

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

17 May 2023

Present (in Person):

Mr J Daniels, Councillor S Hancock

Present (Remotely):

Mr P Davies, Councillor M James, Mrs W Taylor and Mrs V Tomlinson

(Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 2.05pm – 2.50pm)

1. **Election of Chair**

On the proposal of Councillor S Hancock, seconded by Mrs W Taylor, it was **RESOLVED** that Mr J Daniels be elected Chair for the duration of his term of office.

Taking the Chair, Mr J Daniels thanked Members for the confidence shown in him and added that he looked forward to another term of Office. The Chair took the opportunity to thank the recently retired Democratic Services Manager for her contributions and commitment to the Authority over the years and on behalf of all Members, wished her a long and healthy retirement.

2. **Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was received from Dr R Plummer.

3. **Disclosures of interest**

There were no disclosures of interest.

4. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2022 were presented for confirmation and signature.

On the proposal of Mrs V Tomlinson, seconded by Mrs W Taylor, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2022 be confirmed and signed.

5. **Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer 2022/23**

The Chair welcomed the Monitoring Officer who presented his annual report which featured information regarding the terms of reference for the Committee, Coronavirus, Code of Conduct Training, Complaints, a public interest report by the Ombudsman in respect of Bannau Brycheiniog, Local Resolution Protocol (LRP), Dispensations, the Unacceptable Actions by Complainants Policy, the Annual Report of the Ombudsman and the Penn Report Consultation.



A) Training

It was reported that a Code of Conduct training session would take place after the meeting of the National Park Authority on the 21 June 2023, and in response to a query raised, it was confirmed that this hybrid session would be open to Members of the Standards Committee. The Officer then explained the contents of the training and highlighted the importance of Members attending.

B) Complaints Policy

The Monitoring Officer stated that he had hoped to provide Members with a verbal update regarding the model Complaints Policy however as he had not had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the lead Officer from the Complaints Standards Authority, he was unable to provide an update. The Officer explained that he required clarification on elements of the Policy and therefore, he asked that the related recommendation in his report be deferred until this discussion took place.

C) Current Complaints

It was reported that in the past year to 18 April 2023, of the 24 complaints recorded by the National Park Authority, 11 related to the increase in Car Park Season Ticket Prices. It was confirmed that 1 complaint related to Car Park Season Ticket prices had been escalated to the Ombudsman as the complainant was dissatisfied with the response of the Monitoring Officer however this was dismissed on the basis that no flaw had been identified in the way that the decision had been reached and the way it had been presented to the Authority.

It was confirmed that since the publication of the annual report, complaints had been received in relation to the acquisition of Traeth Mawr / Newport Sands Beach.

D) Dispensation

It was reported that the Authority had welcomed a new Member, Councillor B Price, and a general dispensation would be put in place for her.

E) Unacceptable actions by complainants Policy

The report discussed the general increase in poor behaviour by a small number of individuals towards members of staff within the Authority and staff were in agreement that a policy should be introduced to govern such incidents. The Monitoring Officer invited the Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement to provide the Members with an overview of her experience with such incidents and an explanation as to why it was considered appropriate to have a policy in place to address such behaviour. The Officer provided Members with examples of poor behaviour that had been seen in the past to demonstrate how the policy would support staff.



A Member asked if the Planning Department experienced most of the poor behaviour and what was the current practice for persistent complainants. The Officer confirmed that although Members of the Planning Department deal with aggressive calls, other departments such as Reception also deal with calls of this nature. The Officer added that in instances where members of staff experienced abuse over the phone, they were advised to end the call however Managers were aware that a suitable policy was not in place to support them should complaints arise.

In response to a query raised by a Member, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the proposed Policy had been created by adapting an example policy from Monmouthshire County Council (with their permission), where this policy had been in place for approximately 10 years and was considered valuable in resolving persistent complaints. The Monitoring Officer then explained to Members how the policy had been adapted to ensure that it was relevant to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

A Member asked whether the Authority currently recorded telephone conversations and the Officer confirmed that no telephone conversations were recorded at present.

Following positive comments from Members regarding the policy, the Chair asked what the next steps would be. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that if Members were to endorse the policy, it would then be circulated to the Staff Representatives and Management Team meetings and finally, a report would be presented to the National Park Authority (NPA) for approval.

F) The Penn Report Consultation

Members were reminded that in March 2021, the then Minister for Housing and Local Government had commissioned an independent Review of the Ethical Standards Framework for local government in Wales established by the Local Government Act 2000. The independent review was undertaken by Richard Penn. It was noted that the overall finding of the report was that the current system worked well, and no major reforms were deemed necessary. However, a Welsh Government consultation had been issued which built on the Review's recommendations taking these discussions and other communications into account. The Monitoring Officer therefore sought delegated authority to respond to the consultation arising out of the Penn report. It was agreed that Members would be copied into the response of the Monitoring Officer.

On the proposal of Councillor S Hancock, seconded by Councillor M James, it was **RESOLVED** that;



- i) the report be noted
- ii) subject to the approval of the NPA, the Standards Committee agree the need for a policy dealing with unacceptable behaviour of complainants and endorse the draft policy annexed
- iii) Members delegate to the Monitoring Officer the response of the NPA to the consultation arising out of the Penn report
- iv) an update be provided to Members regarding the model Complaints Policy once discussions take place with the Lead Officer for the Complaints Standards Authority

6. Any Other Business

The Chair informed Members that he had attended a virtual meeting for the National Forum of Standards Committee Chairs in January and had found it to be valuable. It was added that they aimed to meet twice a year to share best practice and training resources. The Monitoring Officer added that he also attended regular meetings of the Monitoring Officer group where best practice and resources were shared.

