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Your ref:

Ask for: Michelle Morris

Our ref: MAM/mdm



Date: 2 July 2024



Peredur Owen Griffiths
Chair, Finance Committee

By email only
seneddfinance@senedd.wales

Dear Peredur

Review into operations, processes and investigations - Councillor Code of Conduct Complaints

When I appeared before the Committee on 9 May, and in your subsequent letter, you requested an update on the review before the summer recess.

I am pleased to say that the review started promptly at the end of May, with Dr Melissa McCullough attending our offices on 24 May to finalise practical arrangements, meet members of the Code of Conduct Team and formalise the appointment. We have arranged appropriate access to our case records for the review team, which is progressing each of the five elements of the work. For ease of reference, an extract from the terms of reference is provided below.

- (1) *Review the PSOW's Code of Conduct processes and delegations to ensure that they are appropriate, fair and impartial and free from political bias.*
- (2) *Review the decisions taken by the former team leader and her Team not to investigate Code of Conduct complaints from 1 April 2021 to 22 October 2023, to ensure that the PSOW's two stage test was applied properly, and decisions were free from political bias (673 cases).*
- (3) *Review cases where the former team leader was the 'case owner' which were investigated and closed without a referral to a standards committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales from 1 April 2019 to 22 October 2023, to ensure that there is no evidence of political bias in the handling of these cases (11 cases).*

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to correspondence in Welsh.

- (4) *Establish whether there is evidence that the team leader expressed her personal views on political matters akin to her social media posts in the office and/or inappropriately influenced other staff members, in the performance of their duties under the Local Government Act 2000.*
- (5) *Make any recommendations which Dr McCullough considers appropriate and issue a final report which the PSOW will share with the Senedd's Finance Committee.*

In the event that Dr McCullough considers it necessary to widen the scope of this review, she will inform and agree this with the Ombudsman.

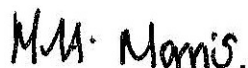
As at the end of June 2024, the reviewer reports that the review team is finding no difficulties accessing information. She has commented positively on the comprehensive documentation available in our case files. In respect of (2) above, 617 of the 673 cases have been reviewed, so this element is around 90% complete. In respect of (4) above, all staff interviews, with members of the Code of Conduct Team, have been completed.

The reviewer has stated that she has not, to date, identified any need to widen the scope of the review.

Whilst there remains much work to do, good progress is being made and the reviewer indicates that the work and report will be complete in September.

I hope that this update is helpful. Should the Committee require any further information, please let me know.

Yours sincerely



Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman