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Bridgend County Borough Council



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*Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg.
Rhowch wybod i ni os mai Cymraeg yw eich
dewis iaith.*

*We welcome correspondence in Welsh. Please
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Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: 01656 643148 /
643147 / 643694

Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Democratic Services

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: Thursday, 09 November 2023

Dear Councillor,

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held Remotely via Microsoft Teams on **Thursday, 16 November 2023 at 10:00.**

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive apologies for absence from Members.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council on 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 10
To receive for approval the Minutes of 07/07/2023
4. Appointment of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson 11 - 14
5. Public Services Ombudsman For Wales Annual Letter 2022/23 15 - 28
6. Observing Town And Community Council Meetings And Council Meetings 29 - 32
7. Urgent Items
To consider any item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Rule 4 of the Council's Procedure Rules, and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should by reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Note: This meeting will be held Remotely via Microsoft Teams. The meeting will be recorded for subsequent transmission via the Council's internet site which will be available as soon as practicable after the meeting. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / .643696

Yours faithfully

By receiving this Agenda Pack electronically you will save the Authority approx. £0.64 in printing costs

K Watson

Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy

Councillors:

MJ Williams
G Thomas

Councillors

G Walter

Lay Members:

P Clarke
R Lynch
S Maughan
S Cullen
P Baker

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 7 JULY 2023

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON FRIDAY, 7 JULY 2023 AT 09:30

Present

Mr C Jones OBE – Chairperson

MJ Williams
G Walter

G Thomas

Mr P Clarke

Mrs J Kiely

Officers:

Mark Galvin
Laura Griffiths

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Principal Solicitor

120. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Williams declared a personal interest in Item 4, Standards of Conduct, as he was married to one of the Group Leaders in attendance at the meeting.

121. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

That the minutes of the Standards Committee dated 22/06/2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

122. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

It was noted that the Leaders of the three political groups had been invited to attend the meeting for this item.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented the report, the purpose of which was to present to the committee, the report of the three political group leaders outlining their compliance with the duties in relation to maintaining standards of conduct.

She referred to the report presented on 30/09/2022 on the new duties placed upon standards committees and political group leaders under the Local Government and the Elections Wales Act 2021 and invited the three group leaders to introduce their reports after which they could be asked questions by the committee.

The Chairperson invited the Leader, Bridgend County Independents, to present her report in the order of the appendices of the report.

Cllr Williams explained that the report is divided into three sections namely:

- Demonstrating personal commitment to and attending relevant development or training around equalities and standards.
- Encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards.
- Ensuring nominees to a Committee have received the recommended training for that Committee.

The Group Leader stated that while she was a returning member, her group mainly comprised of members in their first term of office. The group were eager and

enthusiastic about being active and making progressive changes for the good she explained. She stated that all the members in her group endeavoured to attend all member training provided and where they could not attend in person, they looked at the video recordings of the sessions.

The Group Leader also made reference new members still learning the speed at which processes work, adding that she has been on hand to advise them and guide them on the democratic processes of the Authority. She stated that she also works closely with her group members in terms of adverse comments made on social media, including those made personally.

A member of the committee inquired, particularly in respect of new members, if there was something the Standards Committee could do to assist in the support of new members in any way.

The Group Leader responded that she felt new members would benefit from a briefing from the Standards Committee on its remit and the type of issues it considers

A member enquired if the issues with regards to social media had calmed down as this new term had progressed and asked for recommendations on what the group leader felt could be done to assist in the above regard.

The Group Leader responded that the level of attacks had not reduced or calmed down but the new members adverse reaction to such verbal attacks had subsided.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy thanked the Group Leader for her presentation and informed the committee that she had recognised the requirement of a briefing in relation to the standards committee to members and will include this within the annual report to Council in July.

The Chairperson invited the Leader of the Democratic Alliance Group to present his report.

The Group Leader stated that his group comprised of a 50/50 split of returning members and those who were their first term with a balance of experience and enthusiasm that he felt was positive. He re-iterated the comments made by the Group Leader of the Bridgend County Independents, in that he felt they had a collegiate relationship among group leaders which enabled them to meet regularly to discuss operational and strategic issues facing BCBC. He stated that he felt it was fortunate that no member of his group had been subject to a complaint, formal or otherwise.

The Chairperson invited questions for the group leader and acknowledged that there were none.

The Chairperson invited the Leader of the Council and Group Leader for the Labour Group to present his report.

The Leader stated that there were a majority of new members within the party and they shared the enthusiasm and energy he had been accustomed to with more longstanding and experienced members. He stated that they were both learning and developing in the role and therefore they were not always equipped with the knowledge that experience brought about, so were sometimes unaware of all of the processes of the Council at present.

He confirmed that all members in the Labour group had attended all mandatory training and he felt that the member development sessions were equipping them with the skills they required.

He agreed with comments made by the other group leaders who presented before him, stating that he felt they had a constructive, open and positive relationship as group leaders. He stated that they try to lead by example and show civility and respect to each other and fellow members from different political allegiances.

The Leader referred to the issue raised in relation to attacks on elected members and stated that he had raised this with the Police Commissioner. He clarified to the Committee that the attacks mentioned are not between elected members but more directed at elected members by members of the public on social media.

He mentioned plans of a meeting with elected members to understand the level of the threshold where the Police can and cannot get involved and provide some support. The Leader also mentioned that a meeting with the Police Commissioner was to be arranged over the summer, in order to discuss issues including this problem.

The Leader drew members attention to the two complaints raised with the Public Service Ombudsman and stated he would include the outcome of these, within the annual report.

A member of the committee queried if there was an opportunity for an informal resolution to be agreed prior to any complaints being escalated to the public service ombudsman.

The Leader responded by stating that while there was some engagement before, it was the choice made by the complainant to escalate the complaint, if they felt this to be necessary.

A member of the committee queried if there was any knowledge about the topics to be covered within the member briefing planned for August.

The Leader responded that they were exploring the options available and bringing in specialists that can educate members further. He stated that as it was a broad subject, there were practical measures in terms of action that can be taken as some of it was preventative and some of it was more about reassurance.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy added that a briefing had been organised with the South Wales Police. The aim was to specifically target what the thresholds were for intervention by them and if reports were made to them. The Democratic Services Committee were to have a report at its September meeting, in relation to personal safety of Members. In addition to that the council were already liaising with the police about the opportunity to put markers (referred to as police markers) on member's houses who were receiving personal attacks, should this be required.

She reassured that if there were individual Members who were experiencing issues they needed to contact the relevant officers in BCBC as there were safety measures BCBC could also put in place. As required, with members who approached the Council, individual risk assessments had been undertaken and any issues where it was required, had been dealt with appropriately.

A member of the Committee raised a query in relation to harassment faced by elected members and asked if the police briefing could include guidance and advice on how such instances could be handled.

It was agreed that while recognising that the Police alone could advice on specific matters and would be able to elaborate on thresholds in line with their experience on such matters, the concerns raised should be brought to their attention in readiness for the briefing.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy responded that the police will be preparing the briefing. She agreed to contact them and ask that they covered the scenarios so mentioned today. She stated that she would welcome questions from members and that they were able to respond to some queries themselves.

The Leader suggested a member briefing with the Standards Committee to allow an opportunity for individual members to meet with members of the committee to get a better understanding of its purpose and functions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the reports attached as Appendices 1-3 and provided feedback as given above.

123. **ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented a report, the purpose of which, was that the Standards Committee receives the Annual Report for 2022/2023 to be presented to full Council.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that the Committee received the Annual Report for 2022/23, which will in turn, be presented to full Council.

124. **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented a report, the purpose of which was for the Committee to note the consultation on the Independent Review of the Ethical Standards Framework (Penn Review).

She stated that the framework for this remained largely unchanged over the last 20 years and an individual independent review was felt important to maintain confidence in the system.

An effective ethical framework was essential she explained, to ensure people and local members from all backgrounds have confidence to engage in local democracy and/or stand for elected office.

The independent review was undertaken by Richard Penn, a former local authority chief executive and the former chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The terms of the review, were set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy stated that the review had concluded that the current framework was fit for purpose and worked well in practise. It was suggested that there be a greater emphasis in the framework on the prevention of complaints and improving the handling of complaints, which will result in already high ethical standards being further enhanced and improved.

She stated that since the publication of the review in July 2021, engagement had taken place with stakeholders, including monitoring officers, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales. The reviews

recommendations were also discussed at the All Wales Standards Conference in February 2022 and a consultation paper was published in March 2023.

She requested that the committee noted the report and the consultation that had been ongoing and the outcome of the consultation be reported to the committee when it becomes available.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report.

125. **NATIONAL FORUM FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented the report, the purpose of which, was to update Members in respect of the National Forum for Standards Committee Chairs.

She stated that the PEN report mentioned previously, had discussed and commented on the variety of practice across Wales in how the Standards Committee discharge their duties and functions.

Richard Penn acknowledged the positive work for the forum of Chairs of Standards Committees in North and mid Wales and recommended that an All Wales Forum be established along the same line to encourage consistency in the ways the Committee operates and discharges its functions.

All local authorities in Wales had agreed to create a national forum with a view to sharing good practice. Draft terms of reference for the forum have been prepared and agreed by the Monitoring Officers Group for Wales and as referred to in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy stated that this provided Chairpersons the opportunity to share and agree to co-ordinate best practice while acting as a sounding board for ideas and creates a support network for Chairpersons and committees. Each Standards Committee will retain privacy, so the forum would not be able to make any binding decisions on behalf of local authorities, she added.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report and confirmed that the Chair and Monitoring Officer (or their deputies) represents BCBC on the National Forum for Standards Committee Chairs.

126. **GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented a report, the purpose of which, was for the Committee to consider the harmonisation of gifts and hospitality thresholds to ensure consistency with other Welsh local authorities.

She stated that under the current members Code of Conduct, members were required to register the receipt of any gifts, hospitality or other benefits where the value of the item exceeded a threshold set by the Council. In Bridgend, this threshold was £25.

Monitoring Officers across Wales were asked to seek views with their Standards Committee on where the standard threshold should be set at.

The report enclosed a table indicating that the average threshold across Wales was currently £25. The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy, requested that the Committee agreed that local authorities should voluntarily harmonise their thresholds and sought comments on whether Members felt £25 was an appropriate amount.

RESOLVED : That the Committee agreed to support the proposal that local authorities in Wales should voluntarily harmonise their thresholds for the registration of gifts and hospitality, with this in BCBC remaining at £25.

127. OBSERVATIONS OF THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy presented a report, the purpose of which, was to update the Committee following Members (of this Committee) observing a meeting of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Standards Committee. She invited questions and observations on the report.

Further to the observations made following the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Standards Committee, the Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy enquired with members of the committee if they would like to observe any other BCBC or Town and Community Council meetings within the borough.

The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory, Human Resources and Corporate Policy referred back to a point within Item 1, discussed by Group Leaders, where they discussed the benefit of members of the Standard Committee meeting with elected members. She mentioned that recruitment of new members to the committee was in progress, and while they were happy to take nominations during the meeting, they felt it was fair to allow those Members to come on board and receive an induction prior to the offer. She stated that it may be an opportunity for those currently on the committee to observe a full Council meeting, together with any further new members that were going to be appointed as lay members on the Committee, in the not too distant future.

The Chief Officer Legal, Regulatory and Human Resources and Monitoring Officer stated that she would send a calendar appointment with a date when the council are due to hold a full Council meeting in the future that Standards lay members could possibly attend. Members could then let her know if they were able to attend such meeting to observe proceedings.

She confirmed that she could also contact clerks of Town and Community Councils to establish if there was a will from them to agree for a similar arrangement whereby lay members of the Standards Committee could also observe some of their meetings.

RESOLVED : (1) The Committee noted the report the observations from the Vale of Glamorgan meeting.

(2) That Members decided they would like to observe a BCBC meeting and similarly a meeting of a Town or Community Council meeting.

The Chairperson stated that due to personal reasons, this was his last meeting as a member of the Standards Committee. He would be very reluctantly, tendering his resignation to the monitoring officer to this effect, following the meeting. The chairperson

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 7 JULY 2023

was praised for his past work by the committee members and the Monitoring Officer, both of whom wished him well for the future.

128. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

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Agenda Item 4

Meeting of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	16 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	MONITORING OFFICER
Responsible Officer:	LAURA GRIFFITHS GROUP MANAGER LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	To elect a Chair and Vice Chair for the Standards Committee due to vacancies. Any appointments will be reported to full Council for noting.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson for the Standards Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1 Under the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 the members of a Standards Committee shall elect a Chairperson from amongst the Independent Members of the Committee.
- 2.2 A Chairperson shall be elected for whichever is the shorter of the following periods:
(a) a period of not less than four nor more than six years, (b) until the term of office of that person as an independent member of that standards committee comes to an end.
- 2.3 The Council's Standards Committee consists of five Independent Members, two County Borough Council Members and one Town and Community Council Member.
- 2.4 There is currently a vacancy of the post of Chairperson due to the recent resignation of Mr Clifford Jones OBE.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The Role Description for the Chair of the Standards Committee as set out within the Council's Constitution is as follows:

Accountabilities

To Full Council.

Role Purpose and Activity

- (a) *Providing Leadership and Direction*
 - (i) *To act within technical, legal and procedural requirements to oversee the functions of the committee fairly and correctly.*
 - (ii) *To ensure thoroughness and objectivity in the committee, receiving and responding to professional advice on the Code of Conduct.*
 - (iii) *To demonstrate independence, integrity and impartiality in decision making which accord with legal, constitutional and policy requirements.*
 - (iv) *To provide confident and effective management of meetings to facilitate inclusivity, participation and clear decision making.*
 - (v) *To lead the committee in its role in:*
 - (A) *promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and co-opted members;*
 - (B) *assisting the Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;*
 - (C) *advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;*
 - (D) *monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;*
 - (E) *advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, co-opted members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;*
 - (F) *granting dispensations to Councillors and co-opted members on dealing with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matter referred to that officer by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales;*
 - (G) *the exercise of these functions in relation to community councils and the members of those community councils.*

Values

To be committed to the values of the council and the following values in public office:

- (b) *openness and transparency;*

- (c) *honesty and integrity;*
- (d) *tolerance and respect;*
- (e) *equality and fairness;*
- (f) *appreciation of cultural differences;*
- (g) *sustainability.*

3.2 If the Chair is absent from a meeting then the Vice-Chair shall preside, if present. If both the Chair and Vice-Chair are absent, the Committee shall choose another Independent Member to preside.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. This report also assists in the achievement of the following well-being objective under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-

A county borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.

5.2 The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members. Standards are an implicit requirement in the successful implementation of the corporate well-being objectives.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no safeguarding and corporate parent implications.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Any appointments referred to in this report will be met from existing Democratic Services budgets.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from amongst the Independent Members for a term to be determined noting any appointments will be reported to full Council for information.

Background documents:

None

Meeting of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	16 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	PUBLIC SERVICES OMUBUDSMAN FOR WALES ANNUAL LETTER 2022/23
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	MONITORING OFFICER
Responsible Officer:	LAURA GRIFFITHS GROUP MANAGER LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	The Annual Letter for Bridgend County Borough Council must also be presented to Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Standards Committee to note the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' Annual Letter 2022/23.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) is independent of all government bodies and has legal powers to investigate complaints about public services and independent care providers in Wales. They also investigate complaints that Members of local government bodies have breached their authority's Code of Conduct.
- 2.2 The PSOW reports annually on the number of complaints against public bodies received by its office.
- 2.3 The Complaints Officer is the Contact Officer for the PSOW and the Monitoring Officer is responsible for liaising with the PSOW regarding Member Code of Conduct complaints.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 **Appendix A** provides the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2022-2023.
- 3.2 The number of complaints against the Authority for the period 2022–2023 was 55 compared with 55 in 2021-2022 and 31 in 2020-2021. The figure for 2022-23 represents 0.38 complaints received per 1000 residents. Children's Social Services and Planning / Building Control attracted the largest number of complaints. 10 cases

were out of jurisdiction, 17 were premature, 25 were closed after initial consideration, 4 were settled by working with the Ombudsman for early resolution. One complaint proceeded to investigation and was upheld.

3.3 6 Code of Conduct complaints against the Authority's Councillors were received by the Ombudsman's Office in this period, 5 of which were discontinued and one was referred to the Standards Committee for consideration (which was concluded by the Committee at their meeting on 7 July 2023). 25 Code of Conduct complaints were received against Town and Community Councils in Bridgend County, none of which were referred to the Standards Committee, 23 of which a decision was taken not to investigate, and in 2 cases no action was necessary.

3.4 The Complaints Standards Authority publishes datasets on complaints handled by local authorities. These datasets are published on the Ombudsman's website and on the Council's website. This data shows that last year, 21% of the Council's complaints were referred to PSOW.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. This report also assists in the achievement of the following well-being objective under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-

A county borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.

5.2 Standards are an implicit requirement in the successful implementation of the corporate well-being objectives.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no safeguarding and corporate parent implications.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the Annual Letter for 2022/23.


Background documents:

None


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Ask for: Communications

 01656 641150

Date: 17 August 2023

 Communications
@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Huw David
Bridgend County Borough Council
By Email only: cllr.huw.david@bridgend.gov.uk

Annual Letter 2022/23

Dear Councillor David

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2022/23) for Bridgend County Borough Council which deals with complaints relating to maladministration and service failure, complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and the actions being taken to improve public services.

This letter coincides with my Annual Report – “[A year of change – a year of challenge](#)” – a sentiment which will no doubt resonate with public bodies across Wales. My office has seen another increase in the number of people asking for our help – up 3% overall compared to the previous year, and my office now receives double the number of cases we received a decade ago.

In the last year, I have met with public bodies across Wales – speaking about our casework, our recommendations, and our proactive powers. The current climate will continue to provide challenges for public services, but I am grateful for the positive and productive way in which local authorities continue to engage with my office.

1,020 complaints were referred to us regarding local authorities last year - a reduction of 11% compared to the previous year. During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) 13% of local authority complaints.

We received fewer Code of Conduct complaints in 22/23 compared to the previous year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. My role is such that I do not make final findings about breaches of the Code of Conduct. Instead, where investigations find the most serious concerns, these are referred to the Standards Committee of the relevant local authority, or the

Adjudication Panel for Wales. In 2022/23, the Ombudsman made 12 such referrals – a welcome reduction from 20 last year.

Supporting improvement of public services

Despite the challenges of last year, we have pushed forward with our proactive improvement work and launched a new Service Quality process to ensure we deliver the standards we expect.

Last year, we began work on our second wider Own Initiative investigation – this time looking into carers assessments within local authorities. This investigation will take place throughout the coming year, and we look forward to sharing our findings with all local authorities – not just those involved in the investigation.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year, with more than 50 public bodies now operating our model policy. We've also now provided more than 400 training sessions since we started, with local authorities, in September 2020.

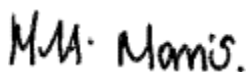
We continued our work to publish complaints statistics into a second year, with data now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 21% of Bridgend County Borough Council's complaints were referred to PSOW.

I would encourage Bridgend County Borough Council, and specifically your Audit and Governance Committee, to use this data to better understand your performance on complaints and consider how well good complaints handling is embedded throughout the Authority.

Further to this letter can I ask that your Council takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Cabinet and to the Governance and Audit Committee at the next available opportunity and notify me of when these meetings will take place.
- Continue to engage with our Complaints Standards work, accessing training for your staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing accurate and timely complaints data.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Mark Shephard, Chief Executive, Bridgend County Borough Council.
By Email only: mark.shephard@bridgend.gov.uk



Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	16	0.24
Bridgend County Borough Council	55	0.38
Caerphilly County Borough Council	49	0.28
Cardiff Council*	142	0.39
Carmarthenshire County Council	53	0.28
Ceredigion County Council	35	0.49
Conwy County Borough Council	31	0.27
Denbighshire County Council	32	0.33
Flintshire County Council	65	0.42
Cyngor Gwynedd	36	0.31
Isle of Anglesey County Council	25	0.36
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	17	0.29
Monmouthshire County Council	23	0.25
Neath Port Talbot Council	39	0.27
Newport City Council	42	0.26
Pembrokeshire County Council	44	0.36
Powys County Council	38	0.29
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**	54	0.23
Swansea Council	94	0.39
Torfaen County Borough Council	16	0.17
Vale of Glamorgan Council	49	0.37
Wrexham County Borough Council	65	0.48
Total	1020	0.33
* inc 9 Rent Smart Wales		
** inc 2 South Wales Parking Group		



Appendix B - Received by Subject

Bridgend County Borough Council	Complaints Received	% share
Adult Social Services	2	4%
Benefits Administration	0	0%
Children's Social Services	14	25%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	2%
Complaints Handling	7	13%
Covid19	1	2%
Education	5	9%
Environment and Environmental Health	4	7%
Finance and Taxation	0	0%
Housing	5	9%
Licensing	0	0%
Planning and Building Control	11	20%
Roads and Transport	3	5%
Various Other	2	4%
Total	55	

ombwdsmon.cymru
holwch@ombwdsmon.cymru
0300 790 0203
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Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes (* denotes intervention)

Bridgend County Borough Council		% Share
Out of Jurisdiction	10	18%
Premature	17	30%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	25	44%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	4	7%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	0	0%
Other Reports Upheld*	1	2%
Public Interest Reports*	0	0%
Special Interest Reports*	0	0%
Total	57	

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Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	16	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	5	57	9%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	6	52	12%
Cardiff Council	25	145	17%
Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales	1	9	11%
Carmarthenshire County Council	7	60	12%
Ceredigion County Council	13	44	30%
Conwy County Borough Council	5	35	14%
Denbighshire County Council	2	33	6%
Flintshire County Council	5	70	7%
Cyngor Gwynedd	5	33	15%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	5	25	20%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	1	18	6%
Monmouthshire County Council	1	22	5%
Neath Port Talbot Council	7	38	18%
Newport City Council	8	48	17%
Pembrokeshire County Council	3	45	7%
Powys County Council	8	44	18%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	2	54	4%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council - South Wales Parking Group	0	2	0%
Swansea Council	10	99	10%
Torfaen County Borough Council	1	17	6%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	15	53	28%
Wrexham County Borough Council	6	67	9%
Total	141	1086	13%



Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

		Bridgend County Borough Council
Investigations	Decision not to investigate	5
	Discontinued	0
	No evidence of breach	0
	No action necessary	0
	Refer to Adjudication Panel	0
	Refer to Standards Committee	1
	Total	6

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Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

Town/Community Council	Decision not to investigate	Investigations				Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Total
		Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary				
Brackla Community Council	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Bridgend Town Council	5	0	0	1	0	0	6	
Coity Higher Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Laleston Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Llangynwyd Middle Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Maesteg Town Council	9	0	0	0	0	0	9	
Newcastle Higher Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Pencoed Town Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Porthcawl Town Council	4	0	0	1	0	0	5	
Ynysawdre Community Council	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	

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Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. These complaints are contextualised by the population of each authority.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix C shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix D shows Intervention Rates for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix E shows the outcomes of Code Of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

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Agenda Item 6

Meeting of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	16 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	OBSERVING TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETINGS AND COUNCIL MEETINGS
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	MONITORING OFFICER
Responsible Officer:	LAURA GRIFFITHS GROUP MANAGER LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	To agree a process for Independent Members of the Standards Committee to observe Town and Community Council meetings and meetings of the Council.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with an overview of the process for observing future meetings of Bridgend County Borough Council and Town and Community Council meetings.

2. Background

- 2.1 There are a number of roles and functions of the Standards Committee, one of which is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors and Co-opted Members. As part of the Committee's work programme, it has been agreed that Independent Members of the Standards Committee would attend meetings of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) and Town and Community Council (TCC) meetings to observe meetings with a view to promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct in line with the Members' Code of Conduct.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 In deciding which meetings to attend, it is proposed that the Committee consider the following:
 - BCBC Council meetings are deemed pivotal as this is where all County Borough Elected Members meet and where political discussions take place and decisions are made.

- Members may wish to observe an Overview and Scrutiny Committee as it provides an opportunity for Members to hold the Executive and Senior Officers to account in relation to decisions made and to be made.
- Observing TCC meetings and the undertaking of observations from Clerks and Chairs of TCCs allows the sharing of good practice.
- The Governance and Audit Committee is regularly observed by external regulators and therefore it may be considered excessive for the Committee to also attend to observe these meetings.
- The Committee may wish to observe a regulatory committee.

3.2 It is proposed that a schedule of future visits is produced and an Observation Evaluation Sheet to provide the Independent Members with a list of questions to consider when undertaking the visits. Chairs of BCBC Council meetings and Clerks of TCCs will then be advised by Democratic Services that Independent Members intend observing. Consideration needs to be given as to whether Council Members will be advised beforehand of the attendance of Independent Members. The arrangements for attending meetings of BCBC will also be shared in advance with Group Leaders.

3.3 Following the observation, it is recommended that the information gathered and any concerns / comments of the Independent Members are fed back to the Committee Chairs, Clerks and / or Chair of the TCCs by the Monitoring Officer. The Independent Members will also report to the next available Standards Committee following their visits. The Monitoring Officer may also seek to receive feedback of how Chairs and / or Clerks intend to take any suggestions made, as a result of observations, forward.

3.4 Whilst the intention of the Committee would be to restrict the observations made to Code of Conduct matters, it is inevitable that other process / governance issues may emerge which Members may include in their observations in the hope they assist BCBC, TCCs and its Members moving forward.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. This report also assists in the achievement of the following well-being objective under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-

A county borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.

5.2 The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members. Standards are an implicit requirement in the successful implementation of the corporate well-being objectives.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no safeguarding and corporate parent implications.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Independent Members are able to be remunerated for attendance under the allowance scheme agreed by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. The costs will be met from existing Democratic Services budget.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Members are requested to note the report and approve the process for observing future meetings of BCBC and TCCs.

Background documents:

None

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