

Llywydd,

As Assembly Members will be aware in November 2017, the Llywydd, leaders of party groups and I as Chair of the Standards of Conduct Committee issued a joint statement setting out:

- a commitment to ensuring that inappropriate behaviour has no place at the National Assembly for Wales; and
- a desire to reassure everyone who works here and those who visit us that they will be free from any form of harassment. Whether it is here in the Senedd, a constituency office or out in the community, everyone should feel as though they are treated with respect when they encounter representatives of this organisation.

The joint statement set out a number of actions intended to ensure the Assembly is an inclusive organisation free from intimidation and harassment. These actions included the development of a Dignity and Respect Policy, the establishment of a confidential complaints referral service and ensuring the complaints procedure is clear and consistent. Work is well underway, and a Dignity and Respect policy will be laid before the Assembly shortly.

The Standards of Conduct Committee agreed to undertake a more wide ranging inquiry into creating the right culture at the Assembly. We believe that the Assembly must set an example and provide clear and strong leadership on the type of workplace culture we would like to see within Wales. We are considering existing procedures around complaints involving Assembly Members to ensure they are appropriate and clear. Individuals must feel able to come forward with confidence about any concerns regarding inappropriate behaviour.

We have held an open consultation, which aimed to find out whether the current complaints procedure is easily understandable and accessible; and whether there are any barriers to people raising concerns about the behaviour of anyone associated with the National Assembly for Wales. Although the consultation has now formally closed, people are always encouraged to come forward with suggestions on how to improve the process or with any concerns they may have.

We are currently taking evidence from groups and individuals who have agreed to talk to the Committee about their experiences.

I would like to put on record my thanks to those who have offered their views to the Committee during the last few months. I am particularly grateful to those who have agreed to speak to us. Without understanding the experiences of others, it is very difficult to identify the challenges within the Assembly and ascertain precisely how the culture can be improved. As a Committee we are determined that these views will be reflected in the reporting stage.

While we are still undertaking our inquiry, one of the key messages we have heard to date is that better communication and clarity around the complaints procedure would help increase confidence in the system.

Building on the existing provisions within the Assembly Member code of conduct, the new dignity and respect policy will help to make it explicitly clear that inappropriate behaviour has no place in this Assembly.

I am sure Members will agree it is important that inappropriate behaviour must be called out. We are all responsible for ensuring we do not stand by and let things happen.

I would also like to take this opportunity to re-emphasise that the National Assembly for Wales has a completely independent Commissioner for Standards who impartially examines any concern or complaint raised with him. He can be contacted via phone, e-mail or in writing. He will always try to help, either by dealing directly with concerns or signposting in the right correct direction. A helpline has been set up for those unsure whether the Commissioner is the most appropriate avenue for a complaint. This number is on the website and on posters around the estate. If any Members do want to discuss any issues regarding the complaints procedure with the Commissioner, he will be available in the Senedd during Plenary next Tuesday.

In addition to the Commissioner, Members of the Standards Committee are also available to discuss any concerns you may have regarding the complaints procedure, and a Member of the Committee will be available during Plenary next Tuesday.

It takes a huge amount of commitment, time and persistence to achieve meaningful cultural change. Today I have set out the early stages of the process ensuring that the National Assembly for Wales fulfils its aim to be an institution which enables and empowers people. I am confident this aim is shared by all of us in the Chamber and that everybody will be willing to play their part in making sure it is achieved.

Diolch.