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## STANDARDS COMMITTEE, 03/11/25

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### **Present:**

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

**Independent Members:** Mr Hywel Eifion Jones (Chair), Mr Mark Jones, Ms Non Gibson and Mr Aled Jones.

**Community Committee Member:** Mr Richard Parry Hughes.

**Also in Attendance:** Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sion Huws (Propriety and Elections Manager), Courtney Jones and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

### **1. APOLOGIES**

An apology was received from Ms Sonya Khade (Independent Member).

### **2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

None to note.

### **3. URGENT ITEMS**

There was no urgent matter to be discussed.

### **4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 9 June 2025 as a true record.

### **5. THE GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY REGISTER**

The report was submitted by the Propriety and Elections Manager. This was confirmed to be a regular report to the Committee, in accordance with its work programme. It was noted that it related to the Code of Conduct for Councillors, which requires members to provide written notice to the Monitoring Officer of any offer of hospitality, material benefit or advantage valued at more than £25, which is the threshold amount set by Cyngor Gwynedd. It was confirmed that the principles were outlined in the protocol, which provided guidance to members as to what was appropriate to accept. It was noted that gifts rejected by members were also registered, in order to analyse patterns, etc.

It was confirmed that there had been a low number of gift registrations this year, which was similar to the previous year of 2024/25. It was reported that only three new registrations had been received since the last meeting, and those related to the same event.

Gratitude was expressed for the report and Council members were commended on their compliance with the policy. It was suggested that consideration should be given to publishing a gifts and hospitality register on the Council's website, to reflect public confidence and ensure transparency. It was noted that data security issues were also important and this would need to be taken into account when considering options for publishing information online. It was decided that the Monitoring Officer would prepare a report on options for entering the information online by the next meeting of the Committee.

## **DECISION**

**To accept and note the contents of the report.**

**To accept the Monitoring Officer's proposal to prepare a report on options for entering information on the Council's website, to be presented to Members at the next meeting of this Committee, which is scheduled for 23 February 2026.**

## **6. THE OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT**

The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer.

Concern was expressed that a significant number of cases were forwarded to the Ombudsman which therefore resulted in a slippage in the Ombudsman's work. It was stated that the Ombudsman was not meeting targets due to such an obviously heavy workload. The Ombudsman's workload was highlighted, and it was stated that this should be taken into consideration.

It was noted that 315 complaints related to the code of conduct and that as few as 49 had been investigated. It was suggested that it would be useful to try to resolve more issues internally before they had to be submitted to the Ombudsman so that the workload could be better managed and more cases dealt with efficiently.

In response to an enquiry from a Member regarding the need for a finding of guilt as an evidential basis to suspend councillors from their work, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that criminal matters were dependent on a finding of guilt in order that appropriate action be taken.

## **DECISION**

**To note and accept the contents of the report.**

## **7. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS**

The report was presented by the Propriety and Elections Manager. The Committee was briefed on the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members. It was reported that this was a summary of complaints that had been closed, to provide the Committee with a snapshot of the type of things that were referred to the Ombudsman and the decisions made when assessing the complaints. It was noted that no decision notices had been received from the Ombudsman since the previous report.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that a complaint against a former member of the Council had been referred directly to the Adjudication Panel for Wales by the Ombudsman. It was noted that it was hoped that further details on this matter would be available by the next meeting of the Committee, so it would be possible to elaborate on it at that time.

It was asked what Members' position was regarding declaring an interest in relation to decisions when they were members of trust boards. It was explained that this issue was part of the statutory and legal duties towards that company or charity to promote the success of the relevant company but that the issue of conflict of interest also needed to be considered and that there was a need to be careful not to go against either duty. It was noted that the unique issue needed to be dealt with in accordance with the requirements and the trust or company and to follow the appropriate guidelines. It was detailed that the code of conduct generally stated that the code of conduct of the organisation of which the member is a part should be followed. It was explained that it was possible to work with the Democracy Team to create an explanatory specific designation detailing this issue in the member induction pack by the next Elections period in 2027 to ensure an understanding of the nature of the code and the relevant guidelines.

## **DECISION**

**To note the information.**

## **8. LOCAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE**

The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer. It was explained that the Local Resolution Procedure had been in place in Gwynedd since 2013, and created an informal process for dealing with low-level complaints without the need for a formal complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. It was noted that the Ombudsman had reviewed all local resolution elements and protocols in Wales, and had highlighted Gwynedd's work as good practice in the field. Members were reminded that this Committee had modified Gwynedd's local resolution procedure about two years ago to give group leaders at the time a greater role in the local resolution process. It was noted that this promoted local resolution and reinforced the process.

Reference was made to the challenges that faced town and community councils and the pressure on monitoring officers to resolve allegations and breaches of the code of conduct. It was noted that the structure was laborious, but that it took significant pressure off the Ombudsman. It was highlighted that this freed up the Ombudsman's resources to deal with matters in accordance with the constitution.

## **DECISION**

**To note the report.**

## **9. NATIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM MINUTES**

The minutes were referred to by the Chair. It was highlighted that this was an item for information and therefore there was no discussion.

### **DECISION**

**To accept the information.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11.20am.