

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT  
COMMITTEE ROOM A - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON  
WEDNESDAY, 5 JUNE 2019**

PRESENT: Mr S Hays (Chair)

Independent Members: Mrs C Jackson, Mrs J Evans, Mrs C Moore and Mrs C Mulholland

County Councillors: S McNicholas, S Lewis, K M Roberts-Jones and K S Silk

In attendance: Ms D Jones (Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Miss C Johnson [Democratic Services Officer]

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| <b>1.</b> | <b>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR</b> |
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**RESOLVED** that Independent Member Stephan Hays be appointed as Chair for his term of office.

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| <b>2.</b> | <b>APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR</b> |
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The Committee noted that the Independent Member Claire Jackson would continue as Vice Chair for her term of office.

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| <b>3.</b> | <b>APOLOGIES</b> |
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There were no apologies for absence.

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| <b>4.</b> | <b>MINUTES</b> |
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The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February, 2019 as a correct record subject to the spelling of Stephan Hays' surname being corrected to the former.

In response to a question, the Committee noted that no response had been received from the Ombudsman in respect of the Committee's comments on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' [PSOW] Draft Corporate Plan 2019/20 – 2021/22.

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| <b>5.</b> | <b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> |
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During the meeting County Councillor S Lewis declared a personal interest in the Supplementary report – Member Attendance, as she was identified in the report. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that individual cases were not being discussed at this meeting and that the Committee was being asked to agree the next action to be taken.

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| <b>6.</b> | <b>REPORT OF THE SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL</b> |
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The Committee received the report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (copy filed with signed minutes).

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

## **Members**

### **A1. Code of Conduct Training**

There was nothing to report.

### **A2. Mandatory Training**

There was nothing to report.

## **B. Referral of Councillors to the Public Services Ombudsman**

### **B1. County Council Referrals**

The current position regarding matters with the Ombudsman is detailed below, subject to the Committee noting the changes since the Committee report had been published as indicated \* :

02/CC/2017 Ombudsman investigating

01/CC/2018 Referred to APW

08/CC/2018 Ombudsman deciding whether or not to investigate

09/CC/2018 Ombudsman deciding whether or not to investigate

10/CC/2018 \* Concluded no action

11/CC/2018 \* Concluded no action

12/CC/2018 Ombudsman investigating

02/CC/2019 \* Concluded no action

## **C. Dispensations**

### **C1. Applications - County Councillors**

No applications for dispensation have been received from County Councillors.

## **D. Late Payment of Expenses**

One claim for late payment of expenses had been received but had been returned to the Councillor, as the form was incomplete.

## **E. Ombudsman's Casebook**

The Ombudsman had published the October – December 2018 Code of Conduct Casebooks. A copy of the Casebook was attached at Appendix A to the report.

The following items were taken next.

## **G. The North Wales Standards Committee Forum – 24 June, 2019 10 a.m. – 2.0 p.m. – Delyn Committee Room, Flintshire County Council, Mold**

The Committee noted that the Ombudsman was to attend the Forum meeting and the Chair and Vice Chair advised that they could attend.

The Committee raised concerns about reports about cases in the press before they were reported to the Standards Committee. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that members, who are the subject of a complaint, are notified directly by the Ombudsman when investigated and when an investigation is completed. Comment was made that the Ombudsman should advise councillors not to comment on a decision, until after the Committee had been officially notified of the decision. Further comment was made that the Ombudsman had advised the press that an investigation into another councillor was still ongoing. The Committee queried this and commented that councillors involved in an investigation are advised that they would be in breach of the Code of Conduct if they discuss anything about it until it is concluded. It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would raise these concerns with the Ombudsman at the Forum meeting.

### **Supplementary report - Member attendance**

County Councillor S Lewis declared a personal interest in the item, as she was identified in the report. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the Committee was not discussing individual cases. It was being asked to consider the process and whether it wished to contact the Councillors regarding the reasons for absence.

| <b>Resolved</b>   | <b>Reason for decision</b>  |
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| <b>That a letter is sent to the 10 Councillors regarding the reasons for their absence and that their responses' be considered at the Committee meeting on 2 October, 2019.</b> | <b>To obtain the reasons for absence from the relevant Councillors.</b> |

### **F. Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure**

The Chair welcomed Steve Holcroft, Employment Policy & Service Development Business Partner to the meeting, he advised that because of a recent follow-up review of the whistleblowing and grievance arrangements by Wales Audit Office the policy had been reviewed.

The Committee noted that due to the managerial structure changes the references to Strategic Directors would be changed to Corporate Directors.

The Committee made the following comments:

- Definition of volunteers needs to be included as this can mean many things [paragraph 3.1]
- Concerns were raised about using the Police 101 telephone number. If individuals used this, members queried how there was feedback to the Council [paragraph 7.1]
- The parties identified in Step 3 [paragraph 6.4] were all internal to the Council and it was questioned whether they would have a

conflict of interest. Steve Holcroft advised that the Council's Auditors were external to the Council. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that, if for example, the Monitoring Officer considered he had a conflict of interest he would pass a case to her or another appropriate person identified under the policy. Steve Holcroft advised where an individual is dissatisfied with a local response they can contact external organisations as listed in paragraph 12. It was noted that many individuals seek advice from their Trade Union on the best way to resolve concerns.

The Chair advised it was important to show that the Whistleblowing Policy worked. He asked if details of the number of concerns raised and the comments from those who had raised concerns could be published. Steve Holcroft advised that this could be done as the number of cases concluded satisfactorily was high.

| <b>RESOLVED</b>   | <b>Reason for decision</b>                 |
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| <b>The revised policy, taking into account comments from the Committee, be circulated to the Committee for further comment.</b> | <b>To seek the views of the Committee.</b> |

#### **H. Correspondence**

There was no correspondence.

#### **I. Meeting dates**

To note the date of the next meeting: Wednesday 2 October, 2019.

**Mr S Hays (Chair)**