



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee meeting held on Friday, 20 September 2019 at 10.00 am at the Committee Room 1, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypany, CF40 2XX.

Independent Members:-

Mr M Jehu (Chair)
Mr D. Bowen

County Borough Councillors - Standards Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor E Webster

Community Councillor:-

Mr R Butler

Officers in attendance

Mr A Wilkins, Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)
Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services

42 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Mr J Thomas (Independent Member), County Borough Councillor M Forey and Mr C Pallant (Reserve Member).

43 Welcome

The Chair welcomed members of the Committee to the meeting. The Chair introduced Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services (Deputy Monitoring Officer) and briefly outlined his role which would involve deputising for the Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) as and when appropriate.

44 Declaration of Interest

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

45 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

It was **RESOLVED** to defer determination of the matter to the next meeting of the Standards Committee to be held on 29th November 2019 so as to afford all Independent Members the opportunity to submit their nominations for the position of Vice-Chair.

46 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd March 2019 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

47 STANDARDS COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented his report in respect of the Standards Committee Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019/20. Committee Members were asked to review and comment on the attached work programme which reflects the remit of the Committee to monitor, review and advise on matters relating to the Ethical code; Members Code of Conduct and associated matters of governance and probity.

On consideration of the draft Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2019/20, Members noted the ongoing priorities, standard reports and frequency of reporting and acknowledged the importance of maintaining a degree of flexibility to enable additional, topical issues to be considered throughout the Municipal Year.

Following consideration of the forward plan of proposed Committee business for the 2019/20 Municipal Year, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the ongoing work plan.

48 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

The Monitoring Officer presented his report in respect of the summary of complaints made against Members and submitted to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the 'Ombudsman') for the period 1st April 2018-31st March 2019.

Committee was asked to note the detail and summary of anonymised complaints made against Members for the period but also to note that in each case there had been no ombudsman investigation and no evidence of breach.

The Committee identified an emerging issue from the cases highlighted and sought assurance that relevant training was being delivered to all County Borough, Town and Community Councillors as it recognised that ongoing support and training for Members is vital. It was agreed that further discussion around this matter would be carried out in greater detail under Agenda Item 8 when the Monitoring Officer would outline future plans for refresher Code of Conduct training.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

49 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - ANNUAL REPORT AND LETTER 2018 - 2019

In his report, the Monitoring Officer provided a summary of matters pertaining to standards of conduct of County, Town and Community Councillors as set out in the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Annual Report and Annual Letter to the Council for 2018-2019.

Whilst considering the report, Committee Members noted the 4% increase in Code of Conduct Complaints (CCCs) for the Municipal Year 2018-2019 largely due to the 14% increase in CCCs relating to Town/Community Councillors. Of the total 282 complaints made 147 related to Town/Community Councils, 102 to Local Authorities and 1 to a National Park. The Monitoring Officer stated that a number of these complaints had resulted in a breakdown in employer/employee

relationships and in some cases had been subsequently referred to the appropriate Standards Committee where the failure had been identified.

Further, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the majority of complaints (255) had been closed after initial consideration with a further 36 closed after full investigation. Of the seven complaints received with potential breaches of the Code of Conduct, two did not meet the PSOW criteria for investigation and two were discontinued as they were no longer in the public interest. The Monitoring Officer added that of the cases the PSOW investigated and closed this year, four cases were referred to the Adjudication Panel for Wales which are yet to be determined. In conclusion, the Monitoring Officer proposed that updates on those remaining cases would be reported throughout the year.

The Chair proposed that a letter be drafted on behalf of the Standards Committee and in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, for the attention of the Chairs of the Community Councils, in the first instance, to highlight the emerging issue from the Ombudsman's Annual Report and to reiterate the importance of all Town and Community Councillors attending future Code of Conduct training sessions.

Accordingly, Members of the Committee **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and to action the afore-mentioned letter to the Chairs of the Town/Community Councillors.

50 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

The Monitoring Officer presented his report in respect of the Ombudsman's Code of Conduct Casebook (Issue 20) which had been produced and published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Committee was asked to consider the contents of the report which set out the Code of Conduct Casebook for the period January-March 2019.

Following consideration of the report it was **RESOLVED** to note the content of the Code of Conduct Casebook.

51 CODE OF CONDUCT REFRESHER TRAINING

The Monitoring Officer reminded Committee that following the Local Government Elections on the 4th May 2017, a number of Code of Conduct training sessions were held for County Borough and Town/Community Councillors with the expectation that they attended and signed up to the Code. Of the 75 County Borough Councillors, 59 attended one of the available sessions.

It was proposed that two years on, a Code of Conduct refresher training for County Borough and Town/Community Councillors is undertaken over the coming months. It was also suggested that smaller sessions are conducted in order to better focus the training and accommodate the needs of individual Members.

Committee was asked to consider and agree the way forward in respect of the Code of Conduct training sessions with the assurance that the Monitoring Officer report the outcomes and attendance figures to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

Following consideration of the information, it was **RESOLVED** to agree that Code of Conduct refresher training for County Borough and Town/Community Councillors be undertaken during the remainder of the 2019/2020 Municipal Year.

52 Councillors' guide to handling intimidation

The Monitoring Officer referred Committee to the link to the 'Councillors guide to handling intimidation' for information only. Committee was informed that the information contained within the link offered Members advice and support on how to deal with intimidating behaviour.

The Chair commented on the useful information provided within the link and how important it is for all Members to understand that intimidating behaviour cannot be tolerated in any situation. Committee agreed that social media can sometimes impact and influence this type of negative behaviour.

Members of the Committee acknowledged the report for information.

53 CHAIR'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair reminded Committee that he had presented the Standards Committee Annual Report 2018/19 to a meeting of Full Council and it had been very well received by the Leader of the Council and by the leaders of the respective political groups. He had received a number of compliments in respect of the work and proactive approach taken by the Standards Committee. The Chair acknowledged that the compliments are testament to the commitment of the Committee and to its good reputation.

The Chair reminded Committee that the next meeting will be held on the 29th November 2019.

This meeting closed at 11.20am

**M Jehu
Chairman**