

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE GUILDHALL, WREXHAM ON
THURSDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2015**

MEMBERS

Mr Rob Dawson, Chair
Mrs Ceri Nash, Vice-Chair

*Councillor Anne Evans
Councillor O Arfon Jones
Councillor Paul H Pemberton

*Ms J.M. Cotter
*Mr M W Pugh
*Mr P R Williams
Community Councillor Geoff Edwards

*Absent

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Mr M W Pugh, Mr P R Williams, Councillors Anne Evans and O. Arfon Jones.

8 DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS IF ANY:

There were no declarations of personal interest.

9 MINUTES:

Minute 5 – Forward Work Programme – The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Forward Work Programme had been shared with Internal Audit and the Chair of the Audit Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4 June 2015 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

10 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT

The Deputy Monitoring Officer submitted a report (HCCS/108/15) informing Members of the publication, in January 2015, of the Adjudication Panel for Wales Annual Report 2013/2014.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer highlighted that breaches of the Code most commonly arising related to the following and said she would be mindful of these three areas in future Code of Conduct training for Members

- failure to show respect/equality/bullying;
- bringing Office/Authority into disrepute; and
- failure to disclose an interest and/or withdraw

The Monitoring Officer referred to key performance indicators aimed at measuring the efficiency of the service based on time taken to progress a case, in particular whether the Target, 75% of cases discharged within 6 months, was achievable given that this had only been achieved in 17% of the cases. The Committee considered

whether it was an appropriate assessment Target given there were many aspects out of the Panel's control, such as the time taken by complainants/Councillors to respond to the Panel's requests for information. The Panel had made no mention in the report of how they intended to address this.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Reason for decision

To inform Members of the work undertaken by the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

11 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT

The Deputy Monitoring Officer submitted a report (HCCS/107/15) informing the Committee of the publication of the Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2014/15 entitled "Making Complaints Serve Wales".

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that the headline figures in respect of Code of Conduct complaints showed there had been 231 new complaints, an increase of 1% on 2013/14, of these the Ombudsman had referred 9 investigation reports to either a Standard Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales, an increase on the 6 referred in 2013/14.

It was noted that the Ombudsman continued to receive "low level" complaints from one councillor against another, notwithstanding that there was an expectation these should be dealt with via the Local Resolution procedure. As most allegations were of failure to show respect and consideration of others under paragraph 4(b) of the Code the Ombudsman's office would, in future, be taking a firmer position in referring such complaints back to Monitoring Officers to be dealt with locally.

The Committee was pleased to note that there had only been 2 complaints to the Ombudsman in respect of a Wrexham County Borough Council Member, one of which was discontinued, the other was withdrawn. Complaints had also been received in respect of Members of two Community Councils within the Wrexham County Borough, three of those complaints were closed after initial consideration and one was withdrawn.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that there were now E Learning Modules available for Members to complete online which supplemented the annual Code of Conduct training. The Committee requested that all Code of Conduct training materials prepared for County Borough Councillor training sessions be shared with all Clerks to Town/Community Councils as a springboard for Community Councillor training.

The Ombudsman continued to produce factsheets to explain his role and assist members of the public in understanding what he could and could not investigate. The following, most recent, were circulated with the report:

- Factsheet for Local Authority Members: What we do when we get a complaint

- about your conduct
- Code of Conduct Complaints: Factsheet for Member Interviewees

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Reason for decision

To inform Members of the work undertaken by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

12 STANDARDS AND ETHICS CONFERENCE WALES 2015

The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the Annual Standards Conference Wales was to be held at City Hall, Cardiff on Tuesday, 20 October 2015.

It was proposed that the Committees representation be made up as follows:
1 elected member, 1 independent member, 1 newly appointed independent member and 1 officer.

It was requested that all Clerks to Town and Community Councils be made aware of the event.

RESOLVED – That the appropriate arrangements be made for Councillor Paul Pemberton, Mrs Ceri Nash, one/both of the newly appointed independent members and the Deputy Monitoring Officer to represent this Committee at the Standards Conference Wales 2015.

Reason for decision

To ensure the Committee is appropriately represented at the Standards Conference Wales 2015.

13 END OF TERM OF OFFICE

The Committee noted that this would be the last quarterly meeting for Mr Phil Williams, as his term of office as an independent member of the Committee ended in November.

On behalf of the Committee the Chair thanked Mr Williams for the contribution he had made to the work of the Standards Committee over the five years he had been a independent member and wished him all the very best for the future.

Councillor Mr Rob Dawson
Chair