

Minutes of the Meeting of ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE held Hybrid at Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Friday, 19 July 2024

PRESENT: Ms Gail Storr & Mr Alan Davies (Independent Members)

Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Elected County Members)
Cllr Delyth James -Town & Community Representative

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Elin Prysor (Monitoring Officer)
Mrs Lisa Evans (Scrutiny and Standards Officer)
Mrs Dana Jones (Democratic and Standards Officer)
Mrs Patricia Armstrong (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

(10:00am-12:05pm)

1 Procedure

In the absence of the Chair, the vice chair, Ms Gail Storr chaired the meeting.

2 Apologies

Miss Caryl Davies and Ms Carol Edwards apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

Councillor Caryl Roberts was excused from the meeting as in accordance with the constitution of the committee the quorum of the Committee was required to have at least three members present; and at least half the members present (including the Chairperson) were Independent Members.

3 Personal Matters

None.

4 Personal/Prejudicial Interest

Ms Elin Prysor declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 6 (a) to 6 (d) and the Deputy Monitoring Officer was present to advise Members of the Committee during these items.

Mrs Dana Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 6 (a) to 6 (d) and the Scrutiny and Standards Officer took the minutes for these items.

5 To confirm as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Ethics & Standards Committee held on 06 March 2024

It was RESOLVED to confirm as a true record of the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 06 March 2024

6 To confirm as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Ethics & Standards Committee held on 01 May 2024

It was RESOLVED to confirm as a true record of the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 01 May 2024.

7 To consider the following application for dispensations:-

8 Councillor Elizabeth Ryder, New Quay Town Council

An Application dated the 27 June 2024 was received from Councillor Elizabeth Ryder, New Quay Town Council to speak and vote upon the

Planning application for affordable/social housing in the top car park (off Park St) by Barcud Housing. Her son, niece and nephew owned and runned the Water Street car park in New Quay, if housing was agreed to Barcud it would mean the loss of car parking spaces in the top car park (off Park Street), this could result in cars having to look for parking elsewhere and could potentially result in her family's car park having more cars. She did not benefit personally in any way from the business financially or from any land/property ownership

It was RESOLVED to grant Councillor Ryder a dispensation to speak only on the grounds that the nature of the members' interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business, (regulation 2 (d) of the Standards Committees (Grant Dispensations)(Wales) Regulations 2001). The dispensation was granted for a period of 12 months.

9 Councillor Helen Swan Jones, New Quay Town Council

An Application dated the 27 June 2024 was received from Councillor Helen Swan Jones, New Quay Town Council to speak and vote upon the proposed housing development on Towyn Road Car Park, Uplands Square, New Quay by Barcud. A pre application by Barcud had already been submitted, and they public meeting had been held. NQTC have not discussed the application due to predetermination as advised by Clerk. The Clerk had been informed that the full planning application by Barcud would be submitted soon. Councillor Jones lived in the rented property in Uplands Square which was opposite the proposed housing development.

It was RESOLVED to grant Councillor Swan Jones a dispensation to speak only on the grounds that the nature of the members' interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business, and the interest is common to the member and a significant proportion of the general public (regulation 2 (d) and (e) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations)(Wales) Regulations 2001). The dispensation was granted for a period of 12 months.

10 Councillor Tomas Davies, New Quay Town Council

An Application dated the 28 June 2024 was received from Councillor Tomas Davies, New Quay Town Council to speak and vote upon the land at central

car park New Quay. His brother owned a property adjacent to the proposed development area.

It was RESOLVED to grant Councillor Davies a dispensation to speak only on the grounds that the nature of the members' interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business. (regulation 2 (d) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations)(Wales) Regulations 2001). The dispensation was granted for a period of 12 months.

11 Councillor Ywain Davies, New Quay Town Council

An Application dated the 28 June 2024 received from Councillor Ywain Davies, New Quay Town Council to speak and vote upon the Barcud - social housing development at New Quay car park. His brother (Rhys Davies) owner of Morgan and Davies Estate Agents was the agent for the Williams family that sold the land to Barcud. Morgan and Davies had no further involvement in this land.

It was RESOLVED to grant Councillor Davies a dispensation to speak and vote on the grounds that the nature of the members' interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business, (regulation 2 (d) of the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations)(Wales) Regulations 2001). The dispensation was granted for a period of 12 months.

12 Action Log

It was AGREED to note the content of the Action Log as presented.

13 Update on Adjudication Panel for Wales matters

It was AGREED to note the content.

14 Quarterly report on trends of complaints- Q4 23/24

It was AGREED to note the content.

It was reported that an upcoming APW trial was due to be held on former Councillor Steve Davies.

15 Ethics and Standards Annual Report 2023/24

Consideration was given to the draft Ethics and Standards Annual Report 2023/24. It was AGREED to approve the draft Ethics and Standards Committee Annual Report, 2023/24 prior to presentation to Council subject to minor amendments on dates, adding photo/biography of one Member and spelling.

16 Code of conduct training for Town and Community Councils

Consideration was given to the Code of Conduct training for Town and Community Council. It was AGREED following discussion that:-

(i) officers would compile an email and circulate to Members with their proposals and preferences for forthcoming Code of Conduct training; and (ii) that Leaders of the political groups be requested to inform their Group Members of the need to inform their respective Town or Community Council of the need to respond to the email circulated on the Committees request for Code of Conduct training, even if they did not wish to receive training.

17 Political Group Leaders Compliance Assessment

Consideration was given to the Political Group Leaders Compliance Assessment. It was reported that a workshop had taken place with the group leaders on 5th June 2024, namely:

- Cllr Bryan Davies (Plaid Cymru)
- Cllr Elizabeth Evans (Liberal democrats)
- Cllr Rhodri Evans (Independent group)

The Political Group Leaders found the monthly meetings with the Monitoring Officer very effective and gratefully received. Discussion around the most suitable time for the group leaders to meet with the Ethics and Standards Committee took place and it was agreed that it would be better if the official meeting to take place in the autumn rather than January due to the pressures that surround the setting of the budget in January. The political group leaders were also willing to attend at other times of the year if the necessity arose.

The timetable for the municipal year was agreed as follows:

- Workshop following the AGM (end of May/beginning of June)
- Political Group Leaders to attend an Ethics and Standards Committee meeting in the Autumn (September/October)
- Workshop at the end of the municipal year (May – prior to the AGM)

At a workshop held on 29 April 2024 the Committee met with the Political Group Leaders individually the Committee assessed the extent to which whether political group leaders had :

1. taken reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by group members
2. co-operated with the Committee in exercise of its functions
3. any training needs

The Committee' assessment was that:

- The group leaders had taken reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by group members, and had done so in a meaningful way;
- Political Group Leaders engage and co-work with the Ethics and Standards Committee;
- It is positive that there are not a high number of referrals to PSOW;
- Include mandatory training on the compliance template;
- Include additional training which the Ethics and Standards Committee has asked for on the compliance template;

- Members that have not already done social media training, should do so (if they use social media)
- Political Group Leaders are to share PSOW and APW reports with their group and discuss at group meetings;
- The Political Group Leaders found the monthly meetings with the Monitoring Officer very effective and gratefully received.

The following amendments to the compliance template were proposed:

- Amend the template to make it easier to use and for Political Group Leaders to provide the information that the Ethics and Standards Committee require;
- reword headings;
- make it more structured;
- Yes/no comments evidence box;
- Ensure the template is not too open ended;
- Add previous year' recommendations to the template.

The compliance threshold was therefore deemed to be:

- mandatory training to be added to the compliance template;
- additional training to be added to the compliance template;
- Members that have not already done social media training, should do so (if they use social media)
- Political Group Leaders are to share PSOW and APW reports with their group and discuss at group meetings

The political Group Leaders Compliance Template was then discussed. The Political Group Leaders felt that the questions were too open and the information required by the Committee may be missed. Emphasis was placed on the requirement of detail and evidence. It was agreed to establish a working group of the Committee to review the template. The number of members that had attended Social Media training was to be added to the template. It was agreed that membership of the working group would be Caryl Davies, Gail Storr, Alan Davies and the Monitoring officer. The template had been reviewed: Political Group Leader Compliance Questionnaire.

It was AGREED to note the current position that it would be included in the Ethics and Standards Annual Report.

18 Report of the workshop with Political Group Leaders at the beginning of the municipal year and review of the Political Group Leaders Compliance Assessment Template

The Ethics & Standards Committee retains independence from operational matters and would request Group Leaders to report once per year. The Committee thereafter meet with each group leader informally to explore their report.

The Ethics & Standards Committee Chair' annual report would contain:

- a) short summary of steps taken by group leaders to fulfill the duty,

- b) its opinion on whether sufficient had been done,
- c) any recommendations as to what may be done by group leaders to fulfill their duties,
- d) any recommendations as to what may be done to evidence the group leaders' actions,
- e) any recommendations as to what may be done to improve the reporting mechanism,
- f) what additional training if any was required,
- g) any future pieces of work that might be undertaken etc.

Group leaders completed their reports by 15/4/24. A workshop took place with each group leader individually on 29/4/24 with:

- Cllr Bryan Davies (Plaid Cymru)
- Cllr Elizabeth Evans (Liberal democrats)
- Cllr Gareth Lloyd (Independent group)

The Committee assessed the extent to which whether political group leaders had :

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2. co-operated with the Committee in exercise of its functions
3. any training needs

The Committee' assessment was that:

- The group leaders had taken reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by group members, and had done so in a meaningful way;
- Political Group Leaders engage and co-work with the Ethics and Standards Committee;
- It is positive that there are not a high number of referrals to PSOW;
- Include mandatory training on the compliance template;
- Include additional training which the Ethics and Standards Committee has asked for on the compliance template;
- Members that have not already done social media training, should do so (if they use social media)
- Political Group Leaders are to share PSOW and APW reports with their group and discuss at group meetings;
- The Political Group Leaders found the monthly meetings with the Monitoring Officer very effective and gratefully received.
- The following amendments to the compliance template were proposed:
 - Amend the template to make it easier to use and for Political Group Leaders to provide the information that the Ethics and Standards Committee require;
 - reword headings;
 - make it more structured;
 - Yes/no comments evidence box;
 - Ensure the template is not too open ended;
 - Add previous year' recommendations to the template.

It was AGREED to

(i) note how group leaders and the Committee would work together, agreed frequency of meetings and compliance threshold; and

(ii) agree the revised reporting mechanism: PGL Compliance Questionnaire subject to reviewing the forms of questions annual, due to change

19 National Standards Chairs forum minutes 29/1/24

It was AGREED to note the minutes for information subject to noting that a further meeting had been held on the 24 June 2024 and the Chair would report on it at the next meeting together with the issues raised on the content by a Member of the committee including status of the Forum.

20 The Public Services Ombudsman Code of Conduct Findings

It was AGREED to note the Public Services Ombudsman Code of Conduct Findings

21 Forward Work Programme

It was AGREED to note the content of the Forward Work Programme as presented subject to noting that the hearing had been rearranged from the 31 July 2024 to the 23 August 2024. An additional Hearing had been arranged for the 24 September 2024, subject to availability of Members of the Committee to attend.

22 To consider any other applications for dispensation received since the agenda was published

None.

**Confirmed at the Meeting of the Ethics and Standards Committee held
on 23 August 2024**

Chairman: _____

Date: _____