

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2024

PRESENT: Mr S Hays (Chair)

Independent Members: Mrs C Moore, Mr J Goolden and Mr N Steward

County Councillors: B Baynham and W Powell

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr R Stafford-Tolley (Independent Member) and Councillors I McIntosh and L Rijnenberg.

2. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2023 as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in respect of Items 4 to 6.

4. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND MONITORING OFFICER

The Committee received the report of the Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer (copy filed with signed minutes).

A. General Standards Issues for County Councillors and Co-opted Members

There were no updates.

B. Referral of Councillors to the Public Services Ombudsman

The Committee noted the information regarding referrals in the table below. The abbreviations used in the headings are as follows:

MO – Monitoring Officer

OW – Ombudsman Wales

Stds – Standards Committee

APW - Adjudication Panel for Wales

Ref	Date OW notified MO of complaint	Date OW advised investigating or not investigating	Date OW's decision	Date considered by Stds	Date considered by APW
03/CC/22		17/04/23 investigating			
05/CC/22		28/06/22 investigating	20/11/23 referred to Stds	07/02/24 consideration of preliminary issues	

C. Dispensations

No applications for dispensation had been received from County Councillors.

D. Ombudsman Wales – Our Findings

The Committee noted the [Ombudsman Wales - Our Findings](#). The Committee noted that at a recent meeting of all Welsh Monitoring Officers, the Ombudsman's office was asked to consider re-instating the "Casebook", which was considered to be more helpful. The Ombudsman has declined to reinstate the "Casebook" but is committed to improve the searchability of its website.

E. Adjudication Panel for Wales [APW]

Details of cases considered by the APW are available via the following link:

[Decisions | The Adjudication Panel for Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

F. National Forum for Standards Committees

The Forum met on 29 January 2024. The Chair attended the meeting and his notes were available at Appendix 2 to the report. The Chair was thanked for attending these meetings.

G. Whistleblowing

The Committee considered the report detailing the Whistleblowing cases and outcomes since 2019/20. This report was required as part of the Committee's Work Programme. The Committee noted that Human Resources [HR] is currently developing a toolkit to accompany the Whistleblowing Policy.

It was noted that Section 115 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the Council's Governance and Audit Committee to review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively. The reporting of whistleblowing complaints will be made to the Governance and Audit Committee. In response to a question the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Whistleblowing Policy was for employees of the Council. Councillor W Powell advised he is a member of the Governance and Audit Committee and is content with what had been discussed.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that in light of this new legislation, the Constitution relating to the role and function of the Standards Committee would need to be considered.

H. Meeting Dates

To note dates of meetings in 2024 as follows, all starting at 2pm:

10 April – annual meeting with Group Leaders – if possible, a new date would be arranged for this meeting, due the unavailability of the Chair on the scheduled date

12 June

30 October

5.	ANNUAL REVIEW OF ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY BY MEMBERS
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The Committee considered the report on the annual review of acceptance of gifts and hospitality by Members.

The Committee noted the details of gifts and hospitality recorded by members on the website between 19 May 2022 and 1 February 2024. The Committee had no concerns about the level of hospitality recorded by members and noted the hospitality offered by the Green Man Festival. It was considered that this current level was not of concern but if it was found that the majority of members were being offered hospitality by an organisation, such as a festival, the Committee may wish to look at this. It was suggested that an annual reminder should be sent to members and the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that this would be done.

Decision	Reason for decision:
To note the report.	To ensure the Committee undertakes an annual review of the acceptance of gifts and hospitality by Members as part of its work programme.

6.	WORK PROGRAMME
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The Committee noted the Work Programme.

Comment was made whether the Committee could consider the number of committees on which a member sits, as someone who only participates in a few committees can achieve a higher attendance rate more easily than someone who sits on a number of committees or on committees which meet more frequently. In response the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee's role was to look at the attendance levels of members. If a member's attendance level was below 60%, reasons for this would be considered including the number of committees on which the member sits.

7.	CONFIDENTIAL ITEM
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RESOLVED to exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 8 of The Council's Access to Information Rules.

8.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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Mrs Moore and Councillor W Powell declared personal interests in relation to their membership of an organisation.

9. REFERRAL FROM THE OMBUDSMAN WALES

The Committee considered the Deputy Monitoring Officer's report and the discussed the preliminary issues relating to a referral of a complaint from the Ombudsman Wales [Ref:202201455].

Resolved that:	Reason for decision
the Ombudsman Wales Case Ref: 202201455 be referred to Ceredigion County Council's Standards Committee for determination.	To address any issues of public perception and to ensure natural justice and fair treatment for the member involved.

Mr S Hays (Chair)