

Meeting of:	<b>Standards Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Thursday, 28 September 2023</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	No Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	<b>Observations by Independent Members of Town and Community Council Committee Meetings</b>
Purpose of Report:	To provide the Committee with an overview of any observations undertaken since the last meeting
Report Owner:	Debbie Marles, Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Karen Bowen, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report does not require consultation to be undertaken
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for decision by the Standards Committee
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the roles of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives of the Council.</li> <li>• Feedback reports in respect of observations undertaken by Independent Members of Town and Community Councils (TCCs) are presented to the Monitoring Officer and verbal generic updates of the reports are presented to the Standards Committee by Independent Members on a regular basis. Any observations that require specific discussion with the Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council or Chair of a Committee and the Clerk / Chair of a TCC are undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and / or Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer. An overview and lessons learned report of all visits undertaken was also presented to the Standards Committee meeting in March 2022.</li> <li>• Independent Members of the Standards Committee have been forwarded a list of dates of future meetings of TCCs in order that further observation visits can be undertaken for 2022/23. With regard to Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings as Senior Officers and Democratic Services Officers attend the Council meetings the Monitoring Officer has requested that any matters are reported to her by officers.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendations**

1. That the report and the feedback received in respect of observation visits undertaken by Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town and Community Council meetings , if any, be noted.
2. That where matters following observation visits of Town and Community Council meetings are highlighted by Independent Members as issues requiring further attention or further visits and / or requests are made by the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services for visits to be undertaken these be arranged as and when required.
3. That a lessons learned report following all Town and Community Council Observations todate be presented to the January 2024 meeting of the Standards Committee for its consideration.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- (1-2) Having regard to the observations undertaken and the role of the Standards Committee.
- (3) To maintain a watching brief having regard to the role of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 There are a number of roles and functions of the Standards Committee, one of which is:
  - (a) To promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor Representatives of the Council.
- 1.2 As part of the Committee's work programme, it had been agreed that Independent Members of the Standards Committee would attend Vale of Glamorgan Council and Town and Community Council (TCC) meetings to observe meetings with a view to promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct in line with the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 1.3 Feedback reports would also be presented to the Monitoring Officer with verbal generic updates of the reports presented to the Standards Committee by the Independent Members following the observations. Any observations that require specific discussion with the Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council or the Clerk / Chair of a TCC are undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and / or Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.
- 1.4 The Monitoring Officer also provides TCC Clerks with an overview of observations undertaken at the Monitoring Officer and Clerks meetings which are held on a six monthly basis.
- 1.5 Having regard to resourcing implications and following the Monitoring Officer's recommendation at the meeting of the Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2022 it was accepted that as a number of Senior Officers and Democratic Services Officers

are present at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings, that such officers be requested to report to the Monitoring Officer any matters that may require attention and / or suggestions for improvement and that such matters subsequently be reported to the Standards Committee as appropriate.

- 1.6 It was however, agreed, that Independent Members would continue to undertake observation visits of TCC meetings on an annual basis and report to the Standards Committee as appropriate.
- 1.7 Chairs and Clerks of the TCCs are advised by Democratic Services of the dates of the meetings the Independent Member intends observing in order that arrangements for the agenda and the link to the virtual meetings can be forwarded to the Independent Member in time for the meeting.
- 1.8 It is recommended that following the observations visits that a lessons learned report be presented to the Standards Committee in January 2024, having regard to the observations undertaken and to include an overview of discussions held with relevant Chairs and Clerks of the Town and Community Councils as appropriate and any suggested improvements and good practice.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1 During the period of Coronavirus restrictions Independent Members' observations of TCC meetings were undertaken in the main on a virtual basis. This practice will continue if meetings are undertaken on a virtual basis however where meetings are in person only, the Independent Members will attend accordingly.
- 2.2 Following the visits the comments and /or any concerns of the Independent Members are fed back to the Clerks and / or Chair of the TCCs by the Monitoring Officer and / or Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer. The Independent Members also report to the next available Standards Committee meeting following their visits.
- 2.3 The Monitoring Officer has also drawn attention to generic good practice and areas of concern at the Monitoring Officer meetings with Clerks.
- 2.4 At the meeting of the Standards Committee in September 2022 it was also accepted that the Monitoring Officer may advise during the year that additional, specific TCC meetings be observed as required.
- 2.5 At the meeting of the Standards Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023 it was also agreed that where observations of TCC meetings are advised by Independent Members to have been managed effectively with no material issues identified, observations of such meetings be undertaken on a biennial basis as opposed to on an annual basis.
- 2.6 A copy of a list of TCC meetings to be undertaken in 22/ 23 was forwarded to Independent Standards Committee Members for their consideration during August 2022. The list is managed and updated within Democratic Services, as appropriate, with Independent Members being advised accordingly.

- 2.7 Independent Members were requested to choose the dates of the meetings they would be able to attend and inform Democratic Services in order that the schedule is kept up to date. To date two Town and Community Council Committee meetings have yet to be confirmed for a visit with Independent Members having been requested by email to advise Democratic Services of their availability to attend over the forthcoming months.
- 2.8 Outcome reports of visits that have taken place and any scheduled to take place over the next few months will continue to be presented to meetings of the Committee verbally by the Independent Members.
- 2.9 Where matters following observation visits of TCC meetings are highlighted by Independent Members as issues requiring further attention or further visits and / or requests are made by the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services for visits to be undertaken following concerns and / or complaints received it is recommended that such TCCs be observed as and when required. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting of discussions held with various Chairs/Clerks of Community Councils since the last meeting of this Committee by the Monitoring Officer and Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer.
- 2.10 Independent Members will present their findings verbally to Committee at this meeting in respect of any observation visits undertaken since the last meeting of the Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2023.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1 The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor Representatives. It is intended that the process adopted within this report will aim to promote that role.

### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1 None as a direct result of this report.

### **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

#### **Financial**

- 5.1 Members are able to be remunerated for attendance under the allowance scheme agreed by the Independent Remuneration Panel and the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Constitution.

#### **Employment**

- 5.2 Members will be remunerated for attendance under the allowance scheme agreed by the Independent Remuneration Panel and the Vale of Glamorgan

Council's Constitution. Independent Members are able to claim for a maximum of 10 days per annum as detailed within the Council's Constitution.

**Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.3 The Council has a duty to establish and maintain a Standards Committee as defined by legislation as set out in the Standards Committees Rules and Regulations 2001 and the Standards Committee (Wales) Amendment Regulations 2006.
- 5.4 The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor Representatives.

**6. Background Papers**