we now have a full complement of Committee Members and going forward I think it is important that our reserve Independent and Community Council Members attend all meetings of the Committee to ensure that they are aware of its work and discussions that take place. This approach will allow a consistent and resilient approach to the work of the Standards Committee going forward, benefiting the Committee Members themselves and those that it serves.

The Committee's Work Programme during the Municipal Year reflects full Committee meetings with the addition of a Standards Committee hearing arising from a complaint made by a Member under the Council's 'Local Protocol – Standards of Conduct expected by Members'.

At the 2018 Standards Conference Wales event, run by Ceredigion County Council and hosted by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, Members were able to participate in a variety of workshops on relevant topics such as; sharing best practice in the role of the Standards Committee, personal and prejudicial interests and dispensations; the practical aspects of holding a Standards Hearing and Social Media and Bullying. Members were also addressed by Nick Bennett, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and Claire Sharp, the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales on current issues relevant to their offices. It was pleasing to hear at one of the workshops the Council's Standards Committee referenced and acknowledged as being a standard of good practice for the work we have done in previous years to promote ethical standards.

Indeed, the Conference recognised the need for Standards Committees to incorporate the good practices of other Standards Committees across Wales.

In this regard, the Council hosted a joint training session for both RCT and Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Standards Committee Members. The session, which centred on an interactive mock standards hearing, was found to be hugely beneficial by all who attended. It was also my privilege to welcome colleagues from Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Standards Committee to observe our meetings and for us as a Committee to share our good practices and experiences with them. This way of collaborative working allows for a more cohesive and resilient approach to Standards across local authorities and we welcome the opportunity to further engage, share and learn from our peers across Standards Committees in Wales.

In respect of 'good practices' the Committee has also resolved to follow the Council's decision to take forward a 'paper light' approach to Committee meetings, as we look to embrace technology and adopt a more environmentally friendly approach to Committee meetings as we all try to reduce our carbon footprint.

It is important that as a Committee we also take forward the principles and ways of working outlined within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act thinking more about the long-term, ensuring that our decisions provide for opportunities for better working arrangements between the Council and the people it serves, ensuring that we act in a preventative manner looking to prevent problems rather than react to them and to take a more joined-up approach to our work.

As ever the Committee's work relies heavily on the support it receives from officers and I wish to place on record our thanks to them and to send the Committee's best wishes to the Council's Monitoring Officer, Mr Chris Jones, following his retirement during the Municipal Year.

MEL JEHU
CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Membership of the Standards Committee

Chairman (and Independent Member): Mr. Mel Jehu

Independent Member: Mr. D. Bowen

Independent Member: Mr. J. Thomas

Reserve Independent Member: Mr. C. Pallant

County Borough Councillor: M. Forey

County Borough Councillor: E. Webster

Community Councillor: Raymond Butler

Reserve Community Councillor: Ms. C. Willis

Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee

The Standards Committee will have the following roles and functions:

- (a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives;
- (b) assisting the Councillors, co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (c) advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (e) advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (f) granting dispensations to Councillors, co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (g) dealing with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter referred to that Officer by the Public Services Ombudsman For Wales;
- (h) overview of the Council's whistleblowing policy;
- (i) overview of complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations;
- (j) oversight of the Members' protocols adopted by the Council;
- (k) oversight of the register of personal interests maintained under Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000;
- (l) oversight of the gifts and hospitality register;
- (m) monitor adherence to the Council's Management of Unreasonably Persistent Customers Policy by Group and Service Directors; and
- (n) the Committee will exercise the functions set out in (a) - (g) above in relation to Community Councils and Members of Community Councils.

THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE DURING THE 2018 – 2019 MUNICIPAL YEAR

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT AND COMMUNITY COUCILLOR MEMBER REPRESENTATIVES ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

In February 2018, the Council, following a recommendation from the Standards Committee Appointments Panel appointed Mr David J.J Bowen as an Independent Member of the Standards Committee for a four year term of office. The Council also appointed Ms. C. Willis as reserve Community Councillor Member representative.

In November 2018, the Council appointed Mr. C. Pallant as the Committee's reserve Independent Member for a 4 year term.

The Standards Committee Appointments Panel welcomed all the applications received although acknowledged its disappointment that no applications had been received from females for the position of Independent Member. Going forward it is important that the Standards Committee looks to actively engage and promote its work to widen its audience for any future vacancies and create more diversity across its membership.

MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Committee acknowledges that the primary role of monitoring Members' training and development falls on the Council's Democratic Services Committee. However the Committee does have a specific role in overseeing Code of Conduct training. Some aspects of Member's training outside of the Code of Conduct specifically does impinge on standards issues, such as the use of Social Media and therefore the Committee does consider this relevant to their work from a Standards perspective.

- Monitoring the delivery and attendance at "Code of Conduct" training sessions provided for both County Borough and Community/Town Councillors.
- Monitoring the delivery of electronic and social media training for elected Members

ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES - REVISED SANCTIONS GUIDANCE

The Committee considered the Adjudication Panel for Wales' revised sanctions guidance for when a Councillor has been found to have breached the Members'

Code of Conduct by a case tribunal, or an appeal tribunal. The Committee considered the guidance would be a useful reference point when they may be required to consider sanction in relation to any complaint it may be required to adjudicate on.

LOCAL PROTOCOL – STANDARDS OF CONDUCT EXPECTED BY MEMBERS

Dealing with a complaint from a Member under the Local Protocol – Standards of Conduct Expected by Members. Following consideration of all the evidence presented the Committee resolved that whilst there was a basis to the complaint against the Member no further action was required. Full details can be found in the relevant minutes of the Committee meeting held in October 2018.

During the meeting Members referenced the good practice and importance of being provided with all available and relevant evidence to assist them in their deliberations particularly if it was going to be referred too during any hearing.

LOCAL RESOLUTION PROCESS FOR TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS - ONE VOICE WALES

Following endorsement by the Standards Committee on the 18th September in respect of good practice the One Voice Wales Local Resolution process for Town and Community Councils was presented to RCTs Community Liaison Committee for adoption by each Town / Community Council.

At the meeting of the [Community Liaison Committee](#) on the 25th September the protocol was well received by its Members, however it would be a decision for each Town / Community Council to take forward, acknowledging not all Community and Town Councils were members of One Voice Wales. The Committee agreed to receive a further update during the next Municipal Year about the adoption of local resolution protocols by Community and Town Councils. Such adoption was being heavily recommended by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales due to the number of complaints his office receives that he considers could be dealt with under such a protocol.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Members received the following two publications which provided a comprehensive guide on how to deal with the challenges presented by the use of social media:

- Welsh Local Government Association - Social Media Handbook
- Handling online Abuse for Councillors

STANDARDS REPORTING

- Public Services Ombudsman For Wales – Received a summary of Complaints Against Members – 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018
- Public Services Ombudsman For Wales’ Annual Report and Letter (2017 – 2018)
- Public Services Ombudsman For Wales – Code of Conduct Casebooks
- Local Government Ethical Standards – Consideration of the review undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

STANDARDS CONFERENCE – ABERYSTWYTH 14th SEPTEMBER 2018

- Attendance at the Conference and associated workshops.

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS

- Determining several applications for dispensations under the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 in accordance with the Council’s agreed procedures

REMAINING COMMITTEE WORK FOR POSSIBLE INCLUSION IN FINAL
VERSION OF REPORT SUBJECT TO MARCH 19 MEETING

REVIEW OF UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT CUSTOMER POLICY

The Standards Committee monitored adherence to the ‘Unreasonably Persistent Customers’ Policy by Group and Service Directors.

The Monitoring Officer presented an annual report to Standards Committee summarising all decisions made and action taken in respect of unreasonably persistent customers. The Standards Committee will review cases in order to gain assurance that the Policy has been administered appropriately.

MEMBER ATTENDANCE

The Committee received an update on the recording and publication of Member attendance, following recent amendments to the system brought forward by the [Democratic Services Committee](#) (and subsequently endorsed by Council) with the inclusion of recording categories of absence.