Agenda Item No: 5

Meeting of:	Standards Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 26 November 2026
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	No Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Item which the Chair has decided is urgent (Part I) **(If yes, why)**	Not applicable
Urgent Decision Procedure Used (15.14 of the Constitution) **(If yes, why)**	Not applicable
Item Type	Part I
Report Title:	**Monitoring Officer Update Report**
Portfolio Holder:	No Relevant Cabinet Member
Strategic Leadership Team:	Director of Corporate Resources
Lead Officer:	Victoria Davidson, Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services

1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 The report provides an update on matters considered at the All Wales Monitoring Officers Group meeting held on the 2nd October 2026 which are relevant to the Standards Committee's statutory responsibilities for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct.

2.0 What are the Recommendations?

	Recommendations – What and How?	**Reason for Recommendation – Why?**
2.1	T H A T the contents of the report be noted.	To apprise Committee.
2.2	T H A T the verbal update provided by the Monitoring Officer at the meeting be noted.	Having regard to the information provided.

3.0 What is the background to this report?

3.1 The All Wales Monitoring Officers' Group (MOG) of all Local Authorities in Wales including National Park Authorities, South Wales Police and Fire and Rescue Authorities meets on a regular basis to share good practice, receive and consider advice, as well as acting as a consultee on occasions by organisations including Welsh Government, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's office (PSOW) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

4.0 What issues are there to be considered?

Topics arising from the All Wales Monitoring Officer Group (MOG) Meeting held on the 2nd October 2026.

4.1 The Committee may wish to note that the PSOW has commenced preparatory work to undertake a comprehensive review of the statutory guidance relating to the Members' Code of Conduct. The intention is to complete the review prior to the 2027 local government elections.

The review will consider whether the current guidance remains effective, identify areas where greater clarity is required and explore opportunities to make the guidance more accessible for elected members. This includes consideration of alternative formats such as digital resources, short guidance modules and explanatory videos.

Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees are expected to have opportunities to contribute to the review.

4.2 A significant proportion of discussion at the meeting focused on the increasing number of complaints arising from members' use of social media and the application of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of expression).

The Ombudsman's Office advised that social media continues to be the most common theme arising in complaints and that complaint volumes often increase in advance of local government elections. Concerns were expressed nationally that some members misunderstand the scope of Article 10 protections and incorrectly view decisions not to investigate particular complaints as permission to continue inappropriate conduct online.

Monitoring Officers and Standards Committee representatives stressed the importance of clear guidance and training to help members understand the distinction between protected political expression and conduct which may amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct.

The Committee may wish to note these emerging themes when considering future member development activity and ethical standards promotion within the Council.

4.3 Work is underway nationally to update ethics and standards training materials for councillors in advance of the next local government elections.

The revised materials will include guidance relating to:

- the Members' Code of Conduct;
- standards of behaviour and ethical decision-making;
- the use of social media;
- misinformation and disinformation;
- the use of artificial intelligence; and
- wider conduct issues arising from online engagement.

The updated resources are intended to support consistent standards training across Welsh local authorities.

4.4 Discussion at the MOG meeting reinforced the importance of the statutory duties placed upon leaders of political groups to take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst members of their groups.

The Committee may wish to note that national work continues to support councils in developing approaches to member conduct, ethical leadership and standards promotion, particularly in advance of the 2027 local government elections.

4.5 The Ombudsman's Office reminded Monitoring Officers of the importance of effective engagement with town and community councils during investigations and standards matters. Authorities were encouraged to support clerks and elected members in understanding their obligations under the Members' Code of Conduct and responding promptly to requests for information.

This remains an area of relevance to the Committee in discharging its standards functions in relation to Community Councils within the Vale of Glamorgan.

4.6 Further training opportunities are being developed nationally for Standards Committees, Monitoring Officers and Deputy Monitoring Officers. Discussions are also taking place with the Adjudication Panel for Wales regarding hearing procedures, standards determinations and related governance matters.

The Monitoring Officer will bring details of relevant training opportunities to the Committee as they become available.

4.7 Monitoring Officers across Wales reported a significant increase in correspondence, complaints and information requests generated using artificial intelligence tools. Concerns were raised regarding the increasing volume and complexity of such correspondence and the associated impact on public sector resources.

Discussion took place regarding the potential development of guidance to assist authorities in managing repetitive, unreasonable or vexatious correspondence whilst continuing to ensure legitimate concerns are appropriately considered.

Whilst this work remains at an early stage, the Committee may wish to note this emerging issue as a developing governance and standards challenge across the public sector.

Full Council debate on Section 19 of the Council's Constitution and the Findings of the Standards Committee Working Group.

4.8 The Committee may also wish to note that Full Council at its meeting on the 5th October 2026 has now considered and approved amendments to Section 19 of the Council's Constitution relating to member conduct and standards arrangements following detailed consideration by the Standards Committee Procedures Working Group and subsequent consultation with Political Group Leaders.

4.9 During the debate, members expressed a range of views regarding the proposed amendments. Matters raised included the practical application of provisions relating to misinformation and social media activity, the position of independent members within the standards framework, the composition of Standards Committee hearing arrangements, the nature of available sanctions, and the balance between informal dispute resolution and public transparency. Some members voiced concerns regarding specific elements of the proposals, whilst others supported the revised arrangements as a proportionate and modernisation focused approach to promoting high standards of conduct.

4.10 Following debate, a recorded vote was undertaken. Twenty nine members voted in favour of adopting the revised constitutional provisions, twenty two members voted against the proposals and one member abstained. Full Council subsequently approved the amended Section 19 of the Constitution, including the Standards of Conduct Principles, the Protocol: Standards of Conduct Expected by Members and the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure.

Standards Committee Annual Report – endorsement by Full Council on the 5th October 2026.

4.11 Committee may wish to note that Full Council considered the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2025/26 at its meeting held on the 5th October 2026. The report, which had previously been approved by the Standards Committee, was presented to Council in accordance with the requirements of Section 63 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

4.12 During the debate, members acknowledged the work of the Standards Committee and the importance of its role in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct across the Council and within Town and Community Councils. Positive comments were made regarding the breadth of activity undertaken by the Committee during the reporting period and the level of detail contained within the Annual Report.

4.13 Some discussion also took place regarding the composition of the Committee and the background and experience of Independent Members. Views were expressed that the Committee benefits from independent scrutiny and that consideration should continue to be given to ensuring a broad range of skills, perspectives and experience amongst its membership. Questions were also raised regarding the operation of standards processes and the presentation of information within the Annual Report.

4.14 Following consideration of the report, Full Council resolved to endorse the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2025/26. Council also agreed that the finalised report should be circulated to Town and Community Council Clerks across the Vale of Glamorgan and provided to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

4.15 The endorsement of the Annual Report provides assurance that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations in relation to standards and ethical governance and reflects the Committee's ongoing work in promoting high standards of conduct, supporting member development and overseeing compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

5.0 How has evidence been used to inform the report, including the views of others?

5.1 This report is informed by discussions and updates received at the All Wales Monitoring Officers Group meeting held on the 2nd October 2026, together with information provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and other national governance bodies, including Lawyers in Local Government.

5.2 The report also reflects current developments in national guidance and emerging good practice relating to standards, ethics and governance, together with information shared by Monitoring Officers to support consistency of approach across Welsh local authorities.

5.3 The contents of this report are provided to ensure that the Standards Committee is kept informed of relevant national developments which may influence its work and the promotion of high standards of conduct within the Authority.

5.4 The report reflects the decision of Full Council on the 5th October 2026 to approve amendments to Section 19 of the Council's Constitution following recommendations from the Standards Committee Procedures Working Group and consultation with Political Group Leaders. The outcome demonstrates the Council's ongoing commitment to maintaining and strengthening its standards and ethical governance framework.

5.5 The report also reflects Full Council's endorsement of the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2025/26. The Annual Report provides an overview of the Committee's activities during the financial year and demonstrates the continuing importance of its role in

promoting high standards of conduct, supporting ethical governance and maintaining public confidence in the Council's decision-making arrangements.

6.0 What are the next steps if the recommendations are approved?

6.1 The Monitoring Officer will continue to represent the Council at meetings of the All Wales Monitoring Officers' Group and will keep the Committee informed of relevant developments relating to standards, ethics and governance.

6.2 Any national guidance, best practice or legislative developments arising from future meetings will be considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the Council's procedures, member development and governance arrangements.

7.0 How does this report support Vale 2030 and Reshaping?

7.1 The report supports the Council's commitment to strong governance, openness and accountability by keeping the Standards Committee informed of national developments relating to ethical standards and governance.

7.2 Maintaining effective ethical governance arrangements contributes to public confidence in the Council's decision-making and supports the delivery of high-quality, accountable public services in accordance with the Council's corporate objectives.

8.0 How does this demonstrate the Five Ways of Working?

8.1 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 with the sharing of good practice.

Resources

9.0 Finance

9.1 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 for approved duties.

10.0 Workforce

10.1 Independent Members are appointed for a period of not less than 4 no more than 6 years in accordance with Regulation 18(i) of the Standards Committees (Wales Regulations) 2001 (as amended) as amended by Regulation 28a of the Local Government (Standards Committees Investigations, Dispensations and Referral) (Wales) Amendment Regulations 2016 and may be re-appointed for one further consecutive term not exceeding 4 years.

11.0 Legal and Equalities

11.1 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.

12.0 Key Contacts

12.1 Who are the primary officers to contact with any comments and/or queries on the report?

Lead Officer:	Democratic Services Officer:
Victoria Davidson Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services vdavidson@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk	Amy Rudman Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer 07784 239 277 arudman@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Background Documents

Report – 30th July 2026 – Monitoring Officer Update Report.

Report – 26th March 2026 - Monitoring Officer Update Report.

Report – 29th January 2026 - Monitoring Officer Update Report.

Report – 17th July 2025 - Monitoring Officer Update Report.