

Report



Standards Committee

Part 1

Date: 18th May 2024

Subject Forward Work Programme 2024/25

Purpose To agree the Forward Work programme for Standards Committee.

Author Head of Law & Standards

Ward City wide

Summary The Standards Committee Annual Report for 2022/23 was received by full Council in November 2023.

The Annual Report stated that a draft Forward Work programme for the next 12 months would be considered by committee members. Standards Committee are asked to approve the Work Programme, identify any further items of work that should be included and to prioritise specific items for review.

Proposal To agree the Forward Work programme and prioritise specific items for review.

Action by Head of Law & Standards and Democratic & Electoral Services Manager

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Head of Finance
- Head of People, Policy & Transformation

Background

1. Terms of reference

The Local Government Act 2000 Part III requires the Council to establish a Standards Committee to carry out the following statutory functions:-

- (a) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives;
- (b) Assisting the councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (c) Advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (d) Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (e) Advising, training or arranging to train councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (f) Granting dispensations to councillors, co-opted members and church and parent governor representatives from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct;
- (g) Dealing with any reports from the Monitoring Officer and hearing any complaints of misconduct or breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct referred by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and determining appropriate action, including the imposition of any sanctions;
- (h) The exercise of (a) to (g) above in relation to the community councils and the members of those community councils.

As from May 2022, the Standards Committee has the following additional statutory functions, in accordance with the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021

- (i) 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.
- (j) Advising, training or arranging to train leaders of political groups on the Council about matters relating to those duties

Standards Committee also carries out the following additional functions, making recommendations to the Council, as appropriate:-

- (k) The hearing and determination of "low level" complaints of misconduct at Stage 3 of the Local Resolution Protocol;

- (l) Providing advice to the Council on the Council's Codes of Practice, including the Officers' Code of Conduct and the Whistle Blowing policy;
 - (m) Monitoring and updating the Codes of Practice as required; and
 - (n) Overseeing the Council's confidential complaints procedure;
2. The composition and membership of the Standards Committee is prescribed by the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended). The Committee is comprised of 5 Independent members, 3 Councillors and 1 community council representative. The Chair and Deputy are both independent members.
 3. The Standards Committee is required to meet at least once annually in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. In practice, the Committee meets on a scheduled quarterly basis and additional special meetings are arranged, as necessary, to deal with specific matters such as misconduct hearings and requests for dispensation.
 4. Three members are required to attend for a quorum at meetings (including the independent Chair or Deputy Chair) and at least half of those present must be independent. The community council representative is not "independent" for this purpose.
 5. **Forward work programme**
The purpose of a work programme is to enable the Committee to plan, organise and prioritise its workload. The Committee will need to plan out its projects and meetings, be clear on its aims and objectives, and properly assess at the end of the year the extent to which its aims have been achieved.
 6. The Standards Committee is asked to consider the following draft Forward Work programme for the next 12 months.

Date	Topic	Information
As and when applications received Review annually	Dispensations	Granting individual and blanket dispensations to Councillors. Reviewing decisions annually to identify common issues and consistency of approach. Produce guidance to Members on any issues arising.
As and when required	Local Resolution Protocol complaints	Update of numbers of complaints received and outcomes.

		Update on complaints resolved through Local Resolution Protocol
Quarterly	Complaints of Misconduct	Conducting hearings into any Stage 3 complaints by Members or Officers.
Frequency to be agreed by Standards Committee at beginning of municipal year – April 2024	Review of arrangements by Leaders of political groups to secure compliance with new duties	<p>Review compliance by leaders of political groups on the Council with their duties under section 52A of the 2000 Act 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.</p> <p>Advising, training or arranging to train leaders of political groups about matters relating to those duties, as necessary</p>
As and when feedback and updates are available from the forum	National Standards Committee Forum	The Chair to present highlights and updates from the Forum with the Committee as appropriate.
July 2024	Annual Report to Council	<p>Review of work undertaken in the past 12 months, identifying any specific ethical standards issues facing the Council and priorities for the forthcoming year. This is a statutory requirement</p> <p>The statutory report must describe how the Committee's functions have been discharged during the previous year and, in particular, must include a summary of any reports, actions or recommendations made or referred to the Committee. In addition the Annual Report must include an assessment of the extent to which leaders of political</p>

		<p>groups on the Council have complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups.</p> <p>Copies of the Annual Report must be sent to the ombudsman and all community councils.</p>
July 2024	Update on member training and development.	
October 2024	Equality and Human Rights Casebook	<p>Every year the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales publish a casebook focused on cases they have dealt with that have a human rights or equality element to them. This is shared with the Committee as an Information Only update.</p>
October 2024	Annual Letter 2023/24 from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales	<p>Following the publication of his Annual Report for 2023/24, the Ombudsman will issue the Council with her Annual Letter, which sets out information relating to the numbers of complaints of maladministration and misconduct relating to Newport City Council and its Councillors which were referred to her office during this period.</p>

7. Standards Committee are asked to approve the Work Programme, identify any further items of work that should be included and to prioritise specific items for review. The Governance Team will then ensure that the Forward Work programme is updated accordingly and that the relevant items are include on the agendas for future meetings.
8. In particular, Standards Committee are asked to consider how they wish to take forward the review of compliance by Leaders of political groups on the Council with their new duties under section 52A of the 2000 Act to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their groups. They are not

responsible and accountable for any misconduct on the part of their individual group members, but they are responsible for promoting a positive culture and setting a good example to their group members. The Committee will need to consider how they wish to work with group leaders to fulfil this duty during 2024/25. There is a requirement to engage with group leaders and to review progress within 6 months of the election and group Leaders must receive appropriate advice and training to enable them to fulfil their duties. It is suggested that the Committee may wish to agree with the group leaders, at their next meeting, how they should work together to fulfil these new statutory duties. This could be in the form of an annual letter from each of the group leaders (an example of which is set out in [Appendix 1](#)) or, alternatively there could be an annual review meeting with the Committee, or a combination of these approaches

9. In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, each Committee is required to review annually the timing and frequency of their meetings, to ensure that they are sufficient and convenient in order to effectively conduct business. The timing of the meetings can be varied according to the availability and preferences of the majority of the Committee members, although the use of hybrid technology and multi-location meetings should provide greater flexibility in terms of attendance.

Financial Summary

10. There are no financial implications

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
No action taken	M	L	Work programming arrangements are in place to ensure they are timely, meaningful, informative, and transparent, balanced, monitored, and joined up.	Head of Law & Standards and Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
The process is not embraced by report authors and members	M	M	If there is proliferation of unplanned or late items, the opportunity to ensure work programming is timely, meaningful, informative, and transparent, balanced, monitored, and joined up will diminish	Head of Law & Standards and Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

*Taking account of proposed mitigation measures.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

The Nolan principles, which underpin the ethical standards framework, are enshrined in the Council's corporate and well-being objectives.

Proposal

To consider and agree the Committee's Forward Work Programme for 2024/25.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no financial implications in adopting a programme of work.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications in adopting a programme of work.

Comments of Head of People Policy & Transformation

There are no specific HR or policy implications in adopting this programme of work.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

- **Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act**
- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Socio-economic Duty**
- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

The principles of fairness and equality are embodied within the Members Code of Conduct and the Ethical Framework. No FEIA is required for the Forward Work Programme.

- There are no negative impacts in terms of equalities or social disadvantage.
- In terms of the sustainable development principle and 5 ways of working

Long-term – The Forward Work Programme will assist Standards Committee and the Council in taking a long-term view about improving ethical standards

Prevention – The Forward Work Programme will help to prevent future complaints of misconduct

Integration – The Forward Work Programme has been produced in consultation with key stakeholders

Collaboration – The Forward Work Programme will assist people in interacting with councils and elected members, in a more collaborative way. It will also facilitate collaboration between Standards Committees and external bodies in discussing matters of common interest.

Involvement – The Forward Work Programme will encourage greater involvement in reporting and resolving issues relating to Standards.

Consultation

No comments at this stage.

Background Papers

None

Dated: 4th April 2024

Appendix 1

Promoting Compliance With the Code of Conduct

Report by:					
Political Group:					
No. of members:		No. trained on Code:	X (Y%)		
For the period:					
<u>Number, Source and Level of Complaints</u>					
	Informal	Local Resolution (Stage)			PSOW
		1	2	3	
Public					
Officers					
Councillors					
<u>Steps taken to Promote Compliance (To Be Completed by Group Leader)</u>					
Include matters such as:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrating personal commitment to and attending relevant development or training around equalities and standards; - encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards; - ensuring nominees to a Committee have received the recommended training for that Committee; 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promoting civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal Council meetings; - promoting informal resolution procedures in the Council, and working with the Standards Committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution; - promoting a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity; - attend a meeting of the Council's Standards Committee if requested to discuss Code of Conduct issues; 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work to implement any recommendations from the Standards Committee about improving standards; - work together with other group leaders, within reason, to collectively support high standards of conduct within the Council. 					