



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Hybrid meeting of the Standards Committee held on Monday, 13 November 2023 at 10.00 am

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

Independent Members in attendance:-

Mr D. Bowen Mr J. Thomas
Mrs H. John Mr C.A.Thomas

Officers in attendance:-

Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services

12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors A Ellis and G Hopkins.

13 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

14 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 5th September 2023 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

15 REVIEW OF THE MEMBER - OFFICER RELATIONS PROTOCOL

The Council's Monitoring Officer provided Members with the Council's Member-Officer Relations Protocol, which sets out a framework for good working relationships between Members and Officers. Members were advised of the timeliness of reviewing the protocol to ensure that it still remained fit for purpose.

Members were advised of the importance of the document, noting that the Member/Officer protocol is an adjunct to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and is an important contributor to the working culture within the Council.

Members of the Committee were requested to review the existing Member-Officer Relations Protocol and consider whether any amendments should be

made and recommended to full Council for adoption.

To aid Members consideration, examples of Member-Officer Relations Protocols which have been relatively recently reviewed by other local authorities were appended to the Monitoring Officers Report.

Members noted that the protocol had served the Council well over the past 10 years, although acknowledged that it was important to review the protocol to ensure that it contained updated practices and technological advancements.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To review the Council's existing Member - Officer Relations Protocol, attached at Appendix 1 to the report;
- ii. To review examples of other local authority Member-Officer Relations Protocols that have recently been reviewed/amended, attached at Appendices 2A – 2C to the report;
- iii. To consider whether any amendments should be made to the Council's Member-Officer Relations Protocol as a result of the reviews proposed in paragraph 2.1 and 2.2 above;
- iv. To agree the Monitoring Officer be tasked with presenting a revised protocol, based on the Committee's recommendations, to the next meeting of the Standards Committee for consideration and review by Members.
- v. To note any revised/amended Member-Officer Relations Protocol would need to be approved by the Full Council following a recommendation from this Committee.

16 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES' ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Members were provided with a copy of the Adjudication Panel for Wales' Annual Report 2022-2023, which provides details of the membership of the Panel, an analysis of its performance and a useful section summarising cases and decisions made by the Panel during the reporting period.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note the contents of the Adjudication Panel for Wales' Annual Report 2022-2023 contained at Appendix 1 to the report.

17 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - ANNUAL REPORT AND LETTER 2022-2023

The Monitoring Officer provided Members with 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 this Council for 2022-2023.

It was advised that the Ombudsman had noted a small reduction in the number of complaints about the Code of Conduct for Councillors and was glad to see that, after the previous year's record numbers her office had to refer fewer cases

of potentially serious breaches to local Standards Committees or the Adjudication Panel or Wales.

Members were advised that the PSOW received 283 new complaints about the Code of Conduct – 4% less than in 2022/23. 56% (158) of those complaints concerned Town and Community Councils. For the first time since 2019/20 this represented a decrease in the number of complaints about this group of Councillors. 43% (122) of the total complaints received related to County and County Borough Councillors. This represents a 7% increase in the number of complaints about councillors at principal councils when compared to 2021/22.

In respect of Rhondda Cynon Taf, there was 1 Code of Conduct complaint made about a Member in relation to their role as an RCT County Borough Councillor during the period, compared against 2 in 2021-2022. The complaint was discontinued after investigation. 6 complaints were received in relation to Town and Community Councils within RCT as against 9 in the previous reporting period. In relation to all 6 complaints the PSOW decided not to investigate.

The Monitoring Officer concluded his overview of the report by advising that the PSOW had stipulated that although she noted some positive trends in 2022/2023 her office continues to underline the value of more education and training for councillors on the Code of Conduct and encourage the use of local resolution procedures. Her belief is that these procedures can calm situations deal with problems early and prevent the need for further escalation to her office.

Members felt the Annual Report was a useful document, presenting detailed information of cases and provided a good comparison on previous years.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note the matters relating to Code of Conduct Complaints reported in the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' Annual Report and Annual Letter to this Council 2022-2023

18 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS - 30TH AUGUST 2023 - 31ST OCTOBER - 2023 AND INVESTIGATION OUTCOMES

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that no complaints had been received during the period 30th August – 31st October 2023.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note that no complaints had been received during the reported period.

19 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - RECENT INVESTIGATION OUTCOMES - 'OUR FINDINGS'

The Monitoring Officer provided Members with the summary of investigation outcomes concerning alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct as published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) on the 'our findings' section of her website for the period 30th August 2023 – 31st October 2023.

Members were reminded of the actions available to the PSOW following such

breaches, before the Monitoring Officer provided detail of the 1 breach reported in respect of a Duty to uphold the law: Conwy County Borough Council.

Members discussed the new way of working in respect of hybrid meetings, and the location of Members when attending virtually in respect of confidentiality items. The Council's Monitoring Officer advised of the Councils Multi Location Meeting Policy, which provides the parameters of how Members should attend should meetings, with a stable internet connection and in a confidential setting.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note and consider the contents of the summary of investigation outcomes concerning alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, originally published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales on the 'our findings' section of her website and attached as Appendix 1 to the report (for the period 30th August 2023 – 31st October 2023).

20 APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION - COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCILLOR M. POWELL

The Monitoring Officer presented his report which sought the Committees decision as to whether to grant a dispensation to County Borough Councillor Michael 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.

Members were reminded that Paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct sets out the procedures to be followed regarding participation in meetings when a Member has declared a personal and prejudicial interest. However the participation by a Member in any business which is prohibited by Paragraph 14 is not a failure to comply with the Code if the Member has acted in accordance with a dispensation from the prohibition granted by the Standards Committee in accordance with regulations.

It was added that any dispensation awarded cannot be used if the matter under consideration would confer a greater benefit on his wife than on other tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the Council's area, or be such that a member of the public might reasonably conclude it would significantly affect his ability to act purely on the merits of the case and in the public interest if Councillor Powell were to take part in the discussion.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To grant County Borough Councillor Michael Powell a dispensation to speak and vote on all matters relating to the Children's Services department (within the Community and Children's 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 by the Standards Committee on an annual basis.

21 FUTURE MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

The Monitoring Officer advised Members of the relocation of the Council Headquarters from Clydach Vale to Llys Cadwyn, in Pontypridd Town Centre, confirming that the next meeting of the Committee would be at the new location in the New Year.

Members **NOTED** the update.

This meeting closed at 10.40am

**Mr D Bowen
CHAIR.**