

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 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; J. Evans and G. Olphert (Independent Members); and Councillor P. Summers (Town and Community Council Representative).

Also present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson.

### 776 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”.

### 777 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE –

This was received from R. Alexander (Independent Member).

### 778 MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2026 be approved as a correct record.

### 779 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

Councillor P. Summers (Town and Community Council Representative) declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 – Applications for Dispensation. The applications presented related to Councillor Summer’s Community Council: Penllyn. However, the applications were requested to be noted and not approved by Committee Members, so Councillor Summers remained in the meeting for the item.

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

The purpose of the report was to note applications for dispensation received from Councillors S. Howells and M. Bancroft of Penllyn Community Council, as detailed in

Appendix 1 to the report since the last meeting of the standards committee, and in line with the prior agreement of the Committee that when applications for dispensation were required to be considered as a matter of urgency, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee be provided with the authority to consider such applications and to report to a future meeting such applications that have been agreed under the delegated authority.

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 the Monitoring Officer's presentation of the report, the Chair raised an amendment to the delegated authority that when applications for dispensation are required to be considered as a matter of urgency, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee be provided with the authority to consider and grant interim approval of such applications until the next scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee, whereby the applications would be presented to the entire Standards Committee for final ratification. This would allow the process to remain timely and seek approval from the entire Standards Committee.

Following careful consideration of the applications submitted, the amendment posed by the Chair, and having regard to the Monitoring Officer's advice above it was

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the applications for dispensation submitted by Community Councillors, as listed in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.
- (2) T H A T the Standards Committee agrees that when applications for dispensation are required to be considered as a matter of urgency, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee be provided with the authority to consider and grant interim approval of such applications until the next scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee, whereby the applications will be presented to the entire Standards Committee for final ratification.

#### Reasons for decisions

- (1) To comply with the regulations and obligations for the grant of dispensations to speak and vote at meetings.
- (2) To process applications received under this delegated authority in a timely manner, to the benefit of the applicant, and to meet the Standards Committee's role of granting dispensations to Councillors, Co-Opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct.

781 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 undertake observations of Vale of Glamorgan Council 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 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2026 Committee meeting, three further observations had taken place as follows:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Meeting Date</b>
Alexander	St. Nicholas and Bonvilston Community Council (2)	20 <sup>th</sup> January, 2026
Watkins	Barry Town Council	16 <sup>th</sup> February, 2026
Hendicott	Vale of Glamorgan Governance & Audit Committee	23 <sup>rd</sup> February, 2026

with Appendix 1 of the report setting out progress to date in relation to observations for the 2025 – 26 Municipal year that was now drawing to a close. The Appendix also set out the proposal for observations to be held within the 2026 – 27 Municipal Year amongst the five Independent Members.

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

Mr. Watkins reported positively on his observation of Barry Town Council’s hybrid meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, noting good attendance, effective meeting management and examples of good practice regarding declarations of interest and Part II agenda presentation. The Chair reported on his observation of the Vale of Glamorgan Governance and Audit Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2026, highlighting the lengthy duration of the meeting, some technical issues, low Member attendance, and unnecessary repetition in officer presentations, though overall the meeting was well-conducted. A written statement from Mr. Alexander was read, outlining his second observation of St Nicholas and Bonvilston Community Council on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2026; while the meeting began smoothly, it again became fractious due to the behaviour of a single Councillor, with the Chair required to intervene repeatedly.

In response to subsequent questions from the Committee, the Monitoring Officer confirmed the Standards Committee had no legislative powers to act directly in response to difficulties experienced by TCCs, but they continued to support clerks and address issues through established processes.

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, 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: St. Athan, Wenvoe, Cowbridge with Llanblethian, Sully and Lavernock, Llancafarn and Penllyn.

In conclusion, the Committee noted the verbal reports received, agreed that further visits be arranged where issues arise or when requested by the Monitoring Officer, and approved the proposed 2026/27 observation programme. The Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer also added that arrangements would now be made to obtain future meeting dates from relevant Councils and allocate observations to Independent Members accordingly.

#### RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the reports and the feedback received in respect of observation visits undertaken by Independent Members of the Standards Committee be noted.
- (2) T H A T where matters following observation visits 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) T H A T the proposal for observations to be held within the 2026 – 27 Municipal Year, as presented within Appendix 1 of the report, be agreed.

#### 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.

## 782 MONITORING OFFICER 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 the 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2026, noting extensive discussion on issues affecting Monitoring Officers and the Town and Community Council sector, including outcomes from Welsh Government workshops on local dispute resolution procedures. Welsh Government had requested feedback from Monitoring Officers on key points arising from that work and the Ombudsman’s representative also referred to a recent Merthyr Tydfil case involving a referral to that Authority’s Standards Committee, and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that a link to the report would be circulated and included in future Ombudsman updates. The meeting also highlighted increasing complexity in cases elsewhere in Wales involving allegations of bullying of officers by Elected Members and the practical difficulties faced by the Ombudsman in obtaining timely witness evidence, which could prolong investigations and present challenges for the officers concerned.

A further key issue discussed at the Monitoring Officer Group Meeting was the need for greater consistency in the delivery of mandatory Member Code of Conduct training across Wales; Welsh Government had suggested making such training compulsory, and Monitoring Officers had been asked to consider this.

The Monitoring Officer also advised that since publication of the report before Members, work had commenced nationally on induction planning for Councillors elected in May 2027, with a strong focus on the Code of Conduct. They had joined a WLGA-facilitated working group developing revised training materials, including enhanced workshop-style sessions and coverage of emerging issues such as misinformation, social media and the implications of AI technology, which were increasingly being experienced across Wales. As such, they confirmed that they would update the Committee as that work progressed.

In conclusion, the Monitoring Officer advised of the mid-year meetings recently held with all Political Group Leaders, which they and the Chair felt had been positive and constructive. Councillor Summers welcomed the feedback from the Monitoring Officer and noted that most, if not all, Vale Town and Community Councils already provided Code of Conduct and induction training and expressed broad support for such training being made mandatory.

## 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.

### 783 FEEDBACK REPORT: STANDARDS COMMITTEE PROCEDURES WORKING GROUP (MO/HLDS) –

The Monitoring Officer presented the feedback report of the Standards Committee Procedures Working Group, reminding Members that the review stemmed from a Full Council resolution of 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2024 to examine the Standards of Conduct principles (Section 19), the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure (LDRP), and the Standards Committee hearing procedure.

The Working Group met on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2025 to consider advice issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, review the LDRP, the hearing procedure and the relevant constitutional appendices. Key findings included confirmation that the LDRP should continue to apply only to low-level member-on-member complaints at principal Council level, rejecting its extension to officer complaints due to existing protocols and HR processes, and noting that Section 19 already captured examples of higher-level behaviours. The Group reaffirmed that LDRP use required the agreement of both parties and should not apply to public or officer complaints and suggested greater promotion of the procedure by Group Leaders and encouragement for Clerks and Town/Community Councils to seek Monitoring Officer advice before referring matters to the Ombudsman.

The Group also considered strengthening mediation arrangements, including the potential use of independent trained mediators supported through service level agreements with neighbouring Authorities. In respect of the hearing procedure, the Group noted the limited sanctions available and proposed removing the term “censure” and ensuring future hearing panel composition preserves impartiality.

Draft amendments to Section 19 and the LDRP, set out in Appendices 2 – 4, were presented for Committee approval. Members raised points regarding the need for a clear notice period where parties intended to bring legal representation, which would be aligned with existing timescales within the procedure; and the importance of progressing work on independent mediation, which the Monitoring Officer suggested being incorporated as a formal recommendation from the Committee.

The Committee endorsed the proposed amendments and the principle of appointing an external mediator, authorising the Monitoring Officer to explore potential service level agreements with neighbouring Authorities and to consult Political Group Leaders before submitting the revisions to Full Council as part of the constitutional housekeeping report.

### RESOLVED –

(1) T H A T the changes proposed by the Standards Committee Procedures Working Group, as set out in Appendices 2 – 4 of the report be noted subject to the following additional point being added to Appendix 3(a), paragraph 30:

- *“If either party decides to have legal representation at the Hearing, the Monitoring*

*Officer is to be notified **not less than five clear working days** in advance of the Hearing in order to inform the other party to ensure that the opportunity is available to seek legal representation.”*

(2) T H A T the point raised by Working Group Members (Appendix 2 – Agenda Item 5b – Row 9), in relation to the suggestion that a trained mediator be instructed to conduct the Stage 2 – Mediation part of the procedure, who is independent of the Vale of Glamorgan Council and whether a service level agreement could be established with other neighbouring Local Authorities, be taken forward for consultation with Political Group Leaders.

(3) T H A T all proposed changes and recommendations of the Standards Committee be shared with Political Group Leaders for comment, with any feedback to be reported back to the Monitoring Officer as appropriate.

(4) T H A T, subject to the outcome of Resolution (3) above, the Monitoring Officer be authorised to present the report and proposed amendments to the Constitution to Full Council for approval.

#### Reasons for decisions

(1) To ensure that the Standards Committee was fully informed of the work undertaken by the Procedures Working Group, and the rationale for the proposed amendments arising from its review, including the addition to Appendix 3(a), paragraph 30, to provide clarity to all parties and avoid any unnecessary delays to hearings being arranged.

(2) To further explore the requirements set out in paragraph 19 of Appendix 3(a) that currently stated that mediation meetings would be chaired by the Vale of Glamorgan Chief Executive, or a nominated Director as determined by the Chief Executive, however the Working Group were concerned that the mediation stage put the Monitoring Officer and/or any other Vale of Glamorgan Officer involved in a difficult position, as they were required to collaborate with the Elected Members involved once the matter had concluded.

(3) To enable Group Leaders to provide comments on the proposed changes ahead of formal consideration by Full Council, ensuring transparency and cross-party engagement in the review process.

(4) To allow the Monitoring Officer to take forward the necessary constitutional amendments for approval by Full Council, subject to feedback received, in accordance with the statutory requirements for updating the Council’s Constitution.

#### 784 STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME (MO/HLDS) –

The Monitoring Officer presented the Forward Work Programme (FWP) for the 2026/27 Municipal year, noting that the Vale of Glamorgan Council meetings calendar had been agreed on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, and that future Standards Committee meeting dates were now reflected in the appended plan (Appendix 1).

The first meeting of the new Municipal year for the Committee was scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2026 and would include the appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair.

The re-formatted plan introduced a clearer layout distinguishing rolling items – such as dispensations, Independent Member observations, Monitoring Officer updates, and quarterly correspondence with the Public Services Ombudsman – from items scheduled for specific months, including the annual review of Group Leader duties, Ombudsman and Adjudication Panel updates, and the Standards Committee Annual Report.

Proposed operational changes included consolidating national standards updates into a single Monitoring Officer report, adjusting the July 2026 meeting start time to 11:00 a.m. to accommodate officer availability, and scheduling a provisional April 2027 meeting subject to pre-election restrictions ahead of the May 2027 local elections.

Members raised no substantive comments, although the Chair noted that some meeting dates may require adjustment to accommodate availability, suggesting that multiple date options be offered for each meeting period to ensure quorum.

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

#### Reason for decision

To discuss and agree a Forward Work Programme for the Municipal year ahead that would thereon be managed by the Chair of the Committee in consultation with the Council's Monitoring Officer.

#### 785 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 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 ('the Ombudsman') and matters arising under the Part II report on the agenda be considered.

#### Reason for decision

To apprise Members of the Committee.

## 786 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.

## 787 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 discussion held at the meeting.