

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2026.

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

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

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

Also present: Councillor L. Burnett (Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources).

### 631 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Principal 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”.

### 632 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from G. Olphert (Independent Member).

### 633 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 be approved as a correct record.

### 634 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

### 635 APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION (MO/HLDS) –

The purpose of the report was to consider applications for dispensation received from Councillors W.A. Hennessy and B.E. Brooks of the Vale of Glamorgan Council, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Monitoring Officer apprised the Committee on the applications presented and confirmed their agreement of the paragraph(s) under which dispensation may be granted, as applied for, in line with the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001.

Following careful consideration of the applications and having regard to the Monitoring Officer's advice above it was

**RESOLVED – T H A T** the dispensations as set out in the schedule below be granted up to the date of the next Local Government Elections:

<b>Member Requesting Dispensation</b>	<b>Paragraph(s) of the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 Under Which Dispensation is Granted and as applied for</b>	<b>Decision</b>
W.A. Hennessy	(d) and (f)	To Speak, Vote and remain in meetings of the Vale of Glamorgan and Barry Town Council when matters relating to the Vale of Glamorgan Age 50+ Forum are discussed.
B.E. Brooks	(d) and (f)	To Speak, Vote and remain in meetings of the Vale of Glamorgan and Barry Town Council when matters relating to the Vale of Glamorgan Placemaking Plans are discussed.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the applications submitted and discussions held at the meeting.

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

As part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, and in line with its statutory responsibilities, Independent Members of the Standards Committee undertook observations of Vale of Glamorgan Council (VoGC) and Town and Community Council (TCC) meetings. This initiative supported the Committee's aim of promoting

and maintaining high standards of conduct by observing how meetings were conducted in practice and offering constructive, impartial feedback.

The Chair advised that, since the 20<sup>th</sup> November Committee meeting, four further observations had taken place as follows:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Meeting Date</b>
Olfhert	Vale of Glamorgan Full Council	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025
Watkins	Sully and Lavernock Community Council	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2025
Alexander	Llancarfan Community Council	18 <sup>th</sup> December 2025
Watkins	Vale of Glamorgan Planning Committee	15 <sup>th</sup> January 2026

with Appendix 1 of the report setting out progress to date in relation to arranging future observations. The Appendix also set out that Officers were working to bring a proposal for observations to be held within the 2026 – 27 Municipal Year to the next Standards Committee meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

The relevant Independent Members went on to advise of their findings/comments in turn, in relation to the five TCC observations that had been undertaken to date. The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services provided verbal feedback on behalf of Mr. Olfhert who had provided their apologies for the meeting.

Feedback in the main was very positive. After which, the Committee discussed the following points:

Speaking time allocated to members of the public during Planning Committee meetings being too restrictive for planning matters.	<p>Public Speaking times at meetings of the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Committee were set as per the Public Speaking Policy included within the Council's Constitution. The meeting was conducted in accordance with the policy as agreed by Elected Members.</p> <p>Councillor Franks added that the speaking time limits in place encouraged focused representations from all sides and suggested that there was more concern around the limited meaningful public input earlier in the planning process prior to formal meetings.</p>
Recorded vote results being displayed too briefly on screen.	The vote display timing was standardised on the Vale of Glamorgan Council's hybrid meeting platform but controllable, by Democratic Officers, to

	align with the pace of the meeting at hand. However, all voting results were available on demand via the livestream recording of the meeting on the Council's YouTube channel for future reference as required.
Delays caused during the meeting as a result of attendee user error in engaging with remote controls/technology correctly.	Comments received in relation to Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings would be fed back to the Democratic Services Team for consideration.

In conclusion, the Monitoring Officer reassured the Committee that good practice following observation visits was shared and discussed at the six-monthly meetings with Clerks, which also afforded the opportunity to raise any generic issues of concern and to offer advice and guidance. Feedback was also provided to Chairs of TCCs on a 1-2-1 basis by the Monitoring Officer following observations where necessary.

As such, since the last Committee meeting, the Monitoring Officer had liaised with the Clerks of the following Councils: Llantwit Major, Penarth, St. Nicholas with Bonvilston, St. Athan and Dinas Powys; to discuss sharing of good practice and advice in respect of matters relating to good governance. Arrangements had also been made to liaise with the Clerks of the following Councils: Wenvoe, Cowbridge and Penllyn.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) THAT the reports and the feedback received in respect of observation visits undertaken by Independent Members of the Standards Committee be noted.
- (2) THAT where matters following observation visits were highlighted by Independent Members as issues requiring further attention or further visits and / or requests were made by the Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services for visits to be undertaken, those be arranged as and when required.
- (3) THAT a proposal for observations to be held within the 2026 – 27 Municipal Year be presented to Committee at its next meeting scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2026.

**Reasons for decisions**

- (1) Having regard to the observations undertaken and the role of the Standards Committee.
- (2) To maintain a watching brief having regard to the role of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.
- (3) To complete the two year observation cycle, as previously agreed by the Committee, having regard to the outcomes of the 2025 Boundary Commission for

Wales Community Review.

**637 STANDARDS COMMITTEE QUORACY – GOVERNANCE REVIEW, CLARIFICATION AND RATIFICATION OF DECISIONS (MO/HLDS) –**

The Monitoring Officer presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide an interim update on the report originally considered by the Committee at its 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2025 meeting.

The report was presented to the Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025 to seek the Committee's approval to ratify and confirm the dispensations granted at two meetings considered to be inquorate, in respect of two Members. The Committee subsequently resolved that the dispensations granted at the 29<sup>th</sup> July and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024 Committee meetings be confirmed to ensure that the relevant decisions were properly ratified and had full legal effect.

In relation to one other previous item considered by the Committee during 2024, the Monitoring Officer advised at the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025 Committee meeting that they were in consultation with the parties involved to address the procedural matter identified during the governance review to determine the most appropriate and proportionate resolution, and that a further report would be presented to the Committee in early 2026 once those discussions had concluded.

As such, the interim update report was presented to the Committee to advise that the Monitoring Officer had not yet received a formal response from the parties involved and was therefore required to recommend that the report be deferred to the March 2026 Standards Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED – T H A T the report be deferred to the March 2026 Standards Committee meeting.**

**Reason for decision**

To ensure that the outstanding procedural matter identified during the governance review was addressed appropriately and transparently, pending a consultation response being received from the relevant parties involved.

**638 ALL WALES MONITORING OFFICER GROUP UPDATE REPORT (MO/HLDS) –**

The report provided an update in respect of matters addressed at the last All Wales Monitoring Officer Group Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2025.

The Monitoring Officer apprised the Committee on the matters discussed at the meeting, as detailed in Section 2 of the covering report.

After which, the Chair noted that many of the same matters were also raised at the recent National Standards Committee Chairs Forum that they had recently attended, including the rise in vexatious Member-on-Member complaints.

Councillor Franks welcomed the focus on discouraging vexatious complaints but felt the Ombudsman could do more to educate the public.

In response to a subsequent question raised by Councillor Summers as to whether complaint levels had risen locally, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that there had been a series of Member-on-Member complaints in the past year, but none progressed to investigation, as they did not meet the Ombudsman's tests. A more detailed update would be provided under Part II of the agenda.

The Monitoring Officer added that, overall, local TCCs in the Vale were managing issues well, though newer clerks may require additional support. In relation to Welsh Government work on the TCC sector, national workshops had been held on governance and complaint-handling and Welsh Government and One Voice Wales were considering requiring mandatory training for TCC Members as part of the declaration of acceptance of office. This aimed to ensure better understanding of governance and the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted.
- (2) T H A T the verbal update provided by the Monitoring Officer at the meeting be noted.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) To apprise Committee.
- (2) Having regard to the information provided.

639 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES – RECENT TRIBUNAL DECISIONS (MO/HLDS) –

The Monitoring Officer advised that the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) was an independent body that adjudicated on alleged breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct, following referral by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

As part of the Standards Committee's role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and supporting Members to observe the Code, this report provided an opportunity to review and reflect on recent APW decisions.

A copy of the following decision notices were appended to the report:

- APW Tribunal Decision – APW/001/2025-026/CT Former Councillor Iwan Huws Gwynedd County Council;

- APW Tribunal Decision - APW/004/2024-25/CT Former Councillor Andrew Edwards - Pembrokeshire County Council.

The Committee was invited to consider whether there were any relevant lessons or themes arising from the decisions that should be shared with Elected and Co-opted Members or incorporated into training.

RESOLVED – T H A T the recent Adjudication Panel for Wales decisions, as appended to the report, be noted.

Reason for decision

To ensure the Committee was aware of and reflected on relevant tribunal decisions in the context of its duty to promote high standards of conduct.

640 CIVILITY IN PUBLIC LIFE – PROGRAMME OF WORK (MO/HLDS) –

The report updated Members of the Standards Committee on recent work associated with the Civility in Public Life Programme (“the Programme”) being led by the Local Government Association (LGA) in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

The Programme continued to address abuse, intimidation, and declining standards of discourse in public life, while promoting Councillor safety, transparency, and accountability.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the report built on the update provided in September 2025 and reflected UK-wide and Welsh developments reported during 2024/25, including the launch of the Defending Democracy Policing Protocol, the Debate Not Hate campaign evaluation, and a refreshed focus on online safety and democratic literacy.

With the Committee’s permission, Councillor Burnett was invited to address in their capacity as presiding member of the WLGA and therefore actively involved in the Programme, who provided a firsthand update as follows:

- There was a growing level of abuse and intimidation directed at Elected Members across the UK, increasingly described in national discussions as an “abuse and intimidation” crisis rather than simply a “civility” issue. They described personal examples illustrating the real-world risks faced by Councillors, including online targeting.
- Recent Wales-wide discussions involving Leaders, PCCs, and senior Police representatives had highlighted: the scale and severity of abusive behaviour toward elected representatives, the growing impact of politically-driven abuse, misinformation, disinformation, and “malinformation,” and concerns about manipulated or misleading social media clips being used to fuel online hostility.

- Police were considering expanding their planned focus on Senedd candidates to include local government candidates and Councillors.
- Leaders across Wales expressed the need for better mechanisms to challenge false statements, and encouragement of robust but respectful debate based on accurate information.

In conclusion, Councillor Burnett offered to arrange a separate session for Independent Members of the Committee, with WLGA officers also present, to explore the issues and data in more depth.

Following Councillor Burnett's representations, Councillor Charles shared her recent experiences of online hostility and expressed strong support for the Programme.

Councillor Franks raised the importance of ensuring that the Programme did not unintentionally suppress legitimate scrutiny or robust challenge, especially from opposition Members and emphasised that disagreement must not be mistaken for misconduct. To which, the Chair agreed that challenge should always be polite and focused on issues, not personal attacks and Councillor Burnett stressed the distinction between legitimate challenge and behaviour grounded in factually incorrect information as well as the need for mechanisms requiring Members who make assertions to be prepared to provide evidence to support them.

**RESOLVED –**

(1) T H A T the further progress being undertaken by the Local Government Association, Welsh Local Government Association and other UK associations on the programme of work be noted.

(2) T H A T the Vale of Glamorgan Council Leader's invitation to a further meeting to discuss the programme amongst Independent Members of the Committee be accepted.

**Reason for decisions**

(1) Having regard to the contents of the report for the Committee's information.

(2) To provide both the Independent Members and Town and Community Council Representative of the Standards Committee with the opportunity to discuss the programme in more detail.

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

The Monitoring Officer advised that the report before the Committee was a standard item on the Committee's Forward Work Programme and set out the communications that they had received from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). A Part II version of the report had also been provided to the Committee and therefore, the Monitoring Officer would provide an update to the Standards Committee at the

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meeting under Part II of the agenda in relation to recent correspondence and matters arising.

RESOLVED – T H A T the content of the report be noted, with an update on the correspondence with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and matters arising under the Part II report on the agenda be considered.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report subject to matters arising under the Part II report later on the agenda.

642 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.

643 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 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.

The Monitoring Officer therefore provided the Committee with a verbal update in respect of recent confidential correspondence with the Ombudsman.

RESOLVED – T H A T the confidential update on correspondence with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ('the Ombudsman'), as provided verbally by the Monitoring Officer, be noted.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the Part II report and discussions held at the meeting.