

**THE ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE GWYNEDD
COUNCIL STANDARDS
COMMITTEE**

2024 - 2025

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR

Standards in public life remains a topic that receives a lot of attention at the moment, emphasising the importance of individuals' behaviour in maintaining public confidence in the manner in which decisions are made on their behalf by their elected representatives. I am confident that this committee can continue to provide support and guidance to the members of Gwynedd Council and the members of the community, town and city councils within the county.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank David Wareing for his dedicated service and valuable contribution to the work of the committee over the last ten years. At the same time I would also like to extend a warm welcome to two new members of the committee, Non Pugh and Sonya Khade, and look forward to working with them in the future.

Hywel Eifion Jones
Chair of the Standards Committee

FOREWORD BY THE MONITORING OFFICER

Reflecting on the programme of work and activity in the Standards Committee a number of issues have been addressed during the year. In addition, the Committee has dealt with requests for dispensations in areas of importance to the Councils (Gwynedd and Town) as well as the Members who applied. An important part of the Committee's function is to support the ethical framework.

Supporting and promoting high standards of behaviour is central to this work. This is achieved through a combination of on-demand advice, reactive advice and training. In my opinion training and understanding of the Code of Conduct gives members a foundation to be familiar with the fundamentals of the Code. This is especially around the personal interest provisions, where they arise and how to respond. Not only from the point of view of propriety but also supporting proper preparation for meetings and undertaking your day to day work. However, it is disappointing to note again that a number of members continue not to attend the full courses that have been held. I will be working with the Group Leaders to address this.

Ultimately, it is a consensus about the type of Council that we wish to see and work in that represents the best foundation. A culture of propriety does not undermine a healthy and robust political debate. It does, however, give the public confidence about the quality of governance in Gwynedd. These supports focusing our work on guidance, support and interventions that develop and maintain the expected standards.

Iwan Evans
Monitoring Officer
Gwynedd Council

INTRODUCTION

The Committee was established in 2001 under the Local Government Act 2000. The main role of the Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the councillors and co-opted members of Gwynedd Council, and community and town councils in Gwynedd. It does this in many ways:

- Assisting the councillors and co-opted members to follow the Members' Code of Conduct
- Advising the authority regarding adopting or amending the Members' Code of Conduct
- Monitoring the implementation of the Members' Code of Conduct
- Advising, training or arranging training for councillors and co-opted members on matters relating to the Code of Conduct
- Determining complaints referred to it by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales that members have breached the Code of Conduct
- Considering applications made by members for dispensation to allow them to participate in discussions despite them having a prejudicial interest under the Code.
- Considering matters referred to it under the Gwynedd Council local complaints resolution procedure.
- Overseeing the Gwynedd Council Members' Gifts and Hospitality Policy.

The Annual Report

The Local Government Act 2000 was amended by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, making it now a statutory duty for standards committees to report to their authority. This must be done as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year, in relation to that year (i.e., the 12 month period ending on 31 March).

The report must describe how the committee's functions have been implemented during the year. In particular the report must include a summary of:

- What has been done to carry out the general and specific functions given to the committee by the 2000 Act?
- Reports and recommendations made or referred to the committee by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

- Actions taken by the committee after it has considered such reports and recommendations.
- Notices given to the committee by the Adjudication Panel for Wales

A report by a county council's standards committee must also include:

- The committee's assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the council have complied with their new statutory duties in relation to standards of conduct.

The report may include:

- Recommendations to the authority about any matter in respect of which the committee has functions.

The authority must consider every annual report made by its standards committee before the end of 3 months which starts on the day the authority receives the report.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Though the Standards Committee is a Gwynedd Council committee, the majority of its membership does not have any connection with the Council or local government ('Independent Members'). It also has a member who represents the interests of the community councils ('Community Committee Member'), as well as three elected members from Gwynedd Council. The Chair and Vice-chair of the Committee must be Independent Members.

Independent Members

David Wareing (member 2015 - 2025)

David moved from Lancashire to Groeslon in 2014 following his retirement from the Merseyside Police. He served for 26 years in a variety of roles, more recently within the Operations Department in the Police Headquarters. In this role, he planned for large public events, public safety during Police operations and reducing police assistance for external agencies through increased partnership working. He specialised in risk assessment and securing compliance with health and safety legislation. David represented the Merseyside Police on each of the five Safety Advisory Groups within that area. He strongly believes that the actions of those in public roles must be transparent and accountable.

Aled Jones (member since 2016)

Aled is originally from Lampeter in Ceredigion. He read Welsh and Geography at Aberystwyth University. After graduating in 1999, he moved to Caernarfon to work with Cymen (Welsh translation company) and became a joint owner of the company in 2007. He now employs a team of almost 30 employees and over 20 freelance translators. He lives in Bangor with Tegwen and their children, Cai and Beca. He recently completed a post-graduate qualification in Leadership and Management ILM Level 5. The programmes create an environment where leaders are stimulated to exceed their potential, drive innovation, embed learning and to continue their development. His work as an interpreter has also given him a unique insight to the workings of government from the European Union to local community councils, and is therefore in a privileged position to observe best practice in terms of conduct and standards.

Hywel Eifion Jones (member since 2019)

Born and educated in Dyffryn Clwyd, Eifion was a senior manager with Barclays Bank and served for 34 years in a number of branches across North and Mid Wales. He has undertaken many public services roles including a County Councillor with Isle of Anglesey County Council and a member of the North Wales Police Authority.

Currently, he is a Magistrate on the North West Wales bench and is a member of the Gwynedd Pensions Board, Gwynedd Council's Governance and Audit Committee and is the Chair of Adra . He is also a member of the Adjudication Panel for Wales which determines allegations of County and Community elected members breaching the code of conduct.

Mark Jones (member since December 2022)

Mark lives in Bangor and is a former police officer with 30 years experience in a variety roles, including as Head of Professional Standards for North Wales Police. He served as a Community Governor and Vice Chair at Ysgol Glanadda for 20 years. He is also a former Chair of Adra, where he continues to serve as a Board member

Appointment of New Independent Members

Two seats for independent members became vacant, and the vacancies were advertised in accordance with the statutory provisions and three applications were received.

An Appointments Panel was established, which comprised Mr Eifion Jones, Chair of the Standards Committee, Community Councillor Richard Parry Hughes (Community Member of the Standards Committee), Gwynedd Councillors Beca Roberts, Chair of the Council and Anne Lloyd Jones Chair of the Democratic Services Committee and Mr Griffith Jones as the statutory lay member.

The Panel, supported and advised by the Monitoring Officer, interviewed the candidates, and having regard to the criteria set out in the person specification for the role, the Panel recommended the appointment of Non Gibson and Sonal Khade. The appointments were confirmed by a meeting of the Full Council on 1 May 2025

Non Gibson

Non lives in Bethel, Arfon with over 23 years' experience as a Police officer completing her career as a sergeant. She has worked on a range of issues and Chaired the Early Intervention Team along with working on multi-agency issues and of course experience working within the justice system.

Sonal Khade

Sonal lives in Pwllheli and has a background in finance and contract management in the public sector. Now self-employed. She has worked at a high level within local government and health leading on audit projects and issues.

Community Committee Member

Councillor Richard Parry Hughes (member since 2017)

Richard was brought up on a farm in Llanaelhaearn and attended Pwllheli Grammar School, Glynllifon Agriculture College and Seale Hayne College (Plymouth University). He has a post-graduate degree in Farm Management. He worked for a veterinary partnership in Chwilog for three years and as a part-time lecturer in Coleg Glynllifon before purchasing Penfras Uchaf farm in Llwyndyrys where his family had been tenants for over three hundred years. He is married to Eleri and they have three sons. The former leader of Gwynedd Council, he continues to farm. He has extensive experience of committees and has held roles such as the chairman of the Wales Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs before being elected as member of public bodies. He was a member of Gwynedd County Council from 1992 to 1996 and a member of Gwynedd Council from 1996 to 2008. He led Gwynedd Council from 2003 to 2008 and was also a spokesperson for the Wales Local Government Association on the Environment and Planning during this time. He is a keen member of Cwmni Drama Llwyndyrys and supports many other local organisations such as Antur Aelhaearn and Friends of Carnguwch Church. He volunteers as a case worker for the Farm Community Network. He has been a member of Llannor Community Council since 1992.

Gwynedd Council Members

Councillor Beth Lawton (member since 2017)

Beth lives in Brynchrug and is the owner of a local factory. She is a County Councillor for the Dro Dysynni area which includes the villages of Brynchrug, Abergynolwyn and Llanegryn. She is also a Community Councillor and the chair of the Ysgol Craig y Deryn Governing Body. She is active on several committees in the community including Abergynolwyn Carnival, Brynchrug Rural Fair, Tywyn Hospital Appeal Committee and many others. She is a member of Merched y Wawr and leads at Abergynolwyn Eisteddfod. She is a member of Cyngor Gwynedd's Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee and Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and has been Chair of both committees since becoming a member. She is also a director and Chair of the Byw'n Iach Leisure Company.

Councillor Anne Lloyd Jones (member since 2017)

Anne lives and runs a farm tourism business in Tywyn, and she has represented Tywyn on Gwynedd Council since 1995 and was previously a member of the Meirionnydd District Council for eight years.

She was first elected member of Tywyn Town Council in 1985 and was Mayor in 1991 , and again in 2004 and was Chairman of Gwynedd Council in 2009. She is former Chairman of Gwynedd Council Planning committee and the Democracy Services Committee and founder member of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd.

She was a member of the Meirionnydd Community Health Council and is currently Chair of the Tywyn and District Hospital Appeal Fund. She is also the Treasurer of the local NSPCC branch since 1989.

She is a member and a former chair of Ysgol Penybryn Governing Body and is also a member of the Governing Body of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn. Anne was the Chair of Mid Wales Tourism between 2001 and 2016, a founding member and former president and treasurer for the Tywyn Inner Wheel Club.

Anne is married to John and they have three daughters and twin granddaughters.

Councillor Dewi Owen (member since 2022)

Dewi farms in Aberdyfi, and has been a County Councillor for Aberdyfi and Pennal for fifteen years, and on Aberdyfi Community Council for twenty-five years. He was elected Chair of Gwynedd Council in 2014. Dewi has been Chair of several scrutiny committees, and is currently Chair of the Democracy Services Committee on Cyngor Gwynedd, and has joined the Standards Committee since 2022.

Dewi is Chair of Governors of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn, and a member of several local committees, such as the Meirion County Show, the Farmers' Union of Wales and 'Aberdyfi Advertising & Improvements Committee.

The Monitoring Officer

The Council's Monitoring Officer, Iwan Evans, along with officers from the Legal Service and the Democratic Service support the Standards Committee in its work. The Monitoring Officer has a statutory role to ensure that the Council, its members and its officers act appropriately and lawfully.

Contact Details

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THE COMMITTEE'S WORK DURING 2024 - 2025

The Committee's work over the year has included the following (the Committee's full work programme can be seen in **Appendix 1**):

Cases which appeared before the Standards Committee

No complaints of a breach of the Code of Conduct were referred to the Committee by the Ombudsman during the year.

Other complaints

The Committee is also notified of the Ombudsman's decisions on complaints that were not referred to the Committee for a decision, and a summary of these is provided in **Appendix 2**.

Dispensations

The Code of Conduct for Members provides that a councillor cannot participate in a discussion if he/she has a 'prejudicial interest'. However, a member has the right to apply to the Committee for permission to participate despite having this interest, i.e. dispensation.

A application was received from a member of a Town Council asking for a dispensation to participate in a discussion on the future of a community building, although she had ties to some of the building's current occupants who could be affected by the council's decision. The request was granted in part, allowing the member to speak but not to vote on the issue. She would need to declare the existence of interest and of the dispensation in the meeting and leave the room following her contribution to the discussion. The application was granted as the Committee considered that the unique perspective that the member could offer in the particular circumstances of this case, would not otherwise be available to the council.

The National Standards Committees Forum for Wales

The National Forum of Welsh Standards Committees has now been established, in order to share good practice co-ordinate events and create a support network for committee chairs. The meetings are attended by the chairs of all Welsh standards committees along with representation from the authorities' Monitoring Officers to

provide professional advice. The secretariat is provided by the Welsh Local Government Association.

Training for Gwynedd Council Members

Two virtual training sessions on the Code of Conduct were undertaken by the Monitoring Officer, one in April and one in December. These were follow up courses to give members who had not attended previous training events an opportunity to attend. These are of course designated core training requirements. In addition, a recording of the December course is available online as a way of meeting the requirement. Unfortunately, it remains the case that a number of members have yet to undertake this training.

Support for Community, Town and City Council Members

There are 3 elements of support that can be offered to members and clerks of community councils on matters relating to the Code of Conduct:

1. Advice on specific issues –by contacting the Monitoring Officer or the Deputy Monitoring Officer.
2. Gwynedd Council website - Standards Committee includes information and guidelines as well as links to other useful websites.
3. Training – the intention is to hold a virtual training session in the form of a webinar. This would create a resource that members could watch when it suits them rather than having to rely on sessions held in specific places and times.

A series of virtual training sessions was begun this year. Two sessions were held and clerks and members of community councils in the Arfon area were invited. The aims of the session are to enable members and clerks to gain an understanding of the basics of the Code of Conduct, to equip members to operate within the framework and highlight where further guidance and information can be obtained. It includes a presentation with slides and an opportunity for questions and a discussion afterwards.

The sessions were attended by a total of 44 members and clerks representing 9 different community councils.

Further sessions will be held during the coming year to include councils in the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd areas. The presentation will also be recorded so that it is available on Cyngor Gwynedd's website.

The Duty of Political Group Leaders

Section 52A(1)(a) of the 2000 Act (as amended by the 2021 Act) requires that a leader of a political group consisting of members of a county council or county borough council in Wales, must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group. A “group” for this purpose is defined as 2 or more members who give notice to the Proper Officer that they wish to be treated as a group for the purposes of political balance requirements and the allocation of seats on Council Committees

The guidance makes it clear that this duty does not make leaders of a political group accountable for the behaviour of their members, as conduct is a matter of individual responsibility. However, they do have a role in taking reasonable steps in maintaining standards, setting an example, using their influence to promote a positive culture, being proactive in promoting high standards of conduct in their group and addressing issues as soon as they arise. A leader of a political group who fails to comply with the new duty in a meaningful way, may potentially be regarded as bringing their office into disrepute, and likely to be in breach of the Code.

Section 62(3) of the 2021 Act amends section 54 of the 2000 Act to extend the specific functions of a Standards Committee to include monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups with the new duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of their group. Political group leaders and Standards Committee should agree on the form and frequency of a report from each group leader to the Committee, which would then consider each report and provide feedback to the group leaders. Standards Committee must also provide advice and training or arrange to train group leaders on the new duty. At the start of each Council term this should take place within six months of the election and be reviewed at least annually. The guidance also suggests that the Standards Committee may wish to meet with group leaders periodically to review arrangements.

In November 2023, the Standards Committee met with the leaders of the three political groups on the Council – Plaid Cymry, the Independents and Liberals/Labour Group to agree how this duty should be monitored and the nature and frequency of information that should be submitted to the Committee. This is now the basis for maintaining and monitoring the system.

During this year a meeting was held between the Group Leaders and the Monitoring Officer. A meeting was also held with the Standards Committee Charman and the Leader of the Cymru Party Group after her appointment to discuss the arrangements. The arrangements have been maintained this year although they have had to adapt to circumstances. A series of meetings have already been scheduled for the upcoming year. On the other hand, the working relationship with each Leader is positive and supportive. While the situation regarding attendance at training is disappointing, one can be confident that the Leaders appreciate and support resolving this situation. This positive relationship gives confidence that we can build on the benefits of the new arrangements,

THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2025

17 June 2024

- Self Assessment of the Committee's work during 2023/24
- Approved the Work Programme for 2024/25
- Approved the Standards Committee's Annual report 2023/24
- Received the regular report of allegations against members

4 November 2024

- Received a report on the Register of Gifts and Hospitality
- Received a report on the Register of Members' Interests
- Received the report of the Independent Review of Code of Conduct Investigations undertaken by the Ombudsman
- Considered the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2023/24
- Minutes of the National Standards Committee Forum
- Received the regular report of allegations against members

17 February 2025

- Duty of Leaders of Political Groups and the Standards Committee. (Leaders of Political groups are invited to the Meeting)
- The Proposed Work Programme 2025 -2026
- Received a report on training for community councils

- Received regular report of allegations against members
- Considered the Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales 2023/24

02307903

Complaint

That a town council member failed to declare an interest and voted on a matter in which she was alleged to have a personal interest.

Decision

Not to investigate. One of the alleged links was suggestive of a personal interest in the matter being discussed. However, the member had previously declared the interest but considered that it was not relevant in on this particular occasion. The failure to declare was an isolated incident but the member was reminded of the need to consider and review her duties under the Code of Conduct. While the matter may have been a breach of the code an investigation would not be in the public interest.

202307940

Complaint

That a town council member failed to declare an interest and voted on a matter in which she was alleged to have a personal interest. She also allegedly made false statements during the meeting.

Decision

Not to investigate. No evidence had been presented to support the allegations.

202310118

Complaint

That a town council member failed to declare an interest and engaged in discussion and voted on a matter in which she was alleged to have a personal interest.

Decision

Not to investigate as the issues raised in this complaint were being considered within a separate investigation, and it would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate separately. The information provided by the complainant would be considered as part of the other investigation.

202310119

Complaint

That a town council member failed to declare an interest and engaged in discussion and voted on a matter in which she was alleged to have a personal interest.

Decision

Not to investigate as the issues raised in this complaint were being considered within a separate investigation, and it would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate separately. The information provided by the complainant would be considered as part of the other investigation.

Complaint 202400306

The conduct of a town council member at a Council meeting and in carrying out an allegedly unnecessary investigation into the conduct of officers who previously managed a business on behalf of the council.

Decision

Not to investigate. No sufficient evidence has been presented to support the allegations.

Complaint 202401290

That a town councillor failed to declare an interest at a meeting of the full council

Decision

Not to investigate. The issues raised in this complaint were already under investigation separately, and it would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate. The evidence will be considered as part of the existing investigation.

Complaint 202401291

That a town councillor failed to declare an interest and voted on a matter in which she was alleged to have a personal and prejudicial interest.

Decision

Not to investigate. The issues raised in this complaint were already under separate investigation, and would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate. The evidence will be considered as part of the existing investigation.

Complaint 202401342

Complaint that a town councillor disclosed confidential information during a council meeting by naming two council members under investigation by the Ombudsman.

Decision

While it was appreciated that the announcement may have caused concern and/or embarrassment to the members under investigation, in the Ombudsman's view, on balance, there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the Member shared private or confidential details of the complaints. The

conduct described was considered not technically contrary to any provision of the Local Government Act and therefore did not contravene the Code.

Complaint 202403031

That a town council member had failed to leave the room when during a discussion on a matter on which he had declared an interest.

Decision

Although the conduct was suggestive of a breach of the Code it was decided not to investigate as a complaint against the member in relation to the interest was already under separate investigation, and would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate. The evidence will be considered as part of the existing investigation.

Complaint 202403620

That a town council member failed to declare an interest and participated in the discussion and vote on the matter.

Decision

Not to investigate. The issues raised in this complaint were already under separate investigation, and it would therefore not be in the public interest to investigate. The evidence will be considered as part of the existing investigation.

Complaint 202403617

A community council member pushed the complainant's front door open as he tried to close it and threatened physical violence.

Decision

Not to investigate. Despite being asked, the complainant did not provide sufficient evidence about the incident or to show whether the member was acting as a councillor or as a private individual at the time

Complaint 202404564

It was alleged by a member of the public that a town council member had breached the Code of Conduct by posting an inappropriate post on Facebook, on a community group page, which the complainant said was controlled by the member.

Decision

No supporting evidence had been provided to establish that the Member was responsible for the community page, or the post complained about. Although further evidence could have been sought, the issue was considered in the context of Article 10 of the Human Rights Convention, which

protects freedom of expression. The Ombudsman did not condone the posting of controversial cartoon images of this nature, which appeared wholly out of place and inappropriate on a community group page and could cause offence to members of the public. However, the post would not be considered so serious, highly offensive or rude to amount to a breach of the Code or to warrant a sanction being imposed, as this would not be considered a proportionate interference with the Member's freedom of expression under Article 10.
