



T: 01495 355100

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

Our Ref./Ein Cyf.
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.
Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Mrs Leeann Turner

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

19th January 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held in via MS Teams (if you would like to view this meeting please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Tuesday, 24th January, 2023 at 9.30 am.

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 made.
4. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** 5 - 8
To receive the decisions of the Standards Committee held on 18th October, 2022.
(Please note the decisions are submitted for points of accuracy only).
5. **ACTION SHEET** 9 - 10
To receive the Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 18th October, 2022.
6. **TERMS OF REFERENCE** 11 - 12
To consider Standards Committee draft Terms of Reference.
7. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT DRAFT TEMPLATE** 13 - 16
To consider the Standards Committee Annual Report draft template.
8. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE LAY MEMBER VACANCY APPOINTMENT UPDATE**
To consider verbal report of the Data Protection & Governance Officer.
9. **CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS AMENDMENT TO PROCESS** 17 - 18
To consider verbal report of the Monitoring Officer.
(Letter to the Chairs of Standards Committee attached).
10. **FUTURE TRAINING OF MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE UPDATE**
To receive a verbal update on future training from the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance.

To: R. Alexander (Chair)
R. Lynch
S. 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

18TH OCTOBER, 2022

PRESENT: MR R. ALEXANDER (CHAIR)

Mr R. Lynch
Mr S. Williams
Councillor M. Cross
Councillor J. Thomas
Councillor L. Winnett

WITH: Councillor S. Thomas (Leader of the Council)
Councillor J. Wilkins (Leader of the Independent
Group)
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 AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed both Group Leaders to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received for:-
Sarah Rosser and Roger Clark

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

4. **DISCUSSION WITH GROUP LEADERS**

The Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Independent Group outlined their approach to maintain and raise standards within the Council and their respective groups under the new legislation.

The Committee AGREED that Group Leaders receive a standard invite to attend future meetings of the Standards Committee.

5. STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 19TH JULY, 2022

The decisions of the Standards Committee held on the 19th July, 2022 were submitted.

Following a brief discussion,

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

6. OUTCOME OF APPOINTMENTS PANEL 14TH OCTOBER, 2022

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance advised the Committee of the outcome of the Appointments Panel.

Following a brief discussion,

The Committee AGREED that the Independent member vacancy be readvertised before Christmas.

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

Consideration was given to the Annual Letter of the Ombudsman and following a brief discussion,

The Standards Committee AGREED that the contents of the Annual Letter of the Ombudsman be noted.

8. FUTURE WORK PLAN/TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The following points were raised:-

Regular structured meetings
Refresher training (especially if new members appointed)
Review of Terms of Reference
Annual Report

9. AOB/DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Next meeting of the Standards Committee – January/February 2023
TBC.

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Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet

Standards Committee – 18th October 2022

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
18 th Oct 2022			
Item 4	<u>DISCUSSION WITH GROUP LEADERS</u>		
	Terms of Reference Review for Next Meeting	Andrea Jones/ Steve Berry	Draft ToR circulated to Committee members 22 nd Dec 2022
	Group Leaders to receive a standard invite to future Committee meetings.	Steve Berry	Clarification needed. Was this intended for every meeting or simply annually?
	Regular structured programme of meetings	Andrea Jones	Programme of meetings complete for current year and will be addressed when the new programme of meetings is determined in the next financial year.
	Group Leaders to take back to respective Groups issue of dispensations.	Group Leaders	
Item 5	<u>STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 19TH JULY, 2022</u>		
	Acknowledge receipt of the Members Development Programme and the Member Induction and Refresher Programme and note in	Andrea Jones/ Steve Berry	ROI forms completed by independent members and published alongside Members interest forms. The only exception to this is the new member that is yet to be officially appointed.

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
	the Annual Report the work of the Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer. Independent members on Standards Committee complete register of interest form as a matter of good practice.		
Item 6	<u>OUTCOME OF APPOINTMENTS PANEL 14TH OCTOBER, 2022</u>		
	The Independent member vacancy be readvertised before Christmas to attract further candidates.	Andrea Jones/ Steve Berry	Re-advertised, selection panel undertaken and a recommendation for appointment going to the January 2023 Council meeting for approval
Item 8	<u>FUTURE WORK PLAN/TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</u>		
	Refresher training (especially if new members appointed)	Andrea Jones/ Steve Berry	Training to be planned for 2022/23 Q4 or 2023/24 Q1 once new Independent Member appointment confirmed.

Standards Committee Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Standards Committee are as follows:

1. Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and Co-opted Members.
2. Assisting Councillors and Co-opted Members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.
3. Advising the Authority on the adoption or revision of the Members Code of Conduct.
4. Monitoring the operation of the Members Code of Conduct.
5. Monitoring appropriate training for Councillors and Co-opted Members on Ethics & Standards.
6. Considering applications for dispensations to Councillors relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct.
7. Considering complaints which have arisen under the Council's internal procedure on member conduct and cases which have been referred by the Ombudsman.
8. Monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups on the Council with their duties under section 52A (1) of the 2000 Act (as amended) to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their groups, and to co-operate with Standards Committee in the exercise of these functions.

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BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Standards Committee Annual Report 2021 – 2022

1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 requires Councils to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and probity in the conduct of Councillors. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council established a Standards Committee in October 2000.

The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced a mandatory requirement for Standards Committees to present an annual report to full Council. This statutory report must describe how the Committee has discharged its functions during the previous year and must include a summary of any reports, actions or recommendations made or referred to the Committee. In addition, it should be noted next year's Annual Report must include an assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the Council have complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups.

This Standards Committee Annual Report covers the period from 31st December 2021 to 31st December 2022.

2. Membership of the Standards Committee

(Details of current Members/Chair/Vice Chair etc)

3. Terms of Office - Independent Members of the Standards Committee

(Overview of rules regarding terms of office and details of individuals terms served etc)

4. Term of Office - Community / Town Council Member of the Standards Committee

(As above in 3)

5. Meetings of the Standards Committee

(Dates of meetings in past 12 months)

6. Detail of the Work undertaken by the Standards Committee

6.1 The following paragraphs set out the work carried out by the Standards Committee during the reporting period.

(Detail here eg the number of dispensations considered, PSOW Annual report consideration, any referrals made through the internal local resolution protocol, references to the SC from the PSOW, Adjudication panel hearings re BG or T&CC Members)

6.2 Annual Meeting with Political Group Leaders

(Overview of the new statutory obligations of Group Leaders and method by which SC proposes to hold to account, date of meeting with Group leader and outcome of discussions).

6.3 Complaints of Breach of the Code of Conduct

(Number of complaints and outcome – NB. no details provided of names etc)


6.4 Any recommendations made by the PSOW or Adjudication Panel on findings and actions taken/in progress as a result.

(Details if appropriate or “None”)


7. Chair’s comments/conclusions

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Ask for: Communications

 01656 641150

Date: 10 November 2022

 Communications
@ombudsman.wales

Our Code of Conduct complaints guidance and process

Dear Chairs

I took up my role as Public Services Ombudsman for Wales on 1 April 2022. Since then we have continued to promote high standards in public life to maintain trust and confidence in those who hold public office.

As political leaders and Standards Committees across Wales take forward their new duties to promote high standards of conduct under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, I have taken the opportunity to review my guidance for members. This will help my office support them in their work and help all members fully understand the requirements placed upon them when fulfilling their role.

To support the Standards Committees, we will be making some minor changes to our process. We will continue to share our decisions with Monitoring Officers, as required by legislation. However, we will now be sharing the complaint and our decision in a standalone decision notice to facilitate the Monitoring Officers in sharing complaint information with Standards Committees (when they consider it appropriate to do so).

Since June, we have been trialling a fresh approach to how we inform members about complaints made against them. Our practice had been that we informed the accused member, the Monitoring Officer, and the Clerk (if a Town/Community Council) of a complaint as soon as it was received. We now inform the relevant parties at the point when we either decline to investigate or decide to investigate the complaint. During the trial, we found that this approach sped up our process. It also helped to avoid unnecessary concern for members complained about, as they waited for a decision on whether the complaint should be investigated. Therefore, we will be continuing with this approach.

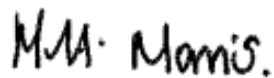
Whenever possible, I would like to see any concerns about a member's conduct to be resolved locally and at an early stage. This can calm situations down and prevent the need for further escalation and formal investigation by my office. The guidance and the changes we have made to our process will assist Standards Committees by keeping them informed of current issues, so they can take steps to address any potential concerns.

Page 1 of 2

Ensuring Standards Committees are adequately informed will also support them to draw up training plans. I, and members of the public, expect all members to take advantage of training which is available to them. I would also urge members to use any local arrangements for dealing with 'member versus member' complaints, which have proved very effective as a means of resolving many of these cases.

We should continue to work collaboratively to drive up standards in public life and to create a culture where members are respected for their selflessness, objectivity and respectful behaviour. If we do so, we can build public confidence in our democratic institutions and promote good governance for the benefit of the people in all of our communities. I, and my office, look forward to engaging with you all via the National Forum for Standards Committees.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M.M. Morris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

Cc. Monitoring Officer