

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Date: Thursday, 29 June 2006
Time: 2:00pm
Venue: Senedd Room 2
Title: National Assembly Commissioner for Standards: Report to the Committee on Standards of Conduct

This is my fourth report to the Committee and I very much welcome the opportunity this 'slot' offers me to bring forward particular issues. This report highlights some of the issues that have arisen in recent months on complaints and the complaints process.

Although no complaints have been referred to the Committee, workload in this area has been demanding. The number of complaints received in recent months has been higher than usual. Since March this year I have received 6 formal complaints, although I (and the Secretariat) have dealt with numerous potential complaints.

The nature of complaints has varied greatly. The website provides access to the Commissioner's office not previously available. I continue to receive unsolicited mail and correspondence on matters outside my remit as Commissioner (and some correspondence that does not relate to the National Assembly for Wales in any way). It is relatively straight forward to respond to this type of correspondence but it does add to the workload, and I would like to again extend my gratitude to the Secretariat for the support they provide in this respect.

A number of the complaints received have been on trivial matters. I have investigated two complaints about the use of Assembly resources and found the Members concerned in breach of the Code of Conduct. However, as the breaches identified were minor in nature and were immediately rectified, I dealt with them in accordance with section 10 of the Complaints Procedure.

I am pleased to say that this part of the Procedure enabled me to deal with these complaints swiftly, without the need to refer them to the Committee. In my view, this aspect of the Complaints Procedure has worked very effectively. I am aware that the Committee will at this meeting today review the Complaints Procedure. The paper by the secretariat includes my comments on how the Procedure has worked in practice. As I have stated previously, I am keen to play a part in this review in whatever way possible.

These minor breaches of the Guidance on the use of Assembly resources highlight a potential issue in the lead up to the forthcoming Assembly elections. In 2003 the Assembly issued supplementary guidance to Members on the use of Assembly resources during election campaigns. It is my intention to write to the House Committee outlining my concerns in this area and recommending that similar guidance is issued in readiness for the Assembly elections in 2007.

Finally, members will be aware that today's meeting coincides with the Blaenau Gwent By-election. I will be seeking an early meeting with the successful candidate, to talk through any early concerns they may have and help them build an understanding of the Assembly's standards culture.

Richard Penn
National Assembly Commissioner for Standards
June 2006