



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN PARK
ON TUESDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 1.30PM.

PRESENT:

Mrs D. Holdroyd - Chair

Mrs M. Evans, D. Lewis

Community Councillor Mrs G. Davies

Councillor C.P. Mann

Together with:

L. Lane (Corporate Solicitor), H. Morgan (Senior Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P. Cook and H. David and Mr M. Stone.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. MINUTES - 15TH FEBRUARY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2016 (minute nos. 1 - 7, on page nos. 1 - 4), be approved as a correct record.

4. ANNUAL LETTER FROM PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES 2015-2016

Consideration was given to the Annual Letter received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, which provided a detailed breakdown of all complaints received and investigated by his Office during 2015/16 and the response times to requests for information.

Members were asked to note that in relation to Caerphilly, the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman compared with the local authority average adjusted for population distribution is slightly higher at 56 compared with 52. Whilst there was an increase in the number of complaints none were taken into investigation. They were informed that the figures show that the Authority's largest area of complaints is Housing. This data has been analysed and of the twelve complaints relating to Housing, seven were made prematurely (had been referred to the Ombudsman before exhausting the Council's Corporate Complaints Process). Practically it is not possible to prevent premature referrals to the Ombudsman. The Council's Complaints Policy is available via the Council's website and a hard copy booklet readily available to the Public. The remaining five complaints were not taken into investigation.

It was noted that overall 17 premature complaints were received by the Ombudsman. This is equal to the Local Authority average but as mentioned there is nothing further that can be done by the Council to prevent such referrals.

Reference is made in the Annual Letter to the increase in complaints in relation to Adult Social Services where the figure increased from three to five. This data was reviewed, three were not investigated, one was premature and one was resolved under the Quick Fix arrangements.

No complaints were taken to investigation during 2015/16 and therefore there are no relevant response times in Section E of the letter.

Members noted that the Ombudsman has "upheld" one report against the Council issued in April 2015, which has been the subject of reports to the Standards Committee. In addition the Ombudsman has not upheld one report issued in June 2015 details of which were set out in Appendix 2 of the report. There have been two quick fixes which are contained in the case book summaries, which for members ease of reference, were appended to the report. There were no code of conduct complaints made against members of Caerphilly County Borough Council during 2015/16.

During the course of the ensuing debate, reference was made to the comparison of complaints by subject category in relation to Children's Social Services (Caerphilly being 9 and the average 5). The Corporate Solicitor advised that she did not have a breakdown of these complaints, which would have been dealt with by the social services complaints officers.

Reference was also made to the comment in the letter in relation to the rise in Code of Conduct complaints and to the fact that this was almost entirely attributable to community councils (where there has been a 49 % increase). Members were advised that there have been no referrals from within the county borough and were complementary on the level of training, advice and guidance that has been provided to community/town councils by the Interim Head of Legal Services. The Chair advised that this had been raised and discussed at the last Standards Conference where concerns had been raised at the increase in the number of such complaints.

A query was also raised on one of the case book summaries detailed in the letter that related to a housing complaint and a recharge to a tenant. It was noted that Officers have reassessed the practice, changed the procedure and withdrawn the recharge.

After due consideration, Members noted the content of the amended Annual Letter, received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and were advised that it will now be presented to Council for information.

5. RESIGNATION - MR V. BRICKLEY

It was noted that as Mr Brickley no longer resides in the county borough and is not registered on the electoral roll for Caerphilly, he is not eligible to sit on the Committee and has subsequently resigned.

The Chair/Members paid tribute to the way in which he had carried out his role as both an independent member and Vice Chair of the Committee. It was agreed that a letter be sent expressing the views of the Committee and thanking Mr Brickley for his service. Members were advised that the vacancy will be advertised, applications sought and interviews arranged with a view to the recommendations of the Panel being presented to Council in November for consideration.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Committee was advised that the new Member Code of Conduct was endorsed at the meeting of Council in May and had now been uploaded to the Council's website.

Changes to the Standards Committees Terms of Reference had also been endorsed by Council and were to be amended and uploaded to the Council's website over the next few days

Members were advised that revised training on the Code of Conduct for use following the election in May is under consideration by the Monitoring Officer and will be shared with members over the coming months.

The meeting close at 2pm.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the next meeting they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR