



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.

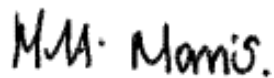
Whenever possible, I would like to see any concerns about a member's conduct to be resolved locally and at an early stage. This can calm situations down and prevent the need for further escalation and formal investigation by my office. The guidance and the changes we have made to our process will assist 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 "MMA Morris". The letters are slightly slanted and connected in a cursive-like style.

Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

Cc. Monitoring Officer