

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2018

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3 - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2018 AT 10:00

Present

Mr C Jones OBE – Chairperson

Mr P Clarke

DRW Lewis

Mr J Baker

Mr G Walter

Apologies for Absence

MC Clarke

Officers:

Mark Galvin

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Laura Griffiths

Principal Solicitor

Andrew Jolley

Corporate Director Operational & Partnership Services

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

21. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee dated 30 November 2017, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the word 'Councillor' being omitted from the title of the Chairperson in that part of the Minutes that related to the attendees at the meeting.

22. WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, that updated Members upon the application of the Whistleblowing Policy across the Authority.

The report gave some background information which reminded Members that the purpose of a Whistleblowing Policy, was to encourage and reassure employees who genuinely and reasonably believed that there are concerns which they should disclose by enabling them to do so within a framework, which ensures they are protected from reprisals or victimisation.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Whistleblowing Policy had now been reviewed, and a copy of the amended Policy was attached at Appendix 1. The monitoring and operation of the Whistleblowing Policy is one of the functions delegated to the Committee he added.

The Policy was scheduled to be presented to Cabinet for approval, following which it would then be published on the Council's website.

The Monitoring Officer advised that there were currently no whistleblowing complaints outstanding at the present time, aside of one which was under investigation, which proved to a significant degree, that the Policy was working effectively.

A Member asked what amendment(s) to the Whistleblowing Policy had been made as part of its review.

The Monitoring Officer advised that this was in the main, that any whistleblowing concern be reported to himself in his capacity as Monitoring Officer, and that he shares this with other members of the Corporate Management Board (CMB), prior to deciding what course of action should be taken (if any) regarding the issue raised.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report.

23. MONITORING REPORT - COMPLAINTS, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, which outlined the performance of the Authority in processing Corporate Complaints, Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, and other such associated information requests.

The report confirmed that there is a legislative requirement to respond to FOI requests within a 20 working day period and to data subject access requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998 in 40 calendar days.

He also advised that information requests from public bodies do not have a statutory response deadline; however, the Information team endeavoured to respond to these requests as quickly as was reasonably practicable. He added that in line with the Corporate Complaints Policy, the Authority should respond to a formal complaint in 20 working days.

Attached to the report at Appendix A was a Monitoring Report for the period 1 January – 31 December 2017.

The Monitoring Officer then, for the benefit of Members, gave a resume of the key elements that were contained in the attached Appendix A, particularly with regard to:-

- The difference between the Informal and Formal Complaint stages;
- The number of complaints received in the calendar year of 2017, including the split of these on a Directorate by Directorate basis and how many aligned to each service area comprising the Authority and each County Borough Council Ward;
- Complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales;
- Code of Conduct Complaints;
- FOI requests;
- Data Subject Access requests, and
- Information Requests from Public Bodies

Members were of the opinion that future such reports to the Standards Committee on this topic contain a further breakdown of information, for example, where the complaints originated from; the nature of these, the number made by Town/Community Councils, and if any were from one Councillor against a fellow Councillor, etc. Members also felt that the data be compared with that of the previous year, in order to gauge if complaints and other requests were following any sort of trend, particularly in relation to the number of complaints being received year on year.

The Monitoring Officer agreed with this request, adding that dependent upon the extent and nature of this more expansive information, it may be necessary for the Committee to consider such future reports in closed session, should they contain information of an exempt nature.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report.

24. OMBUDSMAN CASEBOOK

The Monitoring Officer reported to the Committee so as to provide Members with a summary of cases that have been undertaken by the Ombudsman's Office.

By way of background information, he confirmed that the Ombudsman's Casebook is published on a quarterly basis and contains the summaries of all reports issued during the quarter, as well as a selection of summaries relating to 'quick fixes' and voluntary settlements.

The Casebook for January 2018 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report, and illustrated the cases closed between October and December 2017.

The Chairperson noted from the Casebook that a considerable number of complaints included therein were not upheld, and that a fairly large proportion of these were made against various Health Boards.

Members were also pleased to note that there were no complaints made against BCBC in the Ombudsman Casebook.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report.

25. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 10:45