

# Draft Minutes

## Standards Committee

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Date: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Committee Room 1 / Microsoft Teams Meeting

Present: A. Mitchell (Chair), J. Davies, P. Worthington, R. Morgan, G. Nurton.  
Councillors D. Fouweather, F. Hussain and P. Cockeram, Councillor Jane Mudd, Councillor Alan Morris, Councillor Kevin Whitehead, Councillor William Routley.

In attendance: Elizabeth Bryant (Head of Law and Standards), Leanne Rowlands (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), Pamela Tasker (Governance Officer), Taylor Strange (Governance Officer).

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### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Mr Kerry Watkins

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

None

### **3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Agreed:

The minutes from the meeting 12 January 2023 were moved as a true record.

### **4. Matters Arising**

None

### **5. Chair's Announcements**

None

## **6. Group Leaders Discussion**

### **A Political Group: Labour (Pages 9 - 10)**

The Leader presented the report to the Committee stating that real progress had been made with high levels of engagement in training. The Leader noted that engagement was very important for successful training, to ensure that as many members as possible access the training provided.

The Leader was pleased to announce that everyone in their group had completed training, particularly the number of people attending Anti-Racism training and Equalities training.

The Leader went on to say that Welsh Government had just introduced an anti-racism plan and highlighted the important role of Democratic Services who ensured Members took part the most up-to-date legislation.

The Leader stated that she was very supportive of refresher training and updates, as it was necessary to update training in line with new legislation and to develop an understanding in aligning the work the Council does with the legislation under Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

The Leader commended Democratic Services for the training they had delivered so far to Members.

The Chair commented that he felt it was fantastic that the Equalities training had been included.

Councillor Whitehead stated that there were some good points made and whilst he was part of a smaller group, the standards on how Members should behave and how everything they do is perceived in public life can be somewhat of a revelation for newly appointed members. Councillor Whitehead noted that he had learned that you are responsible for everything you do, and you need to be careful when considering everything you say and do both in your official role and outside of that.

Councillor Whitehead stated that Democratic Services provided a great service and support to Members.

Councillor Whitehead commented on the ever-changing political perspective and encouraged other members to seek advice and information as part of their support system.

### **B Political Group: Conservative (Pages 11 - 12)**

Councillor Routley presented the report to the committee in place of Councillor Evans who sent his apologies for not being able to attend.

The Chair noted that the stencil was not filled in like the others and commented that Councillor Evans had stated that they did not feel the need to do refresher training.

The Chair noted Councillor Evans perspective that training needs to be easier and less onerous through hybrid meetings.

The Chair stated that although Members may not pick up anything new on refresher training it was needed to inform members that processes were being followed correctly.

Councillor Routley stated that refresher training was not an issue and the Members in the group were up to date on Code on Conduct and indicated that the group upheld the Nolan principles and the group fully complied with training.

Councillor Routley stated that some members felt that the establishment brought some Members into disrepute where officers did not act as promptly enough.

Councillor Routley stated that he agreed with all the previous comments made by the Leader and Councillor Whitehead.

The Chair noted that people in public office needed to be held to account as appropriate.

Councillor Routley stated that all mandatory training had been undertaken and that the group members received training through the Council, and other instruction through their roles outside the Council. Councillor Routley considered that they were receiving a well-rounded approach both in their professional jobs and through training provided by the Council.

Councillor Cockeram stated that whilst people can also have external training as part of their work outside of being an elected member, this is not part of what the Council measures or monitors, so there is no way to make sure people completed all the relevant training outside the Council routes.

Councillor Cockeram confirmed that on the report Councillor Evans stated that he felt there was no need to duplicate training if people received training as part of their day job.

### **C. Political Group: Lliswerry Independent (Pages 13 - 14)**

The Chair asked about Code of Conduct training, and it was confirmed that all members had attended this training.

Councillor Morris stated that every member in the group is keen to do all necessary training and are aware of the standards expected. Councillor Morris confirmed that the group had regular meetings and any issues were dealt with straight away.

Councillor Morris stated that the required training is important.

### **D. Political Group: Newport Independents Party (Pages 15 - 16)**

Councillor Whitehead confirmed that he was open to any training that was relevant to the role and there was never an unwillingness expressed to complete this. Councillor Whitehead agreed that the group was happy to look at any additional training.

Councillor Whitehead noted the fantastic work done by the Leader in a short space of time and noted that members never stop learning in their role. Councillor Whitehead remarked that as a member it is important to act as a champion where you live to raise issues regardless of the political balance.

The Chair commented that some Members had not done standards training before the last local elections, but had since completed it now, so this was good to see and there would be a mid-year invite for the political leaders to return to standards.

Dr Paul Worthington stated that discussion had been especially useful and encouraging that the group leaders have supported and encouraged the training when needed.

Dr Worthington noted that there was an immense commitment in being a councillor and the buddy system was great for new councillors as a means of support.

Councillor Whitehead stated that Councillors do see personal things written about them on social and this was difficult.

Councillor Hussain confirmed that she had received a lot of support so far and had regular 1:1 meetings with the Leader and gave thanks for all the help received.

The Chair reflected that whilst there were some Councillors that had served for many years, everyone was still learning and noted that the Standards Committee wanted to ensure that the Committee or the Ombudsman do not have to become involved for issues caused by lack of training.

Councillor Cockeram noted that if Councillors do the training, then this will ensure they know what is correct behaviour and what is not.

Councillor Morris agreed that if mistakes are made, all Councillors are judged the same regardless of their political party. Councillor Morris also stated that anyone from any party could come to him with an issue for guidance if needed.

Dr Paul Worthington stated that corporate and personal responsibility mesh together as personal actions reflect on the Council as a whole.

### **Agreed:**

Group Leaders agreed to attend Standards Committee for a 6-month update.

## **7.National Standards Committee Forum Feedback**

The Chair stated that he would present the highlights to the Committee and that there were some minutes from the forum available, but they were not available at present. The Committee would receive the forum minutes in due course.

The meeting took place on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023 with Mr Clive Wolfendale elected as the Chair with Mr Jason Bartlett elected as the Vice Chair.

The Forum will consist of all local government organisations in Wales with four monitoring officers in attendance at any one time from principal councils, a monitoring officer from the Fire Service and one from the National Park Authorities.

There will be two meetings a year and the Forum will have members attend on a voluntary basis, who will be invited to be present and share ideas.

The Chair confirmed that the Forum then considered the progress of individual Councils concerning standards, and the reflection was that Newport was ahead of many other Councils in this respect. The Chair stated that only five other members who had attended the Forum were able to share any information on their progress.

The Chair stated that at the forum they had explained what the Newport standards committee did, and reflected that not a lot of councils had reached the same point yet. For example, Merthyr Tydfil Council and Swansea City Council Standards Committee had only held an introduction meeting with group leaders. The WLGA received the request from Councils around group leader support, so Newport was ahead of other Councils in this matter.

The Chair noted that Zoom had been used for the meeting, which caused problems when logging in. The Chair stated that feedback would be shared with the Forum that Teams was a much easier platform to use.

Michelle Morris from the Public Service Ombudsman was present at the forum to give an overview of their role and they stated that they investigate complaints from service users, and members of the public about public services and Code of Conduct issues, which is where the role of the Standards Committee also fitted in.

From April 2021 to March 2022 the Public Service Ombudsman adjudicated 300 Code of Conduct complaints and 250 of these complaints were not taken forward following the initial assessment.

A number of breaches of the Code involved a lack of respect for others, and how Councillors treated each other; this made up 50% of complaints.

The Ombudsman are keen to be invited to future forums as they feel they can add more to the forum.

The first part of the Penn report was discussed at the forum, however there was not much information to report at this time, the work of Standards Committees and summoning witnesses will form part of the consultation and final report.

The Members Annual report was also discussed with the All Wales Forum to do something on this in future.

The Chair stated that they would share minutes of the forum and find out why the minutes could not be shared at this time.

The Head of Standards stated that they might not want to share it at this time.

Councillor Cockeram asked why the Fire Service was attending the forum and the Head of Law and Standards confirmed that this service is also subject to the terms of standards regarding the Code of Conduct.

**Agreed:**

The minutes of the All-Wales National Standards Committee forum will be circulated to the Committee in future.

**8.Code of Conduct and General Member Training Update (Pages 17 - 22)**

The Democratic and Electoral Manager presented the report to the Committee.

**Main points:**

- It was the responsibility of the Standards Committee to ensure high standards and ensure Members have access to training and development regarding the Members Code of Conduct.
- Ensuring that members have access to a reasonable level of training and development. falls under the remit of the Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years, and the Democratic Services Committee.
- The draft Induction Curriculum set by the WLGA to support Members following the May 2022 local elections was considered by the Democratic Services Committee in 2021: a final draft for members at Newport City Council was shared in February 2022.
- Key principles were focused on such as less is more, as a lot of new members were elected, and they had to receive a lot of information in a short time. Training opportunities were centred on being as interactive as possible, so Members have the opportunity to ask questions.
- Wherever possible, members should be provided with learning opportunities at a time when it is needed and relevant and in a medium that is appropriate for the topic and activity.
- Facilitators with a specific expertise were sought to ensure the best quality knowledge and experience was provided.
- The agreed framework was also designed to be flexible, allowing for changes as and when required to meet changing requirements.
- There was a tight turnaround with eight working days last year from the election count day until the first Council AGM with Hybrid meetings being introduced for the first time so it was imperative to focus on technology and meeting protocol as a first step.
- The curriculum then moved to focus on key legislation and preparing Members for their relevant committees as appropriate, with bespoke sessions for quasi-judicial committees such as Planning and Licensing.
- In the Summer and Autumn, Councillors were introduced to or refreshed on other key legislation and policy supporting their decision making, such as the Equalities Act and Safeguarding.

- Councillors were also supported by Heads of Service, who introduced their services and key policies in areas such as Environment, Public Protection, and Housing.
- In preparation for the budget setting process, Finance and Treasury Management training was arranged for December.
- Sessions arranged and provided by Newport City Council were augmented by webinars provided by the Local Government Association on Supporting Councillors with Abuse and Intimidation, and Personal Safety. There were also short online cybersecurity courses were sent directly to email accounts covering password security and phishing activity.
- A table was provided highlighting the Summary of Training by Quarter and the chart showed that Code of Conduct training attendance was 100%.
- Where possible the sessions were recorded with a mixture of workshops being hybrid and slides and recordings from the training were provided to Members.
- A survey will be sent to Members to see what has worked well and what has not. This will inform the curriculum for 2023/24.
- This was a continuous development approach with training being followed.

### **Questions:**

Gill Nurton noted that Equality & Diversity Training take up is just above 50% and asked would there be any other sessions.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that there was a lot of key training on the list to be revisited as well as Planning and Licensing training as it was recognised that more training will be needed to see mitigate any potential gaps in knowledge.

Gill Nurton commented on Member Training Records of attendance and whether they were uploaded to the Members Central Personal Development Record, and if that is the case can these be published on the Member Profiles

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that there had been interesting discussions with regional groups regarding budgets and how they are managing in terms of member support. Updates on the outcomes of these conversations would be shared with the Committee as outcomes are known.

Gill Nurton commented on the quasi-judicial Committees mandatory training take up which was as follows: Licensing Committee 54% & Planning Committee 72% and was this correct.

The Head of Law and Standards stated that this would be picked up with those new members to make sure all the mandatory training was completed.

Councillor Cockeram stated that they were disappointed with the safeguarding training attendance as safeguarding was such an important issue.

The Chair stated that a number of things could be linked to standards, and it was acknowledged by Councillor Cockeram that some training was more important than other training.

John Davies commented on amendments and whether there was a letter sent that they signed for.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that some training is a year-by-year refresher and if there was a big change it was a seminar. There was also a record kept of all members to see who has attended training.

Councillor Cockeram asked about Planning changes as whether the Planning Committee member received training themselves on an ongoing basis or was this for all Members and it was confirmed that Planning Committee members received training on an ongoing basis when Planning changes occurred.

Councillor Morris stated that there had been no training previously for Licensing. However, this was amended as committee members needed to understand the licensing rules and how they used their power to make decisions in Committee.

The Head of Law and Standards confirmed that a Legal adviser attends Planning and Licensing Committees to make sure that the Committees ran smoothly.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that another option that was discussed that was not delivered yet was producing e-learning modules, as these could be accessed at any time, and could monitor completion rates, as well as members understanding of the key parts of the training.

The Head of Law and Standards confirmed that three sessions had been provided for the Code of Conduct which explained why the attendance was so good.

Gill Nurton stated that it was a shame that formal feedback on the Code of Conduct Training was not undertaken as it would have been useful information for the Committee.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that they were conscious of survey fatigue so Members could be asked about this through an end of year survey.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

Gill Nurton recommended the following items to go on the forward work programme.

- Ethical Standards Audit - Review of Register of Interests; Review of Gifts & Hospitality and if appropriate Officer Business Interest Declarations, Officer Gifts & Hospitality.
- Community Council Review - review of Code of Conduct Compliance and Register of Interests.



The Chair commented that these were some great areas to be looked at and they could be built into the agenda and that the most important one was that Local Councillors were complying with the code of conduct also.

John Davies stated new members of their community council signed a code of conduct when joining.

The Chair commented that this was a good process, and this was something the committee could pick up and could create a stencil to give to chairs of community councils.

Councillor Cockeram asked whether Members were having training and wondered whether the Standards Committee could sit in on scrutiny committee.

The Chair requested that an invite could be sent to the Scrutiny Chairs to attend, and the Democratic and Electoral Standards Committee stated that they were due to meet the Scrutiny Chairs soon so this could be raised with them.

Dr Paul Worthington stated that the summary of principles for the training in the report was very sensible as it was important to make the training manageable and accessible which was the key word and that the uptake of equality and diversity training was particularly important as this linked most directly with the standards code of conduct. Dr Paul Worthington stated that the point made by Councillor Cockeram regarding being able to identify the content and quality of training that has been undertaken was also an interesting point to link in.

## **10.Complaints**

There were no Complaints to report.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

13<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 5:30pm