

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2017 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Mr C Jones OBE – Chairperson

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| Mr P Clarke | Mrs J Kiely | Town Councillor RJ Hancock OBE | Councillor RD Jenkins |
| Mr J Baker | | | |

Apologies for Absence

Town Councillor A Davies and DRW Lewis

Officers:

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| Laura Griffiths | Senior Lawyer |
| Andrew Jolley | Corporate Director Operational & Partnership Services |
| Andrew Rees | Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees |

158. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

159. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Standards Committee of 15 and 22 November 2016 were approved as a true and accurate record subject to the word 'Councillor' being deleted prior to Mr C Jones' name in the list of attendees in the minutes of the meeting of 15 November 2016.

160. OMBUDSMAN CASEBOOK

The Monitoring Officer reported on a summary of cases which have been undertaken by the Ombudsman's office which had been published on a quarterly basis. He stated that the Casebook contains summaries of all reports issued during the quarter, as well as a selection of summaries relating to quick fixes and voluntary settlements.

The Monitoring Officer referred to a complaint involving Ynysawdre Community Council which involved a long running dispute between the Community Council and an elderly residents group. The residents had recently alleged they had been denied access to a meeting of the Community Council which had received some coverage in the media. The meeting the residents had attempted to gain access to was not a public meeting of the Community Council and the police were subsequently called. He stated that the Ombudsman did not uphold the complaint.

The Monitoring Officer also reported that the Council had apologised and made a compensatory payment to the complainant following a challenge made to the safe walking route to school aspect of the Council's school transport policy.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Council had agreed to resolve a complaint that it had not adequately dealt with a problem of refuse stored within a brick built storage area owned by Hafod Housing Association.

The Monitoring Officer also reported that the Ombudsman had investigated a complaint made by a former looked after child and found maladministration by the Council. The Ombudsman had issued a report in accordance with Section 16 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005 as it was determined that that the case raised important issues at local, regional and national levels about looked after children and their savings. The complainant alleged:

- the Council had not managed his savings properly and in accordance with its policy;
- some of his savings were used, without consultation with him, to pay for trips for which he should have received a special allowance;
- the savings he received in January 2015 were substantially less than he believed they should have been.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the Council's position is that the complainant had not suffered injustice or hardship in consequence of this matter. The Complainant had been provided with the remainder of his savings and the interest accrued. He stated that while in foster care the complainant had been on a rugby tour and attended an outward bound activities trip, a school trip and been on a family holiday. The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee the authority takes its role and responsibilities as a corporate parent extremely seriously, however, there is currently no legal requirement or national policy or guidance in place regarding savings for looked after children, aside from the establishment of a junior ISA. He stated that Bridgend foster carers are encouraged to save for looked after children for whom they provide care. The Council has ascertained from other local authorities that there is agreement in respect of the Authority's position the being no mandatory savings policy in place, all foster carers are merely encouraged to either save themselves on behalf of children or encourage children from whom they provide care to save themselves. He stated that the issue of savings for looked after children had been raised in a number of arenas, including the Welsh Government and South Wales Fostering Managers. He informed the Committee that the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee had debated the matter and decided as the Ombudsman agreed it was a national issue the matter should be pursued as such.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the Council had made an ex-gratia payment to the complainant and a joint statement made to the media. He stated that the Council will lobby the Welsh Government to provide a national position on savings for looked after children. He also stated that it was difficult to recruit foster carers and make savings, but the authority had a responsibility to support looked after children as they go into adulthood.

The Committee was disappointed to note the way in which the case had been played out in the media.

- RESOLVED:
- (1) That the Committee noted the report;
 - (2) That the Committee supported officers and the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee in lobbying the Welsh Government for a change in legislation on the issue of savings for looked after children.

161. RESPONSE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

The Monitoring Officer reported on the response received from the Ombudsman's office in relation to corporate complaint handling by public sector organisations.

He informed the Committee that he had written to the Ombudsman following concerns raised by the Committee at its meeting on 15 November 2016 that a number of cases in the Casebook related to delays by public bodies in dealing with complaints which could be attributed to reduced staff numbers in local government and Health Boards. He stated that the Committee was concerned that in the current and ongoing financial climate organisations were not giving the appropriate priority to the processing and consideration of corporate complaints, both in the individual complaint but also as a method of information gathering on service delivery quality. The Committee was also concerned that, accepting that many organisations were seeking alternative models of delivery to ensure the maintenance and improvement of services to the public, the prioritisation of services would inevitably lead to some service delivery reductions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report

162. VOTE OF THANKS

Councillor RJ Hancock informed the Committee that this would be the last meeting he would be attending as he would shortly be completing two terms of service to the Committee. Councillor RD Jenkins informed the Committee that this would also be his last meeting of the Committee as he was not seeking re-election at the forthcoming local government elections.

The Chairperson on behalf of the remaining members of the Committee thanked both Councillor Hancock and Councillor Jenkins for the service they had both given the Committee and wished them well for the future.

163. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 2.35 pm