

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT HYBRID MEETING - ZOOM - COUNTY HALL ON WEDNESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2024

PRESENT: Mr S Hays (Chair)

Independent Members: Mr J Goolden, Mr R Stafford-Tolley and Mr N Steward

County Councillors: I McIntosh, WD Powell and L Rijnenberg

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs C Moore and County Councillor B Baynham.

2. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received.

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

The Committee noted that all councillors and co-opted members had completed the refresher mandatory Code of Conduct training.

B. Members Attendance

The Committee noted the information provided by the one member, whose attendance level was less than 60% for the period 18 May 2023 to 15 May 2024. The Committee thanked the member for the information which they considered to be a reasonable explanation and which they accepted.

C. Referral of Councillors to the Public Services Ombudsman

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 referred to another Stds Committee. 23/08/24 considered by Ceredigion Ethics & Standards Committee – decision to censure Cllr Iain McIntosh	
02/CC/23		26/02/24 investigating			
03/CC/23		23/04/24 investigating			
01/CC/24		30/07/24 not investigating	N/A	N/A	N/A

The Committee noted the decision of Ceredigion Ethics & Standards Committee on 23 August 2024 to censure County Councillor I McIntosh.

As a result of discussions at the last meeting it was agreed that the Chair should write to the Ombudsman regarding the time taken for complaints to be investigated. The Committee noted the Chair's letter and the response from the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman advised it aims to complete investigations within 12 months and during 2023/24 increased staffing number to address this and the increasing caseload. The Chair and Ombudsman were thanked for their letters. It was noted that one complaint is still outstanding from 2022 and the increased staffing levels will take some time to have an impact on investigations completed.

Comment was made that members who are the subject of a complaint need support as the time it takes to complete an investigation takes a toll on the individual as they are advised by the Ombudsman that the complaint should be kept confidential. The Ombudsman should provide support to members. The mental wellbeing of councillors should be supported. The Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that the Ombudsman acknowledges the need to support members and it was an issue he could raise with other Monitoring Officers. The Committee agreed that he should raise the issue at the Wales Monitoring Officers'

Group meeting in December, where the Ombudsman's office is represented.

D. Dispensations Applications - County Councillors

No applications for dispensation have been received from County Councillors.

E. Ombudsman Wales – Our Findings

The Committee noted the [Ombudsman Wales - Our Findings](#)

F. Adjudication Panel for Wales [APW]

Details of cases considered by the APW are available via the following link: [Decisions | The Adjudication Panel for Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

G. National Forum for Standards Committees

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2024, attended by the Vice Chair and she had advised that she had no comments to add.

The Adjudication Panel for Wales (APL) presentation was made by Judge Claire Sharp the outgoing president. Her address took into account the factors involved in considering whether or not to allow requests from members for appeals against the decisions of standards committees. Paul Egan, Deputy Chief Executive of One Voice Wales (OVW) advised the Forum of its role in supporting town and community councils and the training available to councillors. Michelle Morris – Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) spoke about the cases dealt with by the Ombudsman during 2023/24. The number of cases had risen by 16%, investigations had risen by 13% and 43% more cases were referred to standards committees compared to the previous year.

The Committee noted the 2025 meeting dates: 27 January and 23 June.

H. Independent review of investigations by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales into Code of Conduct complaints

The Committee received the Independent Review report of investigations by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales into Code of Conduct complaints. The Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer referred the Committee to Review Summary, Recommendations and Lessons Learned. The Committee noted that the Review found that the PSOW's Code of Conduct processes and delegations were fair and free from political bias. The review found no evidence of politically biased decision-making in the cases which were reviewed.

It was noted that the PSOW's response to the recommendations was awaited. In response to comments about the methods of the investigation and access to the Review Panel and the Head of Legal and Monitoring

Officer advised that any concerns should be forwarded to the Ombudsman.

I. Meeting dates

The Committee noted the meeting dates for 2025. Meetings to start at 2pm.

12 February

9 April – annual meeting with Group Leaders

18 June

13 October

5.	OBSERVING COUNTY COUNCIL MEETINGS BY STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBER
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The Committee received the observation report of the Council meeting held on 11 July 2024. Mr Golden thanked Mrs Moore for taking his place as observer at this meeting.

In response to a question the Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that the Chair of Council receives the general training provided for other committee chairs. In respect of access to translation for the public attending the meeting in County Hall, he stated that this facility was not available. He advised however, they could access the meeting on their phones but would need to use earphones so that there was no feedback in the Chamber. In response to a comment about members using their mobile phones in meetings and the public perception that they were not engaged in the meeting the Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer advised that some members access agendas on their mobile phones and so it was difficult to restrict their use. He advised that it was not in the remit of the Committee to prevent use but the use of phones should be moderated.

Mr S Hays (Chair)