
STANDARDS COMMITTEE, 17/06/24

Present:-

Elected Members:- Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones, Beth Lawton and Dewi Owen.

Independent Members: Mr Aled Jones, Mr Hywel Eifion Jones (Chair), Mr Mark Jones and Mr Dave Wareing.

Community Committee Member: Mr Richard Parry Hughes

Also in Attendance: Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

None to note.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent matters were raised.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 19 February 2024 as a true record.

5. Self-assessment and Work Programme

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer inviting the committee to:-

- undertake a self-assessment of the work and outputs of the committee during 2023/24; and:-
- consider the draft work programme for 2024/25.

The following points were highlighted:-

- It was believed that more work was needed on matters relating to the Code of Conduct noting that the further training in question had not been arranged yet and the work had slipped. It was noted that two detailed, half-day courses had been held at the beginning of the year for the Code of Conduct. Dissatisfaction was expressed that approximately a third of the Members had not attended this mandatory course which meant that around 20 Members needed to complete it. Further sessions would be held but it was acknowledged that work was to be done to increase the numbers that had completed this training.
- It was acknowledged there had been significant progress in the work of monitoring the compliance of the Group Leaders but it was highlighted that there was a need to move from the induction period to the performance period. It was reiterated that a great deal of work had been done last year to establish the duty but there was

now a need to move to a more operational system as the initial arrangements were in place.

- It was noted in relation to the work on Community Councils, that a pilot and course had been run however, the training programme had not been created due to the workload. The desire to complete the work was expressed but it was noted that it was currently in competition with other resources and priorities.

When conducting the self-assessment, the following points were noted:-

- It was asked what could be done to ensure that all Members completed the training. It was suggested there was room to promote it further through the Group Leaders although it was acknowledged that Group Leaders could not force the Members to complete the training. Further suggestions were offered such as offering a course that was slightly different or that took less time.
- It was expressed that further work was to be done with the Group Leaders but it appeared that the Leaders were working well with the Monitoring Officer and the work done so far had been good. It was noted there was a structure in place and there had been good progress in the work over the last year.
- In terms of the Community Councils, it was acknowledged that more work was needed but the comments about scarce resources were accepted. It was noted that although the training programme had not been created, that the Legal Service provided advice and support to the Community Councils throughout the year.

While discussing the Work Programme for 2024/25 it was noted there was a need to hold a meeting with the Political Group Leaders during the year. The Committee was reminded that last year's meeting had been held after one of the Standard Committee's meetings. The possibility of holding this meeting as part of the formal meeting was considered. It was noted that there was an item on the Political Group Leaders protocol on the work programme for the November meeting and the meeting could be relevant. It was decided to aim towards the November meeting, either during the formal meeting or after it. It was suggested that it could be mentioned to the Leaders soon to ensure their availability.

It was asked whether it would be beneficial to look at a way of improving Community Council functions and it was suggested that a report on the matter be included on the work programme for November as an additional item to try to find a way forward. It was noted that a small number of the 64 Town/Community Councils in Gwynedd had highlighted the need for further guidance. The suggestion of taking a step back and assessing the situation was appreciated. It was confirmed that training was one aspect and that dealing and advising was another. Further suggestions were received such as grouping the Community Councils into Gwynedd Ni areas which were 8 areas and hold the training on-line through Zoom, it was believed that this would facilitate arrangements. The suggestion was appreciated and any further suggestions were welcomed.

It was suggested that an item could be moved to the February meeting as there were a number of items already on the work programme for November in addition to the additional item of Training and Supporting Community Council and the possible invitation for Political Group Leaders. It was agreed to move the item on Reviewing Internal Resolution Arrangements to February. It was noted that many of the other items on the November agenda were items for information.

DECISION

- (a) To adopt the following as the Standards Committee's self-evaluation of its performance in 2023/24.**

FUNCTION	ASSESSMENT (1/2/3/4)	Evidence	Further action
1. Promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members	1.	The Chair and Vice-chair have attended the Wales Standards Forum to share experiences with other standards committees. Submit the annual report to the Full Council.	Continue to attend and support.
2. Assist the members to adhere to the Code of Conduct	1.	The Monitoring Officer and his team provide advice and guidance at meetings, and on a one-to-one basis for members.	
3. Advise the Council about adopting or amending the Code of Conduct	1.	No occasion has arisen to revise the Code. However, the Internal Resolution Procedure was reviewed to support the duty of Leaders of Political Groups under 52A(1) of the Local Government Act 2000.	
4. Monitor the implementation of the Code of Conduct	1.	Receive regular reports on allegations against members. Receive the annual reports of the Ombudsman and the Adjudication Panel for Wales.	Continue to monitor and consider alternative methods of receiving information. Receive annual reports on the register of interests and hospitality.
5. Advise, train or arrange for members to receive training on matters relating to the Code of Conduct	3.	Full Code of Conduct training was arranged for members with the first session taking place during February and the second in April.	Need to look at providing further training as many members did not attend.
6. Granting dispensations to members	1.	Two applications for dispensation were discussed and allocated by the Committee in February 2024.	
7. Deal with reports of case tribunals and any reports from the Monitoring Officer on matters referred by the Ombudsman	1.	One hearing was held during the year regarding a Member of Cyngor Gwynedd. In addition, the procedure for hearings was reviewed to strengthen the communication.	
8. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to	No action required.	None to report	

pay allowances to persons assisting with an investigation			
<p>9. Monitor the compliance of Leaders of Political Groups on the Council and their duties under Section 52A(1) of the Local Government Act 2000.</p> <p>Advise, train or arrange for the Council's Political Group Leaders to receive training on matters relating to those duties.</p>	2.	<p>A joint session was held with Political Group Leaders and the Standards Committee Members to consider the duty.</p> <p>Criteria and a procedure on reporting on duty were adopted.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer has met with the Group Leaders individually to discuss Code of Conduct matters.</p>	The arrangements will be undertaken in accordance with the statutory guidelines.
10. Exercise the above relevant functions in relation to community councils	3.	<p>The Monitoring Officer and his team provide advice and guidance to councillors, clerks and members.</p> <p>However, it was acknowledged that providing for an activity such as training had been challenging and this area needed attention and to come to a conclusion regarding the way forward.</p>	Need to consider resuming the programme virtually when resources allow.

- (b) To agree to move the Review of Internal Resolution Procedure item from the meeting in November 2024 to the meeting in February 2025 to add an item on Training and Supporting Community Councils to the meeting in November. Following this amendment, to approve the following work programme for 2024/25:-

17 June 2024

Annual Report

Allegations against members

Self-assessment and Work Programme

4 November 2024

Register of Gifts and Hospitality

Declaration of Interests Register

The Ombudsman's Annual Report

Allegations against members

Review of the Protocol for Political Group Leaders

To accept the report from the Wales Standards Forum

Training and Supporting Community Councils

17 February 2025

Adjudication Panel's Annual Report

Allegations against members

Self-assessment and Work Programme
Review Internal Solution Arrangements

6. THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Submitted - the report of the Propriety and Elections Manager enclosing a draft of the committee's annual report for 2023/24. The committee's observations and approval of the document were invited.

The Propriety and Elections Manager noted that the Chair and the Monitoring Officer's forewords would follow and the information on the Group Leaders' Duty would be incorporated in the report. Committee members were invited to check the section on Committee member details in the report and asked to contact the officers if anything needed to be amended. It was reported that the annual report would be submitted to the Full Council in July.

Gratitude was expressed for the work of preparing the annual report and it was asked whether there were any comments on the report. It was suggested that the section reporting on cases that had been before the Standards Committee should be made anonymous. Attention was drawn to a part of the report which covered the Ombudsman's decisions reiterating that this section was anonymous and did not name Town/Community Councils. It was believed that the section of the report covering the work of the Standards Committee during 2023-24 should also be anonymous and refer to the person as Cyngor Gwynedd Councillor rather than naming the individual.

In response, it was noted that it was possible to change the report and make it anonymous as the name of the Member had already been noted during the public hearing. It was agreed that this should be done, especially given that the individual had already been penalised. An enquiry was made regarding matters involving Declaring an Interest during Full Council meetings. It was noted that Members were not usually advised to declare an interest when submitting the Annual Report item as it was a factual report. Nevertheless, it was noted if there was a discussion on a specific complaint the Member would be required to withdraw from the meeting at that time, but such a discussion was not anticipated.

It was noted there was no reason not to name individuals under Other Complaints in the report as this was consistent with the complaints element and that the matter related to obtaining permission to participate in a Committee discussion despite there being a prejudicial interest. It was added that these items were already public, and that the situation differed to cases that had been before the Committee.

It was reiterated that it was the duty of the Standards Committee to assess and monitor the work of Political Group Leaders. It was agreed with the assessment that had been included that there had been a positive start to this work. It was believed that it would assist the Standards Committee to have this duty in place.

Reference was made to the English version of the report on page 31, case number 202303259 and 202303399 which referred to a Member as "his" and then "her". It was noted that this would be corrected in the English version.

RESOLVED to approve the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2023-24 to be submitted to the full Council on 11 July 2024, subject to making the reference to the complaint of breaching the code of conduct anonymous.

7. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS

Submitted – the report of the Propriety and Elections Manager which presented information to the Committee about the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members. It was reported that this was a summary of the complaints that had been closed to provide the Committee with a snapshot of the type of things that went to the Ombudsman and the decisions when assessing the complaints.

The members expressed their thanks for the report recognising the work taking place in the background.

RESOLVED to note the information

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11:20am.