

No.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 30th January, 2025.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Present: R. Hendicott (Chair and Independent Member); Councillors J.E. Charles and C.P. Franks; R. Alexander and G. Watkins (Independent Members) and Councillor P. Summers (Town and Community Council Representative).

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from L. Tinsley (Vice-Chair) and G. Olphert (Independent Members) and Councillor R.M. Birch.

MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 21st November, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION (MO / HLDS) –

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that, at the time of the agenda dispatch for the meeting, no applications for dispensation had been received. However, as the next meeting of the Committee was not taking place until 27th March, 2025, the report was being included within the agenda should any applications be received in time for the meeting itself.

At the time of the meeting, no applications for dispensation had been received.

RESOLVED – T H A T it be noted that no applications for dispensation had been received.

No.

Reason for decision

No applications for dispensation, to comply with the regulations and obligations for the grant of dispensations to speak and vote at meetings, were received in time for consideration by the Committee at its 30th January, 2025 meeting.

OBSERVATIONS BY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL AND TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEETINGS (MO / HLDS) –

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services Officer advised that one of the roles of the Standards Committee was to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives of the Council.

To assist this process, in March 2018, Independent Members of the Standards Committee agreed to undertake observations at Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings and were reported to the Standards Committee. On 23rd June, 2022 having regard to resourcing implications it was accepted that as a number of Senior Officers and Democratic Services Officers were present at Vale of Glamorgan (VoG) Council meetings, that such officers be requested to report to the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services any matters that may require attention and / or suggestions for improvement and that such matters subsequently be reported to the Standards Committee as appropriate.

In March 2019, the process of observing Council meetings was also extended for Independent Members of the Standards Committee to observe and report their findings of Town and Community Council (TCC) meetings. On 8th June, 2023, the Committee subsequently agreed that where observations of TCC meetings were 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.

Feedback reports in respect of the observations undertaken were presented to the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services and verbal generic updates of the reports were presented to the Standards Committee by Independent Members on a regular basis. Any observations that required specific discussion with the Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council or Chair of a Committee and the Clerk / Chair of a TCC were undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and / or Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer. Generic overviews of observations were also provided to Clerks at the Monitoring Officer meetings with Clerks that took place on a six-monthly basis.

Following the Officer's introduction of the report, the Chair welcomed Committee's comments in relation to the effectiveness, breakdown of allocations and timeframe for completing observations. The consensus of the Committee was that the visits were a worthwhile exercise and that the allocation of 6 visits per Independent Member (5 x TCC and 1 x VoG) was not considered excessive over a two-year period.

No.

Conducting observations provided the Committee with the opportunity to assess if standards were being maintained since previous observations had taken place as well as offer invaluable support and a critical friend approach for TCCs.

The following suggestions of the Committee were also agreed:

- That, in terms of allocations, Independent Members be rotated across TCC visits to avoid any duplicated observations by the same Independent Member;
- An attempt would be made to conduct visits for half of the 26 TCCs within the 2025-26 Municipal year and the second half in the 2026-27 Municipal Year;
- TCCs to be given advance notice of the Independent Member Observation taking place; and
- Independent Members should remain mindful of the varying size and composition of TCCs when conducting observations.

In response to a question raised by the Chair in relation to the outcomes of the Boundary Commission for Wales's Community Review currently under consideration by Welsh Government Ministers, and the time remaining for the current Municipal term, the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that there were two Municipal years remaining until the next Local Government Elections and that the recommendations currently put forward by the Commission to Welsh Government could result in the total number of TCCs in the Vale of Glamorgan reducing from 26 to 19.

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services subsequently offered to provide an update to the Committee in relation to the outcomes of the Boundary Commission Community View at an appropriate time in the future and recommended that a view be taken at that time in relation to remaining TCC observations to be undertaken.

With no further comments or questions, the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T a schedule of observations visits of Vale of Glamorgan Council and Town and Community Council meetings be prepared and forwarded to the five Independent Members on the Standards Committee to commence from May 2025 to April 2027 when the timetable of the relevant Council meetings were known.

(2) T H A T the 26 Town and Community Councils be visited once in the period May 2025 to April 2027 by an Independent Member of the Standards Committee unless further visits were deemed to be required following the observations.

(3) T H A T the five Independent Members consider the Vale of Glamorgan Council timetable of meetings and undertake an observation of one meeting each in the period May 2025 to April 2027.

No.

(4) T H A T it be accepted that during any year the Monitoring Officer may advise that additional meetings of Vale of Glamorgan Council and Town and Community Councils be observed as considered appropriate.

(5) T H A T observations following the above visits be verbally reported by the Independent Member to the next available Standards Committee following the visits.

Reasons for decisions

(1-3) In order that a total of 6 observation visits be undertaken by each Independent Member of the Standards Committee, over a two year period could be undertaken during the Municipal Years 2025/26 and 2026/27, and that the timetable be assessed on an annual basis to align with the outcomes of the Boundary Commission for Wales Community Review currently under consideration by Welsh Government ministers.

(4) Having regard to any Code of Conduct matters.

(5) For information and consideration by the Standards Committee.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FORUM UPDATE (MO / HLDS) –

The report provided the Committee with an update regarding the meeting of the National Standards Committee Chairs Forum for Independent Standards Committee Members held remotely on 27th January, 2025.

The Chair of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Standards Committee provided a verbal update to Committee following their attendance at the Forum meeting, with it being noted that there was little progress to report in relation to the items included within the Forum agenda, as set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report, but Forum discussion remained very interesting and a useful comparison exercise with other Local Authorities.

In response to the Chair's query on the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) Civility & Respect Pledge, the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the matter was raised by themselves at the last Clerks/ Monitoring Officer meeting held in November 2024 and would continue to be a resource that they would refer Town and Community Council Clerks too when corresponding over any code of conduct complaints.

With no further comments or questions, the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the Agenda for the meeting of the National Standards Committee Chairs Forum be noted.

(2) T H A T the verbal update provided by the Chair relating to the discussions held at the Forum be noted.

No.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report, the verbal update provided and discussions at the meeting.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (MO/ HLDS) –

The Standards Committee agreed to establish a Forward Work Programme for the Committee in March 2018 and attached to the report at Appendix 1 was the suggested Forward Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2025/26 for Committee's consideration.

Standards Committee Members were reminded that the Council's Annual Meeting was scheduled to take place on 7th May, 2025 and the appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Standards Committee would be dealt with at the first meeting of the Standards Committee following the Annual Meeting. Also, that, having regard to the provision at Section 63 (which came into force on 5th May, 2022) of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, that as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year, a standards committee must make an annual report to the Local Authority.

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services also advised that within the work programme, reference had been made to a report in respect of a review of the Council's Protocol 'Standards of Conduct expected by Members under Section 19 of the Council's Constitution and the Council's Local Dispute Resolution Procedure (LDRP) for dealing with low level allegations of breaches of the Members Code of Conduct and the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Protocol. The review having been agreed by Full Council on 2nd December, 2024.

However, the Chair of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services, following recent discussions with Group Leaders having regard to the Group Leader duty under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 advised that a review by the Welsh Local Government Association in relation to ongoing work by the Local Government association regarding Civility in Public life was pending. The All-Wales Monitoring Officer Group were also due to consider the current LDRP process with a view to making suggestions for amendments to the procedure. It had therefore been suggested that the Standards Committee awaits the outcomes of discussions / suggestions in relation to the above matters prior to any review being undertaken.

With no comments or questions raised, the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED – T H A T the Forward Work Programme attached at Appendix 1 to the report be agreed.

Reason for decision

To agree a Forward Work Programme.

No.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (MO / HLDS) –

In line with the Committee's Forward Work Programme, it had previously been agreed that a standing item would appear on the Committee's agenda so that Committee could be apprised of correspondence with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and any matters arising.

With no comments or questions raised at this stage, the Committee subsequently

RESOLVED – T H A T the contents of the report be noted, having regard to the fact that any update on correspondence received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and any matters arising under Part II of the report, would be considered under Part II of the agenda.

Reason for decision

To apprise members of the Committee.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC -

RESOLVED – T H A T under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 4 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Act, the relevant paragraphs of the Schedule being referred to in brackets after the minute heading.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (MO / HLDS) (EXEMPT INFORMATION – PARAGRAPHS 12, 13 AND 14) –

As outlined at Part I of the agenda, it had been agreed by the Standards Committee that a standing item appear on the Committee's agenda in order that the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services would be able to apprise Standards Committee Members of correspondence received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the Ombudsman) on any matters arising, the items being confidential in nature in line with the Ombudsman's procedure.

RESOLVED – T H A T the confidential information provided by the Monitoring Officer / Head of Democratic and Legal Services at the meeting be noted.

Reason for decision

Having regard to correspondence received from the Ombudsman, noting that it was confidential at this stage.