

T: 01495 355001

E: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Blaenau Gwent

Our Ref./Ein Cyf.
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.

Contact:/Cysylltwch â: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

13th October 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held in Virtually via Microsoft Teams - if you would like to attend this meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk on Tuesday, 18th October, 2022 at 2.00 pm.

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

AGENDA

Pages

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

2. APOLOGIES

To receive.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

To receive any declarations of interest and dispensations.

4. **DISCUSSION WITH GROUP LEADERS**

To discuss with Leaders the approach to standards under the new legislation.

5. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 19TH JULY, 2022**

5 - 8

To receive the decisions of the Standards Committee held on 19th July, 2022.

6. **OUTCOME OF APPOINTMENTS PANEL 14TH OCTOBER, 2022**

To inform the group of the decision of the Panel, to be ratified at Council in November 2022.

7. **CONSIDERATION OF THE ANNUAL LETTER OF THE OMBUDSMAN (CONDUCT ELEMENT)**

9 - 18

To consider.

8. **FUTURE WORK PLAN/TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**

To discuss.

9. **AOB/DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To consider.

To: R. Alexander (Chair)
Lynch
Rosser
S. Williams
R. Clark
Councillor M. Cross
Councillor J. Thomas
Councillor L. Winnett

All other Members (for information)
Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officers

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

19th July, 2022

PRESENT: MR. R. ALEXANDER (CHAIR)

Councillor J. Thomas

Ms. S. Rosser

Mr. F.R Lynch

Mr. S. Williams

WITH: Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance (Monitoring
Officer)

Data Protection & Governance Officer

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

No requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.

2. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received for:

Councillor M. Cross and Helen Roberts.

3. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Introductions were undertaken.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Standards Committee held on the 28th January, 2022 were submitted.

Following a brief discussion,

The Standards Committee AGREED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.

6. RENEWAL OF TERMS OF OFFICE

The Governance & Data Protection Officer explained membership of the Committee as follows:

No Member to exceed a term of 10 years (to include one term of 6 years and a second term of 4 years)

It was reported that two Members of the Committee had reached their 6 year first term, namely Ronnie Alexander and Helen Roberts. However, Helen Roberts had decided not to take up a second term, and as a result there would be a vacancy on the Committee.

It was then proposed that Ronnie Alexander's position on the Committee be formally extended for a term of 4 years, and this was seconded and AGREED.

7. RENEWAL OF CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the appointment of Chair for 2022/23.

It was AGREED that Mr. R. Alexander be appointed Chair of the Standards Committee for 2022/23.

Nominations were then sought for the appointment of Vice-Chair, and it was AGREED that Mr. S. Williams be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for 2022/23.

8. SECTIONS 62 & 63 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT & ELECTIONS (WALES) ACT 2021: DUTIES OF LEADERS OF POLITICAL GROUPS

A discussion ensued when the following points of action were raised:

- A Member suggested a review be undertaken of the number of Local Resolutions undertaken by the Monitoring Officer.
- A Member also suggested an overview of the work of the Democratic Services Team, in terms of the training provided for elected Members, be brought to the Standards Committee.
- Consideration of a register of interests.
- Training on dispensations had been granted to Members, and further training to be offered.

- Members of the Standards Committee to meet with Leaders of political groups.

8. FUTURE WORK PLAN/TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

The following points were raised:

Schedule of meetings for the year.

Monitoring Officer to provide a schedule of training that has been provided for Members.


10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Meeting with Group Leaders in October.


Next meeting of the Standards Committee – January TBC.

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Ask for: Communications

 01656 641150

Date: August 2022

 communications@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Stephen Thomas
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
By Email only: stephen.thomas@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Annual Letter 2021/22

Dear Councillor Thomas

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2021/22) for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council which deals with complaints relating to maladministration and service failure, complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and the actions being taken to improve public services

This is my first annual letter since taking up the role of Public Services Ombudsman in April 2022, and I appreciate that the effects of the pandemic are still being felt by all public bodies in Wales. Our office has not been immune from this, with records numbers of cases being referred to us over the last two years. The strong working relationships between my Office and local authorities continues to deliver improvements in how we are dealing with complaints and ensuring that, when things go wrong, we are learning from that and building stronger public services.

Complaints relating to Maladministration & Service Failure

Last year the number of complaints referred to us regarding Local Authorities increased by 47% (compared to 20/21 figures) and are now well above pre-pandemic levels. It is likely that complaints to my office, and public services in general, were suppressed during the pandemic, and we are now starting to see the expected 'rebound' effect.

During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) a similar proportion of complaints about public bodies, 18%, when compared with recent years. Intervention rates (where we have investigated complaints) for Local Authorities also remained at a similar level – 14% compared to 13% in recent years.

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Complaints relating to the Code of Conduct for Councillors

We also received a high number of Code of Conduct complaints last year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. A record number (20) were referred to either the Adjudication Panel for Wales or local standards committees, due to evidence of a breach of the Code.

Supporting improvement of public services

In addition to managing record levels of complaints, we also continued our work using our proactive powers in the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019. Specifically undertaking our first Own Initiative Investigation and continuing our work on the Complaints Standards Authority.

October 2021 saw the publication of the first own initiative investigation in Wales: [Homelessness Reviewed](#). The investigation featured three Local Authorities and sought to scrutinise the way Homelessness assessments were conducted. The report made specific recommendations to the investigated authorities, as well as suggestions to all other Local Authorities in Wales and Welsh Government. Some of these recommendations will bring about immediate change – updating factsheets and letter and assessment templates to ensure that key equality and human rights considerations are routinely embedded into processes for example – all the recommendations were designed to bring about tangible change to people using homelessness services in Wales.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year. The model complaints policy has already been adopted by local authorities and health boards in Wales, we have now extended this to an initial tranche of Housing Associations and Natural Resources Wales. The aim being to implement this work across the Welsh public sector.

In addition to this, the CSA published information on complaints handled by local authorities for the [first time](#) – a key achievement for this work. The data for 21/22 showed:

- Over 15,000 complaints were recorded by Local Authorities
- 4.88 for every 1000 residents.
- Nearly half (46%) of those complaints were upheld.
- About 75% were investigated within 20 working days.
- About 8% of all complaints closed ended up being referred to PSOW.

The CSA has now implemented a model complaints policy with nearly 50 public bodies, and delivered 140 training sessions, completely free of charge, during the last financial year. The feedback has been excellent, and the training has been very popular - so I would encourage Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to engage as fully as possible.

Complaints made to the Ombudsman

A summary of the complaints of maladministration/service failure received relating to your Council is attached, along with a summary of the Code of Conduct complaints relating to members of the Council and the Town & Community Councils in your area.

In light of the new duties on political leaders and standards committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members, we look forward to working with you, your Monitoring Officer and standards committees to share any learning from the complaints we receive and to support your authority's work.

I would also welcome feedback on your Governance & Audit Committee's review of your authority's ability to handle complaints effectively so that we can take this into account in our work and support its work on the handling of complaints.

Finally, can I thank you and your officials for the positive way that local authorities have engaged with my Office to enable us to deliver these achievements during what has been a challenging year for everyone. I very much look forward to continuing this work and collaboration to ensure we further improve public services across Wales.

Further to this letter can I ask that your Council takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Cabinet and to the Governance & Audit Committee to assist members in their scrutiny of the Council's performance and share any feedback from the Cabinet and the Governance & Audit Committee with my office.
- Continue to engage with our Complaints Standards work, accessing training for your staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing complaints data.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters by 30 September.

This correspondence is copied to the Managing Director of your Council and to your Contact Officer. Finally, a copy of all Annual Letters will be published on my website.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Damien McCann, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.
By Email only: Damien.McCann@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	14	0.20
Bridgend County Borough Council	55	0.37
Caerphilly County Borough Council	60	0.33
Cardiff Council*	182	0.50
Carmarthenshire County Council	54	0.29
Ceredigion County Council	52	0.72
Conwy County Borough Council	27	0.23
Denbighshire County Council	34	0.36
Flintshire County Council	99	0.63
Gwynedd Council	39	0.31
Isle of Anglesey County Council	29	0.41
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	27	0.45
Monmouthshire County Council	20	0.21
Neath Port Talbot Council	45	0.31
Newport City Council	40	0.26
Pembrokeshire County Council	39	0.31
Powys County Council	55	0.42
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	51	0.21
Swansea Council	71	0.29
Torfaen County Borough Council	18	0.19
Vale of Glamorgan Council	61	0.46
Wrexham County Borough Council	71	0.52
Total	1143	0.36

* inc 17 Rent Smart Wales

Appendix B - Received by Subject

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	Complaints Received	% Share
Adult Social Services	2	14%
Benefits Administration	0	0%
Children's Social Services	3	21%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	0	0%
Complaints Handling	0	0%
Covid19	0	0%
Education	1	7%
Environment and Environmental Health	2	14%
Finance and Taxation	2	14%
Housing	0	0%
Licensing	0	0%
Planning and Building Control	2	14%
Roads and Transport	0	0%
Various Other	2	14%
Total	14	

Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes
 (* denotes intervention)

	Out of Jurisdiction	Premature	Other cases closed after initial consideration	Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	Discontinued	Other Reports- Not Upheld	Other Reports Upheld*	Public Interest Report*	Total
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	4	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	13
% Share	31%	31%	38%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	

Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	13	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	7	54	13%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	7	58	12%
Cardiff Council	45	159	28%
Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales	1	16	6%
Carmarthenshire County Council	7	49	14%
Ceredigion County Council	13	46	28%
Conwy County Borough Council	2	24	8%
Denbighshire County Council	4	33	12%
Flintshire County Council	15	94	16%
Gwynedd Council	6	41	15%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	3	28	11%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	2	26	8%
Monmouthshire County Council	2	21	10%
Neath Port Talbot Council	5	45	11%
Newport City Council	4	36	11%
Pembrokeshire County Council	2	40	5%
Powys County Council	7	55	13%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	3	45	7%
Swansea Council	10	76	13%
Torfaen County Borough Council	2	20	10%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	9	62	15%
Wrexham County Borough Council	4	67	6%
Total	160	1108	14%

Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

County/County Borough Councils	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Withdrawn	Total
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	1	3	0	0	0	0	4

Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

Town/Community Council	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Withdrawn	Total
Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council	2	3	0	1	0	0	6
Brynmawr Town Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2021/2022. These complaints are contextualised by the number of people each health board reportedly serves.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix C shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2021/2022. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix D shows Intervention Rates for all Local Authorities in 2021/2022. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix E shows the outcomes of Code Of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Local Authority in 2021/2022. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

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