

**Report To:** Standards Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015

**Lead Member / Officer:** Ian Trigger, Chair of Standards Committee

**Report Author:** Lisa Jones – Deputy Monitoring Officer

**Title:** Chair’s Annual Report

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### **1. What is the report about?**

This report to Standards Committee is to enable the full Committee to have sight and contribute to the Chair’s Annual Report, in advance of the item being presented to the full council. The Monitoring Officer is particularly keen to take into consideration the Chair and the Committee’s views on the content, and sets out in section 4 the proposed details.

### **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

It was agreed by Members of this Committee that an Annual Report should be presented on the work of the committee and its findings and observations, to all Council Members as part of the Committee’s drive to increase standards of ethical behaviour and compliance with the Members Code of Conduct.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

That Members:

- (a) Note the contents of the report.
- (b) Provide the Monitoring Officer with comments on its content in order to ensure that it accurately reflects the views of this Committee.
- (c) Recommend its presentation by the Chair to the Full Council.

### **4. Report details**

- 4.1 This is the first Annual Report of the Chair of Standards Committee to the Full Council and covers the calendar year January to December 2014 only. It is intended that the Chair will present their report on this basis annually from now on, to the Full Council, in order to keep Members informed of trends; issues in respect of compliance with the Members Code of Conduct generally across the County and the work of the Committee in driving up standards of behaviour at the County level, but also at Town, City and Community levels.

- 4.2 The Committee consists of the following Member types – 2 County Councillors, 4 Independent (co-opted) Members, and 1 Community Council Member (who is not also a twin hatted Member). The majority of the Members are therefore not elected, but are recruited from members of the public as per the requirements of the Standards legislation in Wales. The Committee can also only be quorate when at least half of those Members present are the independents.

Independent members are recruited via a public advert, which is open to all save for strict criteria in respect of previously being an Officer or Member of the Council within certain time frames, being of good standing and having certain attributes as laid down in the legislation. Other than this the opportunity is open to persons from all walks of life, in order to represent the views of the public with regard to the standards they expect of their elected members; and who will also then if required to do so, sit in judgement in respect of any references to the Committee from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, where there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct, which falls above the relevant threshold. The decision to investigate a breach, is at the discretion of the Ombudsman; based on the facts, evidence and nature of the breach and whether there is corroborative evidence or not, but also now if there is a public interest in exhausting time and public financial resources in the investigation and hearing itself; similar to the Crown Prosecutors Service (CPS) approach to charges and prosecutions.

The Committee which receives a reference from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales following his investigation into the complaint, will then sit in a quasi-judicial capacity whilst they hear the matter. They have powers to suspend a Member from Office for a maximum of 6 months, during which time they will not be able to act in their capacity as an elected member and will not receive any member salary. The Committee has discretion to impose lesser sanctions such as a partial suspension from duties or a 'public censure' and to impose other conditions such as attendance at training.

- 4.3 Prior to 2014 the Committee has been instrumental in the Council amending its Code of Conduct to make training on the Code a mandatory obligation; the introduction of a Self Regulatory Protocol, ensuring that County wide training to the County and 'Code' roadshow events are delivered by the Monitoring Officer and his deputy at the Town City and Community level, providing training to Chairs of Town City and Community Councils and publicity material to assist Clerks in the communities.
- 4.4 During the past year the Committee scheduled to meet five times and met on 4 occasions due to the October meeting being cancelled. The table below sets out a summary of the items under discussion: -

Date of Meeting	Report Items/Area s
31/1/14	Standing Item: Attendance at meetings

	Registration of Members Interests online Standing Item : overview of complaints in Denbighshire against Members
21/3/14	Standing Item: Attendance at meetings Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales PSOW Code of Conduct casebook Standing Item : overview of complaints in Denbighshire against Members.
9/5/14	Standing Item: Attendance at meetings Social Media Protocol Declarations of Interests by members of the County Council (a sample review by the Monitoring Officer) Standing Item : overview of complaints in Denbighshire against Members.
18 / 7/14	Standing Item: Attendance at meetings Adoption of a Forward Work Programme Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report. Standing Item: Overview of Complaints against Members.
17/ 10/ 14	Meeting cancelled.

#### 4.5 Standing Items

There are now 3 standing items the Committee receives: -

- (a) Reports from Standards Members in respect of their attendance and observations at Committee and Council meetings whether at County or Community level. Denbighshire County Council Standards Committee is fairly unique in it's proactive approach to raising standards and awareness of the Code of Conduct. Committee Members will then report back to the Committee who will make recommendations in respect of any training needs or trends or patterns of conduct in particular communities.
- (b) Overview of Complaints lodged against Members with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The report is presented in a closed session and members are provided with a limited amount of detail in respect of the complaint but with sufficient detail to enable members to consider if training or other actions can be recommended to particular town city and community councils which are experiencing issues or an increase in complaints.

(c) Forward Work Programme. This is new initiative in order for the committee to adopt the same strategic approach as other Committees and to target its resources into priority areas.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

A fully functioning and representative Standards Committee which upholds the high standards expected of members helps underpin the Council's exercise of its democratic functions.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

There are no implications for other services as a result of this report. .

**7. What consultations have been carried out?**

No consultations have been carried out save for this report to the Standards Committee, as a consultee, to obtain feedback on its appropriateness, content and recommendations.

**8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not required.

**9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

There are no identified risks.

**10. Power to make the Decision**

The Local Government Act 2000; the Standards Committee (Wales) Regulations 2001 and the Standards Committee (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006.