

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE ETHICS & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: ETHICS & STANDARDS COMMITTEE - 13TH MARCH, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: MR R. ALEXANDER (CHAIR)

Mr S. Williams
Mr R. Lynch
Jenny White
Town Councillor J. Rawcliffe
Councillor M. Cross
Councillor L. Winnett
Councillor J. Thomas

WITH: Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance (Monitoring Officer)
Data Protection & Governance Officer

AND: Councillor S. Thomas, Leader of the Council
Councillor J. Wilkins, Leader of the Minority Group

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> No requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u> An apology for absence was reported for Councillor M. Cross.	

<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>STANDARDS COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the Ethics & Standards Committee held on the 21st September, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 21st September, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER</u></p> <p>The Committee welcomed Town Councillor Joshua Rawcliffe to his first meeting of the Ethics & Standards Committee.</p>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>GROUP LEADER DISCUSSION</u></p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Group Leaders both agreed that there had been very few issues within their political groups to consider over the past year, which was evidence of the very successful systems in place to resolve issues at a very early stage.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council updated the Committee on the PDR process, in place to help identify Member's strengths and weaknesses, and develop training accordingly. However, this was a voluntary process and not all Members participated.</p> <p>Councillor J. Wilkins explained that Members also had the opportunity to prepare an Annual Report, highlighting their activities throughout the year and any training they had</p>	

undertaken. She said this was another useful mechanism for Members development, but again this was voluntary.

A discussion ensued regarding Members participation in the PDR process, and a possible link with the Annual Report mechanism; and also whether consideration could be given to an introductory statement being made before all Council meetings, reminding Members to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct.

In response, the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance confirmed that the introduction statement at the beginning of meetings would not require an amendment to the Council's Constitution.

In terms of linking the Annual Report mechanism to the PDR process, the Officer pointed that the PDR process had no statutory basis other than a mentoring tool. However, it did link closely to the Code of Conduct and the percentage of Members participating in the voluntary process could be included within the Draft Annual Report, with the intention of driving that figure up year on year.

The Committee AGREED to recommend,

- That the Leader of the Council be asked to strongly recommend that all Members take up the PDR process;
- Consideration be given to linking the Annual Report mechanism to the PDR process; and
- An introductory statement being introduced at the beginning of all Council meetings stressing the importance of upholding public service values and compliance with the Code of Conduct.

No. 8

UPDATE ON TRAINING FOR CHAIRS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES ATTENDED 12TH FEBRUARY, 2023

The Chair provided an update on the training of Standards Committee Chairs undertaken on the 29th January, 2024.

A discussion ensued when the Chair asked whether it would be beneficial for a brief training session prior to each Committee meeting, and the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance undertook to investigate.

<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>UPDATE ON CASES CONSIDERED SINCE LAST MEETING</u></p> <p>The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance provided an update on cases since the last meeting as follows:</p> <p>There was currently still 1 case under investigation with the Ombudsman over 12 months old. The Officer has written to the investigator and hopefully this would be concluded shortly.</p> <p>Also 1 complaint from a Member of the public against an elected Member had been received.</p> <p>A further complaint against a Town & Community Council Member had also been received and was currently being considered.</p>	
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Ethics & Standards Draft Annual report for 2023.</p> <p>A discussion ensued regarding the inclusion of the recommendation that all Members participate in the PDR process. The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance confirmed that the report was on the Council agenda for the 21st March, 2024 and the recommendation would be verbally reported.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the draft Ethics & Standards Annual Report for 2023 be accepted.</p>	
<p>No. 11</p>	<p><u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u></p> <p>The Chair reported that a further report had been issued by the IRP for Wales which recommended a change in payment to an hourly rate. He said it was his view that adequate time should be allocated not only for attendance of meetings but also preparation.</p> <p>The Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance confirmed that this had been discussed at the recent Monitoring Officers' meeting. It was a recommendation and any decision to change the payment system was at the discretion of each LA, and the Officer undertook to make enquiries.</p>	

