

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY - VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 29 JUNE 2021 AT 10:00

Present

Mr C Jones OBE – Chairperson

G Thomas

Mr P Clarke

MC Clarke

Mr J Baker

Apologies for Absence

Mrs J Kiely and P Davies

Officers:

Mark Galvin

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Kelly Watson

Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

Michael Pitman

Democratic Services Officer – Committees

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

87. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee dated 25 February 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record.

88. ELECTED MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In light of the fact that the Chairperson was having difficulty in connecting to the meeting remotely, Mr. Jeff Baker chaired the meeting for the following item

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, the purpose of which, was for the Committee to note the draft Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

She confirmed that the Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy had provided the framework for provision and delivery of Member Development for Elected Members from induction and throughout their term of office to date. The Strategy was now coming towards the end of its effective life and in preparation for the 2022 Local Government Elections, and the subsequent induction of newly Elected Members, a desktop review of the Strategy has been undertaken to ensure that it is fit for purpose and updated to reflect a number of factors which have changed since the approval of the original Strategy.

The Strategy was divided into 5 phases as detailed in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

It should also be noted that in the first year after the election, member development activities are primarily for information provision and process development which should be delivered in-house or by appropriate organisations such as the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). After the first year the focus in the delivery of member development will change to the provision of wider in-depth topics at a local level and more topics which relate to regional and national issues, added the Monitoring

Officer. The report also made reference to there being more e learning opportunities to be available for Members going forward and into the next term of office.

The Democratic Services Committee, the body which leads on a considerable number of member development initiatives, had determined that training and development aims and objectives, meets the expectations and outcomes listed in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 of the report. A report on this, would also be submitted to a future meeting of Council.

There would also be Potential Candidate sessions arranged by the Authority, for individuals who were interested in becoming a Councillor in the Local Government elections in 2022.

It was anticipated that the Council's Democratic Services Committee would provide direction for the Member Development activities that need to be undertaken and to ensure that the development needs of Elected Members are met. The Committee will also receive updates regarding the Member development Budget and any evaluation of the Strategy that is undertaken, at future meetings.

Members commended the recent training on the subject of the Code of Conduct for Members that had been made available for Members, provided by an external provider .

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the draft Elected Member Learning and Development Strategy, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

89. **OMBUDSMAN CASEBOOK**

The Monitoring Officer presented a report, that provided Members with a summary of cases that have been undertaken by the Ombudsman's Office between October and December 2020.

She explained that the Ombudsman's Casebook was published on a quarterly basis and contained 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 October – December 2020 was attached at Appendix 1, to the report.

The Monitoring Officer advised that she had heard that the current Ombudsman's term of office was being extended further. When this was officially confirmed, she would notify Members accordingly.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the report.

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

The purpose of this report presented by the Monitoring Officer, was to share with Members the performance of the Information Team in processing Corporate Complaints, Freedom of Information requests and other information requests.

She advised that, the Corporate Complaints Policy requires that the Information Team report to Cabinet at least annually on performance.

Appendix A to the report, included performance data in relation to the additional areas outlined in the report, as these formed a significant part of the work of the team.

The Monitoring Officer added, that there was a legislative requirement to respond to Freedom of Information requests within a 20 working day period and to Data Subject

Access requests in 1 calendar month. Information requests from public bodies did not have a statutory response deadline, however, the team endeavour to respond to these requests as quickly as reasonably practicable. In line with the Corporate Complaints Policy the Authority should respond to a formal complaint in 20 working days from its receipt.

She advised Members that the Information Team consisted of two employees, however, due to the increased number of complaints, Freedom of Information and Data Protection queries/requests, the team were soon going to be extended by the recruitment of a further employee, due to this increase in work, which had almost doubled.

Appendix A provided a monitoring report for the period 1 January – 31 December 2020. This includes data on the numbers of complaints, Freedom of Information requests, Data Subject Access requests and Information requests processed by the team during this period.

The Monitoring Officer advised that Complaints received were broken down at section 2.2 of the report. This reflected that there had been 51 complaints received, 48 of which had been acknowledged within the prescribed period for doing so, with only 3 falling outside this window.

At section 3.6 of the report, the Complaints received were broken down on a Department by Department basis, with the areas of Housing, School Transport and Highways receiving the most complaints.

Section 3.7 showed such Complaints broken down Ward by Ward and this reflected quite an even spread. Education and Family Support Directorate had received the most complaints followed by Communities. The rest of the Complaints received for other service areas were far lower, but this was expected given that the above were very much public facing Directorates.

In 2020 the Council received 877 FOI requests and only two complaints had been received to the responses to these from the Authority. There had been 95 Data Subject Access requests, she added.

RESOLVED: That Committee noted the Monitoring Report attached at Appendix A, to the covering report.

91. **ANNUAL REPORT**

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report, that set out the work of the Committee for the period May 2020 to May 2021.

She explained that this report would also be submitted to a future meeting of Council.

By way of background information, the Local Government Act 2000 required the Council to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and probity in the conduct of Councillors of the County Borough.

The next sections of the report detailed the current composition of the Committee, the terms of office of its individual Members, the role and remit of the Committee, the number of times it had met during 2020/2021, details of the work it had considered during this period, training and development opportunities and examples of work the Committee will get an opportunity to look at moving forward.

The Monitoring Officer expanded upon each of these areas, for the benefit of Members.

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She also confirmed that certain Members terms of office would be terminating at certain points within the future and that these Members would be contacted regarding this, in order to establish if they were interested in being considered for a further term of office.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees reminded Members of the dates of the next two meetings of the Standards Committee scheduled in 2021, so they could diarise these.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the report and further noted, that it will be presented to a meeting of Council in July 2021.

92. **URGENT ITEMS**

None.

The meeting closed at 10:45