



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Hybrid Standards Committee held on Monday, 22 April 2024 at 10.00 am.

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

Independent Members in attendance:-

Mr D. Bowen (Chair)
Mr J. Thomas
Mrs H. John
Community Councillor C.A.Thomas

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor A J Ellis
Councillor G Hopkins

Officers in attendance:-

Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services and Democratic Services

29 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

30 MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 29th January 2024 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

31 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 27 – The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the progress with the Member-Officer Protocol, where it was advised that the draft protocol would be reviewed by the Democratic Services Committee on the 1st May 2024.

32 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEMBERS - 23rd JANUARY 2024 - 31st MARCH 2024

The Monitoring Officer presented his report which provided Members with a summary of complaints made against Members which were submitted to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for the period 23rd January 24 – 31st March 2024.

Members were referred to the summary of the anonymised complaint concerning

a county borough councillor contained within the table in the report, and details regarding the complaint were provided to Members. The Monitoring Officer advised that the complaint did not result in an investigation.

Members of the Committee spoke of the importance of Declarations of Interest and careful consideration should be given by all Members when attending meetings in respect of such declarations.

It was noted during discussions that training is provided by the Monitoring Officer to both County Borough and Community Councillors in respect of the Code of Conduct and the Monitoring Officer advised that a planned Briefing sessions was to be provided as part of the Member Development Programme to act as a timely reminder of the importance of Declarations of Interest.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. To consider the contents of the report and provide any comments/feedback on the complaints received by the Ombudsman during the period 30th August 2023 – 22nd January 2024.

33 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES - RECENT TRIBUNAL DECISIONS

The Committee were referred to the report which presented Members with the opportunity to consider recent decisions made by the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Members were reminded that the Adjudication Panel Wales issues decision notices following the conclusion of the cases it considers and the Monitoring Officers proceeded to provide detail of the recent decisions published.

Following the summary of the cases, the Monitoring Officer suggested that the Committee may find it helpful to consider the decisions and the approach adopted by the APW in formulating its decision and sanctions (where relevant) in light of its own role when conducting Code of Conduct hearings. It was also suggested that the Committee may also wish to consider whether there are any possible messages or lessons to be learnt arising out of the decision that could be communicated as part of future training for Members on the Code of Conduct.

Members spoke on the nature of the cases presented and the decisions of the Panel. One Member of the Committee spoke on the importance of communication links with the Monitoring Officer and Community and Town Clerks before decisions are taken forward to the Adjudication Panel, which it was felt could eliminate some of the decisions considered.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To consider the recent decisions made by the Adjudication Panel for Wales (as appended to the report); and
- ii. To determine whether there are any possible messages or lessons to be learnt arising out of the decisions that could be communicated as part of future training for Members on the Code of Conduct.

34 NATIONAL STANDARDS FORUM - FEEDBACK FROM MEETING HELD ON 29TH JANUARY 2024

The chair commented on the recent National Standards Forum held on 29th January 2024 which he attended and advised the Committee of the content of the meeting. The chair spoke of the importance of such forums to allow the sharing of ideas and protocols across Authorities for smarter ways of working.

The Monitoring Officer provided further detail in respect of the Forum meeting including discussions on gifts and hospitality and social media. The monitoring Officer commented on the civility and respect pledge discussed in the forum and the Monitoring Officer agreed to provide further research in respect of this pledge.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- i. To note the feedback from the meeting of the National Standards Forum held on 29th January 2024, attached at Appendix 2.
- ii. To consider whether there are any items the Committees wishes to put forward as suggestions for consideration by the National Standards Forum at its future meetings.

35 VERBAL UPDATE - PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES - RECENT MEDIA ARTICLES CONCERNING THE ACTIONS OF ONE OF ITS OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update on the Public Ombudsman for Wales, following recent media articles.

It was advised that following an allegation of political bias, made against the former Head of Investigations at the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman has announced that an independent review will be conducted to provide assurance that its code of conduct processes are sound, free from political bias and that lessons are learned from what has happened.

It was reported that the Ombudsman fully accepted that her office now needs to rebuild trust in the work of the organisation on complaints against Councillors. Members were advised that the review remit would include reviewing discretionary decisions previously made, by the former officer and her team, not to investigate complaints when applying the Ombudsman's processes.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that such additional work may impact on timescales for existing work and added that it was the intention to seek additional resources to ensure that this review does not impact on day to day work. It was also reported that the Ombudsman was looking to brief Standards Committees Chairs also as soon as she is able.

The Chair thanked the Monitoring Officer and welcomed the report that was to come forward following the review.

Members of the Committee expressed their concerns and spoke of the trust placed within the Ombudsman office for their unbiased opinions. Members spoke of the possibility of challenge to previous decisions, depending on the outcome of the review, and the impact this would have on both current and previous cases.

It was **RESOLVED**

- i. To note the verbal update

This meeting closed at 10.30 am

**D Bowen
CHAIR.**