

Report To: Full Council

Date of Meeting: to be confirmed

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

Report Author: Lisa Jones – Deputy Monitoring Officer

Title: Standards Committee Annual Report

1. What is the report about?

This is the first Annual Report 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.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

It was agreed by Standards 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 note the contents of the report.

4. Report details

4.1 Standards Committee main role is to monitor adherence to the Members Code of Conduct. All members are aware that their Code is founded (and should be read in conjunction with) the 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life. In Wales there are ten principles (those which were not included in the Nolan recommendations indicated with an *) as follows: -

Selflessness
Honesty
Integrity and propriety
Duty to uphold law *
Stewardship *

Objectivity in decision making
Equality and respect *
Openness
Accountability
Leadership

- 4.2 Standards 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 Prosecution 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.

There is also the option where the PSOW seeks the views of the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee on whether in those circumstances where the Ombudsman decides not to investigate, that the Monitoring Officer may wish to investigate locally. In these circumstances, the Monitoring Officer consults the Chair and/or the Committee and each case is considered on its merits.

- 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 for County Councillors; 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 its proactive approach to raising standards and awareness of the Code of Conduct. Committee Members attend to observe conduct and general effectiveness of the meetings; will then feed back to the Committee, who may make recommendations in respect of any training needs or trends or patterns of conduct in particular communities or at County level. Attendance levels vary from 3 to 6 visits by the Committee, between Standards Committee meetings. The majority of these attendances are selected randomly and are routine observation exercises; occasionally a particular Council is selected at the request of the Monitoring Officer, whose jurisdiction in respect of the Code of Conduct extends to town, city and community councils. On the whole, the general ethical framework functions at a good level in the community; and this is reflected in the significant downturn in complaints to the PSOW.

The Committee is also keen to make it clear that their approach in attending in person at meetings is from a support and educational angle; in order to target resources in order to improve standards and the public's confidence in the vital work being done at community level, on a voluntary basis; and not from any enforcement or critical angle. The Committee fully recognises the value such councils and their members add to local 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.

4.6 Finally, on a regional note, a North Wales Standards Forum has been set up, which comprises the Chairs of all six Standards Committees in North Wales with their Monitoring Officers or Deputies in attendance. The Forum's remit is to share good practice and learn from our respective approaches in raising standards; sharing the cost of any training events and developed documentation which could assist Monitoring Officers, such as self regulatory protocols or standards hearing procedures.

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 that Standards Committee has been consulted on the content.

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.