



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

MINUTES OF MEETING

STANDARDS MEETING

FRIDAY, 29TH JANUARY, 2021

PRESENT: J Morgan (**In the Chair**)
I Cathrew (**Vice Chair**)

Councillors:

J Amos, G Richards and C Tovey

Independent Members:

D McCarthy, A L Morgan and M Veale

Community Council Representative:

R Searl

Officers:

C Kennedy (Head of Legal and Governance Services -
Monitoring Officer) and S Jones (Senior Solicitor)

K Reddy (Democratic Services Officer)

ITEM NO.	AGENDA MATTER	DECISION
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Before the meeting started, the Chair asked if we could have a minute silence for our friend and colleague Helen Thomas.

447	Welcome - Richard Searl, Bedlinog Community Council Representative	The Chair welcomed Richard Searl who is the Bedlinog Community Council Representative to his first meeting of the Standards Committee.
448	Apologies for absence	No apologies for absence as all Members were present.
449	Declarations of Interest	No declarations of interest were made.

450	Complaint - To consider referral from Councillor Darren Roberts	<p>Carys Kennedy advised the Members that she had received a complaint from Councillor Darren Roberts in relation to a comment made on a pub facebook page in March 2020, just before the first lockdown, which was then copied and further commented on by Councillor Geraint Thomas on his private page. The pub in question is run by Councillor Geraint Thomas.</p> <p>She then took Members through the details of the complaint and advised that initially she felt this could have been dealt with by an informal resolution but the complainant had requested this be referred to the Standards Committee for their consideration.</p> <p>Simon Jones then went through the procedure of how this Committee will deal with the complaint via a Standards Hearing. With the consent of the Chair, it was agreed that this Hearing will be considered under Stage 3 of the Authority's Local Dispute Policy.</p> <p>Following discussion, it was agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Hearing be held on the 12th or the 19th March 2021 from 9.15 am to 1.00 pm. A date to be confirmed at a later stage.
451	Standards Committee Work Programme Timetable:	<p>Carys Kennedy reminded the Committee of the agreed Standards Committee Work Programme Timetable but, as meetings were not held in 2020 due to the lockdown, she gave Members a brief update on each of the items included in the Committee's Work Programme, namely Whistleblowing Policy, Ombudsman Annual Report and Corporate Complaints Data, as follows:</p>
451a	Update on Whistleblowing Policy	<p>Following the request at a previous Standards Committee to raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy, Carys Kennedy advised that an e-mail was sent out to all staff by the Chief Executive on the 10th November 2020 reminding them of the purpose of the Whistleblowing Policy, which also provided links on the process and how staff can make a complaint.</p> <p>Although this communication has been sent out, Carys Kennedy advised that no Whistleblowing Complaints have been received to date.</p> <p>Following discussion, it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Whistleblowing Policy and update on any Whistleblowing Complaints received will be scheduled for the Standards Committee in March 2022 but Members will be updated as and when any Whistleblowing Complaints are received.
451b	Update on the Public Services Ombudsman Annual Report	<p>Carys Kennedy reminded Members that the previous Ombudsman Annual Report was previously circulated, and the 2020/21 report will be released later this year which will be considered at the November meeting.</p>

		<p>Following discussion, it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ombudsman Annual Report for 2020/21 will be scheduled for the Standards Committee in November 2021. • As the Committee were unable to consider the 2019/20 Annual Report due to the lockdown, this report will also be considered at the November meeting.
451c	Analysis of Data in respect of Corporate Complaints received by the Authority	<p>Carys Kennedy referred to the report in respect of Corporate Complaints received by the Authority for 2019/20.</p> <p>Members were advised that there is a slight difference in how this data has been presented, as the Complaints Department now provide data to the Complaints Standards Authority in the Ombudsman Office in a set format.</p> <p>Discussion ensued in relation to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of data year on year. • Increase of complaints received. • Brief summary being provided in future reports regarding the number of cases being upheld, explanation of why these complaints are upheld and the nature of the complaints. • Identifying trends and making referrals to other Committees for consideration, if required. • Concern over the number of “no response of outcome from Manager/Department” and how the Committee can take this forward if the trend increases in the 2020/21 data. <p>Following discussion, it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complaints data for 2020/21 be presented to the Standards Committee in July 2021 in the same format. • The data for 2019/20 will also be included in the report so that Members can make a comparison over the 2 years. • Simon Jones to liaise with Complaints on them providing a brief summary of the data being provided in future reports, together with any lessons learned or particular issues that may be causing concern.

452	Verbal Update on the Standards Committee Annual Report	<p>Discussion ensued in relation to the Committee producing an Annual Report which will give an overview of the work carried out by the Standards Committee.</p> <p>Due to the current lockdown, the Committee were unable to produce an Annual Report in 2020 and, following discussion, it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A draft report be produced for the July 2021 meeting for Members' consideration, which will cover the period July 2019 to July 2021. • The Corporate Complaints Report, which will be scheduled for the July 2021 meeting, will also be included in the Annual Report. • This document be scheduled for Full Council for Councillors' information once the Annual Report has been agreed by Members of the Standards Committee.
453	Member Code of Conduct Training	<p>Carys Kennedy reminded the Committee it is a requirement of this Authority that all Members have training before they sign their acceptance of office. She advised that following discussions, it has been recommended that another training event to go over the Code of Conduct would be beneficial to all Members so there is no doubt what is expected of them under the terms of the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Discussion ensued on the Code of Conduct training for Standards Members, and it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Standards Members will be invited to the training being offered to all Members. • Any Member unable to attend the training will have the opportunity to view a recording of the training.
454	Decision of the Adjudication Panel for Wales in respect of a Complaint about an Elected Member	<p>Simon Jones referred to the information report on the decision of the Adjudication Panel for Wales in respect of a complaint about Councillor Kevin O'Neill.</p> <p>He advised Members on the different stages of how a complaint is dealt with and, in relation to the complaint about Kevin O'Neill, he advised that the Ombudsman prepared a report which in turn was submitted to the Adjudication Panel for Wales for a decision. This decision was totally independent of the Council.</p> <p>He gave an overview of the decision published by the Adjudication Panel for Wales on the 23rd December 2020 which briefly sets out the findings of the Panel.</p> <p>He advised that since the publication of the agenda, detailed reasons of the decision have now been released, which will be available on the Adjudication Panel for Wales' website, and may assist Members on any queries or clarifications they may have.</p>

		<p>Following discussion, it was RESOLVED that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A link to the Adjudication Panel's website be sent to Members so that they can view the document outlining the detailed reasons of the Panel's decision.
455	Date of next meeting	It was agreed that Members will be advised of the date of the next meeting once the date of the Standards Hearing has been confirmed.
456	Any other item deemed urgent by the Chair	The Chair advised that there was no business deemed urgent.