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## STANDARDS COMMITTEE, 23/02/26

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**Present:** -

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

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

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

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

### 1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Hywel Eifion Jones as Chair of this Committee.

### 2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Mr Mark Jones as Vice-chair of this Committee.

### 3. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

### 4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None to note.

### 5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

### 6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 3 November 2025, as a true record.

## **7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The report was presented by the Propriety and Elections Manager. Mr Aled Jones was thanked for his work on the Committee over the years.

It was noted that both empty seats would be advertised, and that the intention was to report to the Council in May with recommendations.

The recent change in the Regulations was highlighted, relaxing the restrictions for being a member of the Standards Committee as an independent member. Details were given of this noting that the change enabled former members and former officers of the authority's Committee to be independent members of the Standards Committee after two years of being a non-member/officer.

The importance of filling these empty seats promptly was highlighted, and it was hoped that the roles would engage a lot of interest in light of the changes to the Regulations.

### **DECISION**

**To note the information.**

## **8. PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2026-27**

The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer.

It was stated that the draft Work Programme had been set out for the Committee's work for 2026-27. An inconsistency between the dates in the Welsh and English reports were noted, confirming that the correct date of the meeting was 8 June.

A proposal was made to add an item to the November agenda, highlighting that it was customary for the Committee to meet the leaders of the political groups.

It was confirmed that the Work Programme was a live document, meaning that any item arising and requiring attention could be added.

Reference was made to conducting a review of the training situation for community and town councils, as it was a matter that had been discussed by the Committee for a while now. The pressure on staffing was mentioned, meaning that this work could not be prioritised, and it was added that the Senedd Election in May was also taking up the Team's time. It was proposed that a report should be presented on the matter to this Committee in June. The importance of looking at the item on New Member Induction Arrangements was emphasised in terms of town and community councils too.

## **DECISION**

- 1. To review the Proposed Programme and propose any modifications.**
- 2. Following a discussion by the Committee, the proposal to add an item to the Committee's meetings in November and June was accepted.**

## **9. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS**

The report was presented by the Propriety and Elections Manager.

It was explained that the purpose of this item was to share information with members regarding the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members.

It was mentioned that a matter involving a former member of this Council had been before the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

It was highlighted that there had been two instances where Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been considered, and a reference was made to the challenge in interpreting such cases was referenced. It was noted that there was a regular discussion around where Freedom of Expression fell, and the protection it is given when complaints were made about comments. It was highlighted that political Freedom of Expression was a difficult concept to convey at times, in terms of the nature of political discussions.

In reference to a particular case, it was stated that it underlined that bringing into disrepute applied to life more widely than merely an individual's role as a Councillor. It was added that this highlighted the expectations in terms of members' general behaviour.

The importance of informing the Monitoring Officer of any emerging breach of the Code of Conduct was emphasised. It was added that the member who was the subject of the conduct was also expected to contact the Monitoring Officer, to explain the situation as soon as possible.

Reference was made to the inconsistency between the dates noted in point 7.2.11 of the Welsh version and the English version of the Adjudication Panel report, and it was confirmed that the Welsh reported noted the correct date.

## **DECISION**

**To note the information.**

## **10. AMENDMENTS TO THE MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT AND THE COUNCIL'S WHISTLE-BLOWING POLICY**

The report was presented by the Monitoring Officer.

The Committee was informed of statutory changes to the Members' Code of Conduct, arising from the new Regulations that came into force at the end of January this year.

It was highlighted that the changes were quite technical, of which details were given, and it was noted that changing the Members' Code of Conduct and Behavioural Principles was likely to be because of a recent decision by the Supreme Court about equality.

It was reported that this change placed the definition contained in the Equality Act 2010 in the Code of Conduct, and therefore that the protection was now on the basis of Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

It was explained that this tidied up the Code of Conduct but did not change the rights and responsibilities of the members.

In addition, it was stated that Wales had brought into force the duty to deal appropriately with socio-economic circumstances under the Equality Act 2010. It was therefore recognised that the Code had been amended so that there was a duty not to discriminate based on socio-economic circumstances. It was noted that the Full Council was required to adopt these revisions formally into the Code.

Reference was made to Cyngor Gwynedd's Response Plan, and it was highlighted that the Cabinet had adopted the revised Whistleblowing Policy at its January meeting this year as part of their response. As it was a document in the Council's Constitution, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was his duty to report, for information purposes, to the Full Council that the document had changed.

The importance for members of the Standards Committee to also be aware of this change was noted.

A question was asked around the protection of the Welsh language. As the Welsh language was not a Protected Characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, it was confirmed that the Welsh Language Measure 2011 gave protection to the Welsh language.

### **DECISION**

**To accept the information.**

## **11. THE GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY REGISTER FOR MEMBERS**

The report was presented by the Propriety and Elections Manager.

It was stated that the Register was regularly reported to this Committee. Reference was made to a previous discussion about the fact that the Register was not currently published on the Council's website.

It was noted that the Code of Conduct for Councillors required members to provide written notice to the Monitoring Officer of any offer of hospitality, material benefit or advantage valued at more than £25.

They went on to discuss the Protocol on Members' Donations and Hospitality which had been adopted by the Council, which provided guidance to Members on how to deal with proposals.

The Committee's previous discussion about the appropriateness of publishing the Register of Gifts and Hospitality on the Council's website was mentioned, and it was confirmed that it was now a statutory requirement to publish the Register of Members' Interests on the website.

Reference was made to the Protocol stating that the public could come in to view the Register of Gifts and Hospitality, and some of the Principles contained in the Code of Conduct were highlighted.

The need to be aware of any implications in terms of data protection was emphasised, recognising that there may be some special cases where it would not be appropriate to release the information.

It was concluded that there was no reason as to why the Members' Donations and Hospitality Register should not be published on the website, stating that it gave Members protection and contributed to the desire to be transparent and open. It was recognised that this was positive.

A question was asked about the procedure in going forward, should the matter be approved at this meeting. In response, it was confirmed that the principle of the Register being public had already been established in the Protocol. It was therefore noted that the Members would be informed of the change. It was added that the form used to note any gifts and hospitality was also being adapted, to highlight the fact that it was published on the website. It was noted that the Register had been included in the Council's Publication Plan, which was a plan to note which documents were publicly available from the Council. It was added that the Council tried to make any information public, although it had to be made public under the Freedom of Information Act. It was stated that this avoided the need for some freedom of information requests.

It was asked what the benefit was of making it public and what difference this made to the report received when the Committee previously discussed this matter. In response, it was highlighted that putting the Register on the website would mean that the names of the members in question would also be published. It was confirmed that the document was already public in paper format and that the only change was how it was made public.

Mr Aled Jones was also thanked for his contribution to the Committee's work and was wished well.

## **DECISION**

**Consider the findings contained in the report.**

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

Chair