

Draft Minutes

Standards Committee

Date: 12th January 2023

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Committee Room 1 / Microsoft Teams Meeting

Present: A. Mitchell (Chair), K. Watkins (Vice Chair) J. Davies, P. Worthington, R. Morgan, G. Nurton, Councillors D. Fouweather, F. Hussain and P. Cockeram. Elizabeth Bryant (Head of Law and Regulation). Emily Mayger (Governance Officer)

1. Apologies for Absence

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 15th November 2022 were accepted to be a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

G. Nurton noted that the committee had been supplied with the data on the number of Councillors that had completed the Code of Conduct training and was pleased that there was another training session booked in for the remaining few Councillors. G. Nurton queried if the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager could provide information on the induction training and what it included by the next meeting.

Cllr Cockeram noted that many of the Members are new and may require training on the purpose and role of Standards committee and noted that the Chair and Vice chair attend one of the planned seminars.

The Vice Chair asked whether there had been any updates in regard to the Councillors that had not completed the training. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that there was another code of conduct training session due and after that a report about the training would be brought back to committee.

G. Nurton asked whether there had been any feedback from the National Standards Committee. The Chair informed the committee that this had been rescheduled for January and added that he would provide feedback from it at the next meeting.

The Chair noted that an important part of having the Leaders attend the next meeting is to be able to challenge them so that it can be certain that 100% of the Cllrs have completed the Code of Conduct training. The Chair queried what is being done by the Leaders if their Cllrs are not attending the training.

The Vice Chair reiterated that it was important to know which of the Cllrs had not completed the training and queried what the next step was if the Cllrs are not attending the two formats (in person and online) available to them.

The Head of Law and Standards stated that all they can ask is for the Leaders to put pressure on them and noted that a self-led module that they could complete in their own time had been raised and added that they could make it more interactive or have a quiz that could be marked for the few that fail to complete the training.

Cllr Cockeram expressed that his preference would be for the Cllrs to complete it in person rather than virtual as many online are multiple choice and so answers can just be guessed. Cllr Hussain added that on MS Teams was ok however agreed that they should not have one that could be completed in their own time. Cllr Hussain added that if they were to complete it in their own time, they would not be able to raise any questions or comments they may have. The Chair agreed and stated that the problem with e-learning is that there is no one to answer questions that may come to mind and there is an absence of sharing knowledge and experiences. The Chair noted that the committee would have to be careful in not imposing their will unnecessarily on the Cllrs and asked for guidance from the Head of Law and Standards.

P. Worthington noted that 100% of Cllrs should have completed the Code of Conduct training and added that part of the Group Leaders roles was to ensure this. P Worthington added that in regard to the mode of delivery his preference would be in person training but added that there could be queries regarding accessibility and agreed with the Chair about not imposing preferences. P. Worthington stated that it is harder to organise an in-person session when the group required is smaller and added that that is where the benefits of the digital side came in.

The Vice Chair agreed that there was a room for both formats but not for a tick box exercise and added that the Leaders could advise the best way forward. The Head of Law and Standards stated that they could assess the numbers that attended each method and review at a later date.

R. Morgan noted that there weren't any sanctions for Cllrs that did not complete the training and queried if there was anything that the Leaders could do in that regard. R. Morgan added that some training is mandatory before the Cllrs are allowed to sit on a committee. The Head of Law and Standards noted that this was the case for committees that played a judicial role to avoid judicial reviews. R. Morgan agreed with previous comments regarding the Leaders role in ensuring their Cllrs have completed the training as well as having the different formats available to them. The Chair noted that this would be raised at the next meeting with the Leaders.

The Chair noted that the format of the previous meeting with the Leaders worked and that as they are now building bridges it is important to see what information can be gained from them.

J. Davies queried if the committee could ask the Leaders to bring information regarding the number of their Cllrs that had completed the statutory training. The Chair noted that training other than the Code of Conduct training would be out of the committee's remit and added that although the committee would be able to ask the committee would be limited.

Cllr Hussain queried whether the Code of Conduct training is annual and the Head of Law and Standards noted that it would be every 5 years for existing members, and following elections for newly elected members . The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted that an e-learning module could be used for existing members as a refresher. Cllr Hussain agreed and added that it should have something that could be submitted to show that it had been completed.

G. Nurton queried whether areas such as Equality and Diversity were covered in the Code of Conduct training the Councillors received and added that the Cllrs have a duty to abide by legislation. G. Nurton added that the Leader' had previously brought the use of IT and social media training and asked if any area on social media could be added. The Head of Law and Standards noted that the Council already offer separate training for Equality and Diversity as well as social media and added that the Code of Conduct training was already quite long. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager added that Equality and Diversity training had occurred in September 2022 and that the social media training is due at the end of the next quarter. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager added that when Members are brought in there is a large amount of information at once but noted that they could look at feedback about may be useful to include in the next years training.

The Chair queried whether the committee were happy with what was included on the Stencil of the Form for Group Leaders and added that it would be important for the Leaders to complete the form and return it in time for the committee to formulate questions before the next meeting.

The Chair queried whether the committee should leave in the section regarding types of complaints and added that that information was generally provided by the Head of Law and Standards. The Head of Law and Standards noted that the Leaders were not happy about that section of the form and added that any data given could identify complaints. The Chair queried if that section should be removed and the Vice Chair agreed.

The Chair queried the section regarding promoting compliance and noted its importance. J. Davies questioned whether all Cllrs have a group leader and if not how would the committee be assured that those Cllrs had completed it. The Head of Law and Standards noted that this could be looked into in terms of asking independent members to complete the form.

G. Nurton informed the committee that some other Councils publish Members' training details on their website and questioned whether this was something that Newport City Council would consider. Cllr Cockeram queried whether that could be debated with the group leaders. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager stated that there would be an update of the training at the next meeting but that it could be brought to Democratic Services Committee. The Head of Law and Standards added that after the next meeting the report that the Leaders would be supplying would then be available. The Vice Chair agreed that there could be an issue of 'naming and shaming' and added that a change in the pro forma could be made for just the number of non-attendance and the action that had been taken by the group Leaders. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted that the data regarding the Councillor's training attendance will be fed back to the Leaders.

The Chair suggested that the form still be sent to the Councillors that are not affiliated to a group and have the report sent back rather than their attendance at the committee and questioned how many Councillors were not affiliated with a group. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that there were 2 Cllrs.

G. Nurton questioned whether Standards Committee could request that Democratic Services committee publish member training records in line with good practice? The Chair noted that the committee could certainly put in the request and queried what the Newport City Council's policy was and whether it could be an opportunity to make a policy regarding this.

The Chair questioned whether the section regarding implementing recommendations should continue to be included and noted that if so the

whole of that section would be relevant. The Chair opened out suggestions from the committee about what else may need to be included on the form. G. Nurton noted that it should be asked what training the Leaders have taken and what training they may require. G. Nurton added that this could include informally and that under the new guidance the committee needs to be arranging training for Leaders of Political groups. The Head of Law and Standards noted that the form was in relation to Code of Conduct training and that wider training is not relevant to the form. The Head of Law and Standards added that it may be a case for a review of the code of conduct training to ensure that the necessary aspects are included.

P. Worthington noted that the initial meeting with the Leaders had been very constructive and added that it is important to know what their knowledge and background is so that the committee can be helpful. The Chair queried whether any question regarding training would be added to the Pro forma or whether it would be added to the next meeting. The Head of Law and Standards noted that they could add it to the form as it may give an idea of training they would like to request.

The Chair stated asked for the Stencil to be circulated amongst the Standards committee members and to be returned with comments, questions and feedback after a week so it can be amended and sent to the group Leaders in good time. The Head of Law and Standards added that the Chair could discuss the Pro forma at the National Standards committee forum to gauge what other councils have decided.

5. Chairs Announcements

There were no announcements that the Chair wished to make.

6. Complaints

The Head of Law and Standards provided an update on one complaint that had not been upheld by the PSOW due to their being no evidence of a code of conduct breach by the Councillor concerned. The Head of Law and Standards added that the PSOW had commented that whilst the conduct did not amount to a breach, the behaviour complained of was discourteous and was rather about incompetency the incompetency of the member to fulfil their role, which was a matter for the ballot box.

7. Equality and Human Rights Casebook 2022-2023

The Chair noted that the handbook had been added to the Agenda for information purposes but opened it out for any questions or comments from the committee.

P. Worthington noted that the handbook contained a large amount of content regarding health but noted that one of the key messages was issues in communication. P. Worthington stated that issues with communications is often at the heart of complaints and although it relates to specific circumstances it contains a good lesson.

8. PSOW Complaints Standards Data April to September 2022

The Chair introduced the item. Cllr Cockeram asked for clarification on the table and how the numbers correlated. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that during the complaints procedure there were three stages with the third being contacting the Ombudsman. The Head of Law and Standards stated that the numbers are slightly different due to some cases that are from previous years being closed.

9. Date of Next Meeting:

13th April 2023 – 5.30pm
Committee Room 1

G. Nurton questioned whether an agenda item could be added to the next meeting about a forward work programme. G. Nurton noted that there was one in the annual report but that it was not up to date. G. Nurton noted that the committee could look at the ethical standards audit and ethnicity of new Councillors under the Ethical Standards area.

G. Nurton added that the committee had decided previously to look at a review of Community Councils and suggested that the committee could attend a Community Council meeting to see how they operate. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager also noted that the Community Councils had requested more information regarding the Standards committee.