

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, WREXHAM ON THURSDAY, 4 JUNE 2015**

MEMBERS

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

Councillor	Anne Evans	Mr	*	M W Pugh
Councillor	Paul Pemberton	Ms	*	J M Cotter
Councillor	O Arfon Jones	Mr		P R Williams
		Community Councillor		Geoff Edwards

*Absent

1 DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTERESTS IF ANY

There were no declarations of personal interest.

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5 March 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5 March 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

3 WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Deputy Monitoring Officer submitted a report (HCCS/78/15) in accordance with the Council's Whistleblowing Policy which contained a requirement that a report on the operation of the Policy, and any changes in practice introduced as a result of concerns raised under the Policy, was considered by the Standards Committee at least once a year.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report and commented that the Committee had last received a report on the operation of the Whistleblowing Policy at its meeting on 5 June 2014. Following a recommendation by the Standards Committee, the Council approved a revised Whistleblowing Policy and associated amendments to the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations making provision for dealing with complaints about breaches of the Protocol, at its meeting on 25 February 2015. A programme to raise staff awareness of the revised Policy has been undertaken during April 2015, including publication of the revised Policy on the Council's website, in staff newsletters, and was part of the corporate induction programme. Staff will be reminded of the Whistleblowing Policy on at least an annual basis.

Since June 2014 there had been two concerns notified under the Whistleblowing Policy and the nature of those concerns together with the outcome of investigations,

were identified in Appendix 1 to the report. Neither of concerns raised had resulted in a full investigation and there did not appear to be any common themes linking the issues to cause significant corporate concerns.

Members commented upon the importance for the Council to have an effective Whistleblowing Policy and procedures which actively encouraged employees to raise concerns in confidence without fear of reprisals or victimisation.

RESOLVED – That the contents of report HCCS/78/15 be noted.

Reason for decision

To fulfil the Standards Committee function of overseeing the Council's Whistleblowing regime.

4 REVISED GUIDANCE ON THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS ISSUED BY THE PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

The Deputy Monitoring Officer submitted a report (HCCS/79/15) which informed Members of the Standards Committee of the changes introduced by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in the third version of his Guidance on the Code of Conduct for Members of Local Authorities in Wales published in March 2015. There was separate guidance for Members of County and County Borough Councils and Community Councils and copies of both sets of guidance were attached to the report. In addition, a Refresher Training Workshop on the Code of Conduct had been held in May 2015, during which the revised PSOW guidance was brought to the attention of Members of this Authority. A copy of the slides utilised for that workshop were attached to the report for information.

In introducing the report the Deputy Monitoring Officer commented that the PSOW had a wide discretion as to whether to begin or continue an investigation of a breach of the Code of Conduct. The revised guidance had been issued to provide greater clarity on how he would usually exercise that discretion, including the implementation of a revised two stage test and incorporated further guidance on the use of social media and political expression.

Members raised the following points in particular:

- The importance for all Members to attend training sessions being provided on the Code, including refresher courses, to ensure that they were fully aware of the provisions of the Code and the standards expected of them in public life.
- The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Council had adopted the Model form of the Code of Conduct for Members in its entirety and would always refer to the published guidance from the PSOW.

RESOLVED – That the revised guidance on the Code of Conduct for Members published by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales be noted.

Reason for decision

To ensure that the Standards Committee is aware of the latest published guidance from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.

5 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - JUNE 2015 TO MARCH 2016

The Deputy Monitoring Officer submitted a report (HCCS/80/15) to enable consideration to be given to items for inclusion in the Forward Work Programme for the period June 2015 to March 2016.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report and it was agreed that the following additional items be included on the Forward Work Programme:

- Annual report on the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy to be included on the Work Programme for the June 2016 meeting of the Committee.
- Appointment of two new independent members onto the Standards Committee. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised Members that the recruitment/selection process had been endorsed at the previous meeting of the Standards Committee with a view to making a recommendation to Council on the appointments in September 2015. An additional training session for those members appointed onto the Selection Panel may also have to be arranged.
- Annual Standards Conference Wales: The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that she was awaiting information on the date and location of the Annual Conference and that this item be considered at the September meeting of the Committee.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer commented that compliance with the Councils' corporate policies and procedures came within the remit of the Council's Audit Committee and in some instances, such as the Council's Whistleblowing Policy, Protocol for Member/Officer Relationship and the Code of Conduct for Members, there was a potential overlap in the work undertaken by that Committee and the Standards Committee. Therefore, she suggested that the Forward Work Programme be shared with Internal Audit and the Chair of the Audit Committee. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED – That, subject to inclusion of the above, the Forward Work Programme identified in report HCCS/80/15 be approved.

Reason for decision

To approve the list of items included in the Forward Work Programme.

6 **FUTURE DATES OF MEETINGS:**

Members noted that the Quarterly Meetings of the Standards Committee in 2015/16 would be held on:

10 September 2015

3 December 2015

3 March 2016

2 June 2016

All meetings will be held at 3.30pm in Meeting Room 2, Guildhall, Wrexham.

Mr Rob Dawson
Chair