

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Ethics and Standards Committee

Date of meeting: 10 January 2024

Title: Feedback from the political group leaders compliance assessment workshop

Purpose of the report: To ensure compliance with the Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021: S62 and S63

Background

Group leaders are subject to two new statutory duties:

- i. To take reasonable steps to promote and maintain good standards of behaviour amongst their group members
- ii. To co-operate with the Standards Committee in the exercise of the standards committee's functions.

Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021: S62

Group leaders could be deemed to be bringing their office into disrepute under the councillors' code of conduct by not fulfilling the duties; duty does not make group leaders accountable for behaviour of their members.

The Ethics & Standards Committee is under a duty to:

- a) monitor compliance by leaders of political groups on the council with their duties, and
- b) to advise, train or arrange to train leaders of political groups on the council about matters relating to those duties.

Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021: S63

The Ethics & Standards Committee is also under a duty to prepare an annual report which:

- a) must include the committee's assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the council have complied with their duties, and
- b) may include recommendations or comment on levels of compliance with these new duties.

Consideration was given to the first Political Group Leaders Compliance Assessment at the Ethics and Standards Committee meeting held on 5th June 2023. Group leaders had completed their reports by 20 April 2023. A workshop had taken place with each group leader individually on 15 May 2023:

- 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:

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.

Current Situation

There has been an amendment to the consolidated statutory and non statutory guidance for principal councils in Wales at Part 2, Section 6.0, paragraph 6.4.

The guidance has been amended to read that standards committees (as opposed to standards committee chairs) should meet with group leaders at the beginning of each council year to agree a number of issues.

The updated guidance has been published on the following links and shared with the Committee previously:

[Statutory and non-statutory guidance on democracy within principal councils | GOV.WALES](#)

[Canllawiau statudol ar ddemocratiaeth o fewn prif gynghorau | LLYW.CYMRU](#)

The compliance assessment template was reviewed and amended in light of the final guidance at the meeting of Ethics and Standards Committee on 15 November 2023.

The Committee held a workshop with group leaders on 17th November 2023. The following were considered:

- Reporting mechanism
- Feedback mechanism
- Meeting Frequency
- Threshold for assessment.

Specifically the workshop considered:

4.36 At the beginning of each council year Political group leaders should meet with the standards committee to agree the following:

- How group leaders and the standards committee will work together to ensure appropriate standards of behaviour;
- Frequency of meetings between group leaders and the standards committee throughout the year;
- The threshold which the standards committee will use to establish whether it is content that political group leaders have complied with the duties of the 2021 Act;
- The mechanism for political group leaders to provide reports to the standards committee about the actions they have taken to comply with the duties within the 2021 Act.

The following conclusions were drawn from the workshop:

How we will work together

- Meet according to agreed schedule,
- Assess according to agreed threshold,
- Reporting annually via template giving appropriate evidence
- Two way feedback.

Frequency of meetings

- Group leaders are to attend one formal meeting per year (this will be kept under review each year) (January 2024),
- An informal workshop at the start of the municipal year in line with paragraph 4.36 of the statutory guidance (May 2024),
- An informal workshop to undertake assessment of compliance, which will take place in April annually. The Committee will meet individually with the political group leaders to consider their compliance assessment,
- There will be an open invitation for group leaders to attend any formal meeting of the Ethics and Standards Committee
- Group leaders will attend a meeting with the Ethics and Standards Committee if it has concerns about any issues.

Threshold for assessment

- All Group Leaders should ensure that their group members complete the on-line social media training within 6 months. Democratic Services will provide the information to group leaders.
- That additional training should be provided for 2023/2024 to ensure Group leaders completed the templates adequately, with more metrics and evidence. This has been provided during the workshop held on 17th November 2023. Group Leaders can approach the Monitoring Officer for any additional support they require.
- Continue to engage with the Ethics and Standards Committee, Monitoring Officer in proactive way.
- Continue to engage with other group leaders to learn from and support each other in promoting positive behaviours.
- Continue to use group meetings to provide opportunities for informal mentoring.
- Continue to use group meetings to share cases and lessons learned and consider including APW/PSOW cases as a standing item.
- Recommend to members that they should not sign petitions.
- Attend the ongoing quarterly meetings with the Monitoring Officer.
- Complete template annually with evidence/examples of actions taken
- Encourage group members to undertake training in response to any issues arising e.g. racism.

Reporting/feedback/evidence

- Complete the template which has been updated at the Ethics and Standards Committee on 15th November 2023, followed by individual meetings with the Ethics and Standards Committee.
- Feedback will be provided to the political group leaders by the Monitoring Officer.
- Evidence included in the compliance template may include examples of training undertaken (numbers/dates/topic)/dates of meetings held/trends in proven complaints per group/confidentiality to be maintained in individual cases

General comments

- Committee members and political group leaders are happy with the existing process subject to above.
- No significant areas of concern were identified.
- Group leaders are concerned they cannot ensure only encourage good standards of behaviour. The Chair of the Ethics and Standards Committee will raise the concerns that political group leaders raised with the word 'ensure' being used in the statutory guidance at the National Standards Committee Forum.
- The relationship between group leaders and the Ethics and Standards Committee is good and both parties are looking forward to continuing to work together constructively.
- There was recognition that the feedback from the May 2023 meeting was not meant to be negative – we were all learning a new process and looking at ways to improve it.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term: N/A
Collaboration: N/A
Involvement: N/A
Prevention: N/A
Integration: N/A

Recommendation(s):

To note:

- a) the conclusions drawn from the workshop;
- b) political group leaders are invited to the Ethics and Standards Committee on 10th January 2024
- c) A workshop with individual political group leaders has been arranged for XX April to undertake the assessment of compliance
- d) A workshop with political group leaders has been arranged for XX May.

Contact Name: Lisa Evans

Designation: Scrutiny and Standards Officer

Date of Report: 17/11/23

Acronyms: