

Meeting of:	Standards Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 27 January 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	No Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Monitoring Officer Meetings with Clerks of Town and Community Councils
Purpose of Report:	To provide the Committee with an update of the meeting held on 24th November, 2021 undertaken between the Monitoring Officer and Clerks of Town and Community Councils
Report Owner:	Ms. D. Marles, Monitoring Officer / Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Mrs. K. Bowen, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report does not require consultation to be undertaken
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for decision by the Standards Committee
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the roles of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives of the Council. • To assist in this process, the Monitoring Officer has held meetings with Clerks of Town and Community Councils to provide opportunities for discussion of matters of mutual concern, to have regard to the principles of standards in public life and to provide networking opportunities. • During the pandemic the Clerks meetings were put on hold, however meetings have since resumed with two taking place in 2021 on 21st May, 2021 and 24th November, 2021. Committee received an update report in relation to 21st May, 2021 meeting at its meeting on 27th May, 2021 and this report includes details of discussions held at the meeting on 24th November, 2021.

Recommendation

1. That the Standards Committee Members considers and notes the report in respect of the Monitoring Officer's meeting with Clerks held on 24th November, 2021.

Reason for Recommendation

1. Having regard to discussions held at the meeting on 24th November, 2021.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Monitoring Officer has previously informed the Standards Committee of the intention to hold six monthly meetings with Clerks of Town and Community Councils to provide a formal opportunity to discuss matters of mutual concern, to provide open discussion and networking opportunities
- 1.2 In 2019 the meetings commenced and two meetings were held on 22nd March, 2019 and 10th October, 2019.
- 1.3 At the first meeting in March 2019, Town and Community Councils' Clerks were provided with a copy of the current Public Services for Wales Ombudsman's Guidance on the Code of Conduct for Members of Community Councils. The Guidance refers to the principles of standards in public life, with specific reference to the need to register Members' interests and have regard to the provisions under gifts and hospitality. The Monitoring Officer suggested that the Clerks, if they had not already done so, share the guidance with Elected Members of their Town and Community Councils.
- 1.4 It was also noted that through One Voice Wales, Town and Community Councils have access to legal and general advice when they subscribe to the organisation. One Voice Wales is described as a principal organisation for Town and Community Councils in Wales providing a strong voice, representing the Council's interests and a range of high-quality services to support their work. It is the Monitoring Officer's understanding that 25 out of the 26 Town and Community Councils in the Vale of Glamorgan subscribe to the organisation.
- 1.5 Feedback received following the meetings was that meetings were both useful and informative and a frank exchange of views shared which they were grateful to the Monitoring Officer for hosting.
- 1.6 At the last meeting of the Committee on 25th November, 2021 during the discussion relating to Observations by Independent Members of Town and Community Council meetings, the Monitoring Officer apprised the Committee of some of the issues that had previously been discussed at the Clerks meeting on 24th November, 2021 which related directly to observations received following the Independent Member visits.
- 1.7 Notwithstanding the above this report provides the Committee with a more detailed overview of the topics discussed at the meeting on 24th November, 2021.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** As a result of the pandemic the meetings with Clerks were put on hold and resumed on 19th May, 2021.
- 2.2** For Members' information matters discussed at the meeting on 24th November, 2021 included the following:
- Finance matters including Council Tax Banding and Precept Setting and funding opportunities for electric car power points
 - Becoming a Councillor initiative - as outlined in the previous agenda item in relation to the Draft Member Induction and Development Programme
 - General Power of Competence - the Monitoring Officer drew attention to an information paper that had been provided to the Senior Leadership Team regarding the provision under the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 in relation to GPOC.
 - Member safety - the Monitoring Officer drew the Clerk's attention to a report that had been presented to the Vale's Democratic Services Committee on 22nd November, 2021 which set out guidance for Members' personal safety and lone working.
 - Generic observations following the viewing of TCC meetings by Independent Members of the Standards Committee
 - Hybrid working and broadcasting of meetings
 - Independent Review of Ethical Standards Framework in Wales
 - Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 - the Monitoring Officer drew attention to reports and the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Action Plan that had been presented to various Committees of the Council including the Community Liaison Committee.
 - Audit Wales Public Interest report: Sully and Lavernock Community Council
 - Sharing of good practice.
- 2.3** The Monitoring Officer will provide detailed verbal feedback to the Standards Committee on 27th January, 2022 regarding the issues discussed at the Clerks meeting, if this is required by Members of the Standards Committee.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The role of the Standards Committee is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives. It was intended that the Monitoring Officer meetings with Clerks of Town and Community Councils and the way in which the first ways of working proposals aim to promote the role.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

4.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

Employment

4.2 There are no direct employment implications as a result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

4.3 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report, however it is noted that the Town and Community Councils in the Vale of Glamorgan who subscribe to One Voice Wales are able to obtain legal and generic advice as required as a result of their subscription.

5. Background Papers

Minutes of Monitoring Officer meetings with Clerks of Town and Community Councils.