
REPORT OF THE INTERIM MONITORING OFFICER

BIANNUAL MEMBER BRIEFING

Reason for this Report

1. To enable the Committee to consider the content of its first Member Briefing and approve arrangements for the Briefing to be finalised and issued.

Background

2. At its last meeting, in March 2016, the Committee received a report on the Wales Audit Office (WAO) Corporate Assessment Follow On Report published on 26 February 2016. The Committee noted the specific references to the Standards and Ethics Committee made in the WAO report (at paragraphs 23,49 and 50) and the proposal for improvement number P5, which included reference to the Committee as follows:

“P5 Enhance member accountability by:

- (a) Ensuring that the Standards and Ethics Committee plays a more proactive role in promoting and enforcing the Cardiff Undertaking for Councillors and supporting policies in relation to Member conduct and behaviour;
- (b) ..
- (c) .. ”

3. Members of the Committee expressed various reservations about WAO’s view that the Committee was not sufficiently proactive, but agreed the Action approved by Cabinet, in consultation with the Chair, in response to the WAO proposal for improvement P5(a), which was as follows:

“P5a Standards and Ethics Committee to publish biannual Member Briefings on the work of the Committee, underlining the importance of the Cardiff Undertaking and Member conduct and behaviour. (Timescale: August 2016)”

Issues

4. The Committee is invited to consider and provide comments on the issues which are to be included in its Member Briefing. Suggestions for consideration include the following:
 - i. Welcome and purpose of the Briefing – to inform Members about the work of the Committee and to highlight the importance of all Members upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
 - ii. Cardiff Undertaking – to reiterate the high standards of conduct expected from those in public office, as detailed in the Members' Code of Conduct, and to which all Members have publicly committed themselves by affirming the Cardiff Undertaking every year at Annual Council. To note that the Undertaking was amended in May this year to include reference to Members' duties as Corporate Parent of children looked after by the Council.
 - iii. WAO findings – to note the concerns identified during the recent WAO assessment in relation to the conduct of a small number of Members, whose engagement is not consistently positive, professional and constructive (examples of engagement with the media and social media to get their points across).
 - iv. Work of the Committee – to emphasise the independent and non-political nature of the Committee, and provide a link to the Committee's Annual report 2015/16, which is to be presented to September Council, and sets out the work undertaken last year and future work priorities. Consider whether to refer to any particular matters, for example, perhaps the All Wales Standards Conference hosted by Cardiff last year, with a link to the conference final report.
 - v. Meetings with Leaders and Whips – to inform Members about the regular meetings held with group leaders and whips in the spirit of a positive and proactive partnership approach to promoting high standards of conduct. To note the date of the next meeting (25 October 2016); and consider whether there are any specific issues which should be raised in this regard.
 - vi. Observations from Meetings – to note that the Standards and Ethics Committee Independent Members have agreed a programme to attend and observe proceedings at Council and other committee meetings; and to give feedback on observations made to date.
 - vii. Complaints – to report on Code of Conduct complaints received in the first quarter of 2016 (April to July) and comment on themes and trends – with reference to the Monitoring Officer's separate report and the Committee's discussion under agenda item xx.
 - viii. Training – to note that the annual refresher training on the Members' Code of Conduct is to be offered on dates to be agreed in the autumn (2016); and to note that the Standards and Ethics Committee will be working with the

Democratic Services Committee on finalising a programme of learning opportunities for the remainder of this Municipal Year; and to input into the planning and implementation of the new Member learning and development programme and briefing sessions for after the May 2017 local government elections, including the identification of compulsory sessions.

- ix. Further information – to provide contact details for the Chair (and Vice-Chair) of the Committee (c/o Committee Services) for any Member who wishes to find out more about the work of the Committee or discuss any issues of concern.
5. Members may also wish to note that the Monitoring Officer has approached the Council's Communications team seeking advice on how best to raise the profile of the Standards and Ethics Committee and positively engage Members in conduct issues. Further information will be provided in this regard in due course.

Legal Implications

6. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

7. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Provide comments on the issues to be included in the Member Briefing; and
- 2) Delegate authority to the Interim Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair, and having regard to comments provided by Members of the Committee, to draft and issue a Member Briefing to all Members in August 2016.

David Marr
Interim Monitoring Officer
14 July 2016

Background papers

Standards and Ethics Committee report, 'Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment Follow On Report, 22nd March 2016