

No.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote Meeting held on 21st November, 2024.

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; G. Watkins (Independent Member) and Councillor P. Summers (Town and Community Council Representative).

ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Principal Democratic 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 R. Alexander, G. Olphert and L. Tinsley (Independent Members) and Councillor R.M. Birch.

MINUTES –

RESOLVED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 26th September, 2024 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations of interest were received.

APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION (MO/HLDS) –

The purpose of the report was to consider an application for dispensation from Councillor E.J. Goodjohn of the Vale of Glamorgan Council as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report. The Principal Democratic Services Officer also advised the Committee that following a recent discussion Councillor Goodjohn had also requested that the application be considered in respect of her role as a Member of Barry Town Council should such matters be required to be considered by that Council at its meetings.

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

Member Requesting Dispensation	Paragraph(s) of the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 Under Which Dispensation is Granted and as applied for	Decision
Councillor E.J. Goodjohn	(d) and (f)	To speak and vote on general matters and speak only on finance and property matters when matters relating to Newydd Housing Association are to be discussed at Vale of Glamorgan Council and Barry Town Council meetings.

Reason for decision

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

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF INVESTIGATIONS BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES – CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS (HLDS / MO) –

The purpose of the report was to enable the Committee to consider the Report of the Independent Review of Investigations by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) into Code of Conduct Complaints published on 27th September, 2024.

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Democratic and Legal Services apprised the Committee on the primary goal of the independent review, as detailed in Section 1 of the report, to evaluate the PSOW's Code of Conduct Team's processes, delegations, and decisions related to complaint assessment and investigation by the Code Team and Former Code Team Manager. The review aimed to confirm that the said procedures were unbiased, politically neutral, and identify lessons to be learned.

The Officer also drew the Committee's attention to the various appendices for the report which included a statement from the PSOW endorsing the seven recommendations that had arisen as a result of the review, and were detailed in full within Section 2 of the report.

RESOLVED – The Independent Review of Investigations by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales into Code of Conduct complaints be noted.

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Reason for decision

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

UPDATE REPORT NATIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS FORUM
WALES (MO / HLDS) –

The Chair of the Committee advised of their regular attendance at meetings of the Forum, the last being in June 2024 and the next scheduled for January 2025, and advised that the Forum was developing over time and was both an interesting and reassuring opportunity to hear how other Standards Committees were dealing with matters.

Subsequently, following a point raised at the Monitoring Officers Group meeting on 4th October, 2024, the Standards Committee's view on proposed agenda items for the upcoming Forum meeting in January 2025 were currently being sought. Therefore, any recommendations of the Committee would be reviewed at the next Monitoring Officer Group meeting in December 2024, with a view to finalising the next Forum agenda in consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) during December 2024.

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Democratic and Legal Services drew the Committee's attention to three proposed agenda items set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report, one of which being a potential review of the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure (LDRP) for Elected Members, that they would be fully supporting and, in a position to provide future updates on any subsequent amendments to the procedure given their role on the LDRP Review Working Group.

In response to a question posed by Councillor Franks as to whether the threshold/ levels of complaints that were referred to the Committee would be reviewed, the Monitoring Officer / Head of Democratic and Legal Services advised that the point was ultimately a matter for the Ombudsman to decide. However, it was intended that further information be brought to a future meeting of the Committee in relation to the various processes of dealing with low level complaints received by the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Summers then queried if there were any particular concerns in relation to the current LDRP that would steer the related review. In reply, the Monitoring Officer/ Head of Democratic and Legal Services advised that they were unable to provide any specific details at such an early stage in the review however, pre-cursory discussions had related to the nature of the LDRP becoming quite adversarial and therefore a wholesale review was felt necessary. The experiences of both Monitoring Officers and Members who had previously applied the procedure would be fed back as part of the review and the Committee's views on the same were also welcomed.

In conclusion, Mr. Watkins stated that the process of dealing with a Standards Committee hearing once referred to the Committee by the Ombudsman was very

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cumbersome and therefore hoped that the hearing procedure could be simplified in the future. The Chair echoed Mr. Watkins' comments and noted that there were also implications as to how the Ombudsman prepared the case.

The Monitoring Officer / Head of Democratic and Legal Services thanked Committee for their comments and advised that a future report was intended for the Committee's consideration in relation to a review of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's internal procedure for Standard Committee hearings.

RESOLVED – T H A T the National Standards Committee Chairs Forum Wales update report be noted.

Reason for decision

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

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.

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

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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.