

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

14TH JULY, 2020

PRESENT: Mr. R. Alexander (CHAIR)

Councillors K. Hayden & M. Moore

Mr. S. Williams
Miss. H. Roberts
Town Councillor J. Thomas

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and the following apologies for absence were reported:

Councillor G. Thomas and Mr. J. Evans.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Standards Committee held on the 29th January, 2020 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Raising awareness of the availability of dispensations

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance reported that following previous discussions relating to the availability of dispensations, it was intended to strengthen the process for dispensations through the usual Members' Code of Conduct training. However, the training programme had been put on hold as part of the response to COVID-

19, but the Officer assured that it would be incorporated into the training programme when Council business was back to normal.

Consideration of examples from the Ombudsman Workbook

The Chair said it was agreed at the last meeting that this would become a standard item on the agenda, and asked the Officer whether there were any updates to report.

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance said she was unable to provide an update as this had also been affected by the COVID-19 response, and would be picked up at the next meeting. The work of the Ombudsman had also been largely on hold so it was unlikely that there would be much to report, however, in the interim Members were able to visit the Ombudsman website.

A Member said the resources on the Ombudsman website were very helpful in keeping updated on issues relevant to the Standards Committee.

Deferral of webcasting of meetings

In response to a question raised the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance reported that many of the issues around webcasting had been superseded by the Council's response to COVID-19. The Council had now moved to a situation where democratic meetings had slowly started to be reinstated using Teams technology which enabled meetings to be recorded and placed in the public domain, so in essence meetings were being webcasted albeit in a different format. The Officer said like many other organisations, the Council would be looking at taking some of the benefits of this into longer term use to plan for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, but also looking at the benefits in terms of efficiencies, and this would be considered by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team moving forward.

Training Requirements

The Chair asked whether it was still intended to hold a training session in September in light of current Government guidance, and whether this could be delivered via the Teams technology.

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance said the normal training session would incorporate new Members and a refresher training for existing Members, however, that would now have to be adapted to a

virtual format and she sought suggestions from Members as to how they would like training delivered.

A Member said training was essential for all Members and welcomed any form of training. She said joint training with other LA's was beneficial, but it was important to receive training refresher or otherwise.

The Officer confirmed that options would be considered and circulated to Members for further discussion.

Local Government and Election (Wales) Bill

The Chair asked whether the summary of main provisions of the Bill had been circulated to Members.

In response the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance said the information had yet to be circulated. At that point in time the Bill had been circulated to LA's for consultation, and one element that related to Standards Committees was a proposal that Leaders of Political Groups would have responsibility and be involved in issues of conduct within their groups. It was the Officer's understanding at that time that a summary of the response to the consultation undertaken would be circulated. However, following investigation the Officer reported that the consultation response was not for wider publication at that time, and indication of when that could be shared was awaited.

The Officer said some key elements of the Bill had been passed, but the remainder had been delayed due to the current circumstances. She undertook to circulate Part 4 of the Bill, relevant for the purposes of Standards Committees, and check whether the WLGA response to the consultation was now appropriate to be shared.

It was AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.

5. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER VACANCIES

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance reported that two candidates had been interviewed for the two vacancies on the Standards Committee. One candidate had been recommended for appointment, and this recommendation would be put forward for approval at Council on the 23rd July, 2020.

The remaining vacant post would be re-advertised.

In response to questions raised, the Data Protection & Governance Officer said approximately 9 enquiries were received but only 3 formal applications were completed. The posts were advertised in the local press, and also advertised on social media and the usual OD recruitment channels.

6. FUTURE WORK PLAN/TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance undertook to email options for delivery of training, to include new Members. Whilst options were limited in the current circumstances, virtual sessions could be arranged.

The Chair stressed the importance of training, particularly for new Members to ensure they feel supported in their new role, however, he understood the difficulty due to the current circumstances.

7. AOB/DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair said this was the last meeting for Mr. Evans and Mr. Price and whilst they were not in attendance, he thanked them for their substantial services to the Standards Committee during the last 10 years.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance reported that no complaints against Blaenau Gwent Councillors had been investigated by the Ombudsman.

Date of Next Meeting: TBC

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed.
