

Minutes



Standards Committee

Date: 1 November 2018

Time: 5.30 pm

Present: P Westwood (Chair)
Cllrs V Dudley, H Thomas, P Hourahine,
J David, A Mitchell and P Worthington

In Attendance: G Price (Head of Law & Regulation), A Jenkins (Governance Team Leader)

1 Apologies for Absence

T Britton and K Watkins.

2 Declarations of Interest

None received.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting of 12 July 2018 were submitted.

Agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting were accepted as a true record.

4 Matters Arising

The Officer/Member Protocol was adopted by full Council in September 2018.

5 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Dr P Worthington as a new member of the Standards Committee.

The Chair referred to the Standards Annual Conference which was held in Aberswyth in September. There were only two places available for Newport Standards Members and unfortunately no one was able to attend. Any papers from the conference would be circulated to members when available.

6 Complaints

No complaints had been received.

7 Standards Committee Annual Report 2017-2018

The Standards Committee were due to present an Annual Report to the Council which provided information about the work carried out by the Committee during the past 12 months,

identifying particular issues that had arisen and setting out the forward work programme for the forthcoming year.

A draft of the Annual Report for 2017/18 was presented to the committee for comment and approval prior to its presentation to the next meeting of full council on 27 November 2018.

It was suggested that Councillor H Thomas present the report to full Council as he had done in the previous year.

Agreed:

- To make any comments on the report by 8 November 2018 and approve the Annual Report for presentation to Full Council on 27 November.
- Councillor H Thomas to present the Annual Report at Council.

8 **Ombudsman Annual Letter 2017-2018**

Following the publication of his Annual Report for 2017/18, the Ombudsman issued the Council with his Annual letter, setting out information relating to the numbers of complaints of maladministration and misconduct which were referred to his office during this period relating to Newport City Council and its Councillors.

In terms of numbers of complaints or maladministration there was an increase relating to planning or building control. This was fairly representative in terms of the nature of the complaints. Members of the public generally felt the need to complain to the ombudsman although these were not serious complaints.

There were two issues in the report which were settled locally. Additionally, there was a number of complaints made regarding community councils.

Of the three complaints within the Newport area there was nothing that required further investigation. Complaints were available on the Ombudsman website where members could build a picture of what was happening Nationwide.

Agreed:

To note the report and the Ombudsman's Annual Letter.

9 **Adjudication Panel for Wales: Sanctions Guidance**

The Adjudication Panel for Wales issued statutory Guidance setting out the approach taken by case, appeal and interim case tribunals in order to reach fair, proportionate and consistent decisions on the sanctions that should be applied in relation to an individual's breach of the Members Code of Conduct.

As such, it provided useful guidance to Standards Committee on the approach that should be taken in relation to any misconduct hearings, following the referral of a complaint by the Ombudsman and the principles to be followed when considering the proportionality of any sanction.

The Panel's powers of sentencing were greater than the Standards Committee but were applicable should the Council have to impose any penalties as a result of a misconduct, as there was a consistency of approach and proportionality.

Whilst Newport would follow guidance provided by the Panel should there be a serious issue, the Councillors within Newport were well briefed and adhered to instructions when told. There had not been any serious issues since the previous code of conduct came into force in 2001 as well as code of conduct training following local elections, however the Committee must not be complacent.

10 **Staff/Councillor Survey: Verbal Update**

The questionnaire referred to the Standards Committee survey undertaken in 2011, however a copy of the previous questionnaire and report from 2001 was circulated. The questionnaire was completed and returned in 2011 but no action was taken as a result of the finding. The document circulated was only a specimen document and questions could be changed accordingly.

It was therefore put to the committee whether it would be a worthwhile exercise to repeat the process.

The staff survey would be a general circulation sent to a small amount of staff that had a working relationship with councillors, such as senior managers. The survey would also be sent to councillors.

It was suggested that a question relating to staff/councillor relations could be a question included as part of the staff survey circulated once a year. This had however recently been issued and completed but related to employment issues.

Discussion ensued regarding the relevance of the survey with no clear decision on a way forward.

The Chair suggested that the members give more thought to the issue and defer the matter to the next meeting.

Agreed:

Defer the survey to the next meeting to give the questionnaire more consideration.

11 **Letter to Community Councils - Review of Ethical Standards: Questionnaire Follow-up**

Most of the Community Councils had returned their completed questionnaire with only two outstanding. As a result of which, the questionnaire highlighted that there was a need for training for Community Councillors, collective training session within the Civic Centre would make an interesting session with greater expected outcome for attendance. With this in mind, the community council representative mentioned that training incurred a cost to the community councils and any free training would be greatly appreciated.

Of the 12 responses received all Community Councils were complying with their obligation to sign up to the code of conduct.

Finally it was agreed that as there were only two remaining community councils that had not completed the questionnaire; Redwick and Michaelston-y-fedw these would be contacted via telephone or email for a response.

12 **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 17 January 2019 at 5.30pm in Committee Room 4.

The meeting terminated at 18:30