

Statement by the Llywydd, the Chair of the Standards of Conduct Committee and the leaders of the party groups at the National Assembly for Wales

As those who have overall responsibility for the conduct of Members and our political parties in the National Assembly for Wales, we very much regret that individuals may have been affected by inappropriate behaviour on the part of Members of this institution.

The Code of Conduct for Assembly Members already prohibits the kind of inappropriate behaviour which has recently attracted public attention and our aim is to ensure that everyone – Assembly Members, staff and the public - are crystal clear about that.

We are however, going to work together to clarify and strengthen our procedures to ensure that individuals feel more empowered to report allegations of inappropriate behaviour, and that such allegations are investigated thoroughly and fairly - for all involved.

As our first practical step, the Assembly Commission will work with the Standards of Conduct Committee to develop a Respect and Dignity Policy which will spell out that inappropriate behaviour has no place in this institution. A resolution will be put before the Assembly to incorporate the policy within the Code of Conduct for Assembly Members. The Standards of Conduct Committee will also review the sanctions available if the Code is breached.

The Code of Conduct for Assembly Members covers Members' behaviour towards everyone, whomever they may be, and the Commissioner for Standards will apply the policy when looking at all complaints. Whether you work on the Assembly estate or not, all complaints against an Assembly Member will be investigated by the Commissioner. Complaints can be discussed on a strictly private and confidential basis, and your name will not be made public. We urge anyone who wishes to complain about the inappropriate behaviour of an Assembly Member to approach the Assembly's Standards Commissioner.

In addition, any allegation received by the Clerk of the National Assembly that a Member has breached the Code will be referred immediately to the Commissioner. As leaders of our groups, we accept a presumption that we will refer any allegations of breaches of the Code in future to the Commissioner. In all cases, this will be subject to the complainant's consent.

Assembly Commission and Members' Support staff can currently access a 24-hour confidential telephone support line if they have any problem they wish to talk through. We accept, however, that more should be done to make the process of reporting a complaint easier. The Assembly Commission, in consultation with the Standards of Conduct Committee and Standards Commissioner, will therefore promote a point of contact to which anyone, whoever they may be, who has experienced inappropriate behaviour can turn for advice on the procedures and support available.

The Llywydd will also ask the Standards Commissioner to review how the political parties' policies and procedures can be aligned to the Assembly's new Respect and Dignity Policy which will form part of the Code.

For those who work in the National Assembly, it is important that they should be both protected by, and subject to, the same expectations. The Assembly Commission, the Remuneration Board, political parties and the Welsh Government will work together to ensure that the same principles of conduct as set out in the Respect and Dignity Policy apply to the Assembly Members' Support Staff, Assembly Commission and Welsh Government staff, and that the procedures for dealing with any complaints between staff members, incorporate the same standards of fairness, thoroughness and support as in cases involving Members.

We all recognise that we have a responsibility to ensure that the National Assembly for Wales is a safe environment for those who work here, for those who visit the estate and for anyone who has dealings with our Members or employees.

Elin Jones AM, Presiding Officer, National Assembly for Wales

Jayne Bryant AM, Chair of the Standards of Conduct Committee

Carwyn Jones AM, Leader of Welsh Labour

Andrew R T Davies AM, Leader of the Welsh Conservative Group in the National Assembly

Leanne Wood AM, Leader of Plaid Cymru

Neil Hamilton AM, Leader of UKIP in Wales

Kirsty Williams AM, Welsh Liberal Democrats

15 November 2017