

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Ethics & Standards Committee

DATE: 11 July 2024

TITLE: 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

PURPOSE OF REPORT: For decision

BACKGROUND

Group leaders are subject to two statutory duties:

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

4.36 of the *Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales – supporting provisions within the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021* states that 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.

CURRENT POSITION:

A workshop took 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)

Working together

The Political Group Leaders found the monthly meetings with the Monitoring Officer very effective and gratefully received.

Frequency of meetings

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)

Threshold for compliance

At a workshop held on 29 April 2024 where 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;

Reporting Mechanism:

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 have attended Social Media training is 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 has been reviewed: Political Group Leader Compliance Questionnaire **(Appendix 1)**.

It was agreed that the political group leaders quarterly meetings with the Monitoring Officer would continue.

RECOMMENDATION (S): To:

- 1) note how group leaders and the Committee will work together, agreed frequency of meetings and compliance threshold
- 2) review and agree the revised reporting mechanism: PGL Compliance Questionnaire **(Appendix 1)**.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

The recommendations are necessary to ensure compliance with the Local Government & Elections Wales Act 2021

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Date of Report: 19 June 2024
Acronyms: