

Minutes of the Meeting of ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE held Hybrid at Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Wednesday, 05 March 2024

PRESENT: Miss Caryl Davies, Mr Alan Davies, Ms Carol Edwards, Ms Gail Storr & Ms. Llinos James

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

Other Elected Members in attendance: Councillors Bryan Davies, Elizabeth Evans and Gareth Lloyd

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

(10:00am-11:35am)

1 Apologies

None.

2 Disclosure of personal / prejudicial interests

None.

3 An annual opportunity for Group Leaders to address the committee about promoting and maintaining high standards of behaviour by Ceredigion County Council members

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council, Councillor Gareth Lloyd, Leader of the Independents Group and Councillor Elizabeth Evans, Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group to address the committee about promoting and maintaining high standards of behaviour by Ceredigion County Council members.

Councillor Bryan Davies firstly addressed the Committee regarding his position during and following the budget setting. He stated that he and his family had been subject to abuse on social media and in person which had impacted him so severely that he no longer attended events or social gatherings. He stated that he was totally disappointed in people as he had worked endlessly, as all other Members for the benefit of the County. He also had concerns that several Members had recently targeted individual Members in the Chamber, and that this was totally unacceptable. Everyone needed to be polite and thoughtful. In response, Members of the Committee agreed that both issues were totally unacceptable.

Councillor Elizabeth Evans agreed with the comments by Councillor Bryan Davies, she stated that her husband had recently returned to Aberaeron to

live from London, and he could not believe all the negative comments on social media regarding the County Council. She informed the Committee that she had total confidence in him as an inclusive Leader. She also stated that she had concern that several Members intimidated other Members on items to be discussed at future meetings, however, she had informed he own group not to be influenced.

Councillor Gareth Lloyd stated that there was a fine line in relation to the issue of personal attack and asking questions to Members within their role as Cabinet Member on specific issues. He had recently been questioned by the Fire Authority to be accountable for decisions but accepted that personal attacks were totally unacceptable. He stated that he totally understood the position of the Leader as he was always approached by people regarding Council issues, even in funerals, weddings and on family days out. The local press articles on the County Council in addition to Facebook posts were totally disgraceful, as the decision of the Council was due to the cut in the funding from Westminster and Welsh Government.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Groups for attending and being open in relation to their experiences; and offered the Leaders support in the future.

4 To confirm as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Ethics & Standards Committee held on 04 December 2024

It was RESOLVED to confirm as a true record of the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 04 December 2024

Matters Arising

Item 5 – confirmation was required on the dates as they had been changed. This would be provided at the end of the meeting.

Minute 15 (Matters Arising) – the MO informed the Committee that the National Standards Committee Forum minutes for the meeting held on the 29 January 2024 were now available. They would be presented on the agenda of the meeting on 5/6/24

5 Action Log

Consideration was given to the content of the Action Log. It was AGREED to note the content subject to including compulsory Social Media Training for all Councillors to be completed urgently.

6 Monitoring Officer Code of Conduct Update- Quarter 3 & 4 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the Committee on the Code of Conduct Update- Quarter 3 & 4 2023-2024. The report had been presented to the Committee as the Committee had requested to be informed in future reports of any trends that had increased/decreased and to note the increase in recent years of trends relating to social media and online abuse.

It was AGREED to note the update and the content of the report.

7 Update on Adjudication Panel for Wales matters

The Monitoring Officer highlighted the need to provide reasons for the suspension decision in the letter to the Councillor by the Adjudication Panel.

It was AGREED to note the content.

8 Update on the Public Services Ombudsman matters

It was AGREED to note the content as presented.

9 Training Programmes - Town and Community Councils

It was reported that 25 Town/Community Councils had responded to the request. 26 Town/Community Councils were yet to respond. This information had been shared with County Councillors to inform them if the Community Council in their Ward had not presented the plan to the Council; and to inform them that the plan was required to be on their website in line with legislation.

Consideration was given to Committee offering Code training.

It was suggested that Code of Conduct training was held in person rather than on zoom as several Councillors would prefer this option.

It was AGREED :

i)to note the content.

ii) that an email would be circulated to Clerks of Town and Community Clerks requesting if they wished to receive Code training and if so, in what format.

10 Recruitment of Town and Community Councillor Representatives for Ceredigion County Council's Ethics and Standards Committee

It was AGREED to note the current position in relation to the proposal for appointing a new Town and Community Councillor representative following the resignation of Councillor Jan Culley.

11 Forward Work Programme

It was AGREED to note the content of Forward Work Programme subject to noting

- the workshop of Group Leaders would be held on the 25 April and 20 May 2024 at 10am via zoom.
- refresher training on the Hearings process would be held on 29 April 2024 at 10am via zoom (this was not compulsory) for the Hearings to be held on the 01 May 2024 and 05 June 2024. Members were encouraged to attend in person
- Consideration to be given to the provision of Code of Conduct Training for Town and Community Councils at the 5/6/34 meeting)
- Minutes of the National Standards Chair' Forum meeting held on the 29 January 2024 (5/6/24 meeting)
- Ethics and Standards Draft Chair' Annual Report 2023/24 (5/6/24 meeting)

12 Any Other Business

Social media-Monitoring Officer to consider:

- Refresher training to County Councillors on Code/social media
- Wlga Social Media guidance to be re-circulated to all Members
- Discussion with group leaders