

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4 NOVEMBER 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Monday, 4 November 2013

PRESENT: Mrs Patricia Jones (Chair)
Councillors: David Cox and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members: Chris Bretherton-Watt, Robert Dewey, Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Ann Earlam and Edward Michael Hughes

APOLOGIES: Councillor Hilary McGuill

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Democracy and Governance Manager, and Committee Officer

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

30. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 October 2013 were submitted.

Matters arising

Page 4: The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that he had written to the relevant Members to inform of the Committee's decision concerning requests for dispensation.

Page 5: The Democracy and Governance Manager referred to a training session for Town and Community Councils on the Code of Conduct to be hosted by Flint Town Council on 7 November 2013. He confirmed that Mr. Gareth Roberts of Bagillt Community Council had been contacted to ask him to share the training session with his network.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensation.

32. AUDIT OF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Democracy and Governance Manager introduced a report on the audit of the declarations of interest process. He provided background information and referred to the audit which was undertaken during August 2013 on a number of meetings to determine the extent of Members compliance with the requisite procedures. The results of the audit were detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the report.

The Democracy and Governance Manager advised that the individual Member held responsibility for ensuring that notification was given whenever necessary. However, the audit had identified a need for officers to be more proactive in chasing up the requisite paperwork to be completed by Members. He explained that a spreadsheet was being prepared to record for each Member the interests registered and those previously notified following a meeting. Where, at a meeting, a Member declared an interest that was not included on the spreadsheet the Member would be given a notification form and asked to complete it. Forms which were not completed would be chased and failing a response the Monitoring Officer would contact the Member concerned. The Democracy and Governance Manager confirmed that it was intended to undertake such audits annually during August to ensure standards were maintained and improved.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the provisions within the Code of Conduct required Members to state whether they wished to register a personal or a personal and prejudicial interest and also to describe the nature of the interest. He explained that Members needed to specify the reason and how it arises to ensure that the full requirements of the Code were met.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services responded to the query raised by Mr. Edward Hughes concerning the implications if a member failed to declare an interest. Councillor Arnold Woolley commented on the processes for making declarations of interest at Town and Community Councils. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services acknowledged the points put forward by Councillor Woolley.

In response to the further queries raised the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Democracy and Governance Manager provided clarification around the need to declare a personal interest or a personal and prejudicial interest at meetings.

During discussion Mr. Robert Dewey referred to the results of the audit and suggested that it may be helpful if a comparison was made with other Authorities. It was also suggested that the Chair of a meeting reminded Members of their responsibility to complete all sections of the form during or immediately following the meeting. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services suggested that it may be helpful to provide a short training session for each Committee to remind Members of their obligations and to inform them of the results of the audit.

It was agreed that a further report be submitted to the next but one meeting of the Committee to update members on progress of the results shown in appendix 1, and to provide comparative information from other Authorities.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the results of the audit be noted; and
- (b) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to update members on progress of the results shown in appendix 1, and to provide comparative information from other Authorities.

33. ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the Standards Committee Annual Report 2012/13. He advised that once approved the Report would be sent to all County Councillors, Town and Community Councils and other public bodies for information and would be published on the Authority's website. He asked members to comment on the content of the report and the intended circulation list.

Members highlighted two typographical errors on page 14. It was also agreed that the word "regularly" in paragraph 3, page 14, be replaced by the word "annually". During discussion the Head of Legal and Democratic Services provided further clarification to the queries raised by members concerning indemnity.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above minor amendments the Annual Report and the intended circulation list be approved.

34. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services introduced the Forward Work Programme and invited members to put forward items for future consideration. He suggested that the Annual Letter from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and that a review of the planning code be included on the Forward Work Programme for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 2 December 2013.

Mr. Robert Dewey referred to the training session for Town and Community Councils on the Code of Conduct which was to be hosted by Flint Town Council on 7 November 2013. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said members were welcome to attend the event if they wished.

The Chair referred to the retirement of Mr. Chris Bretherton Watt at the end of November 2013, and thanked him on behalf of the Committee for his commitment and valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme be agreed; and
- (b) That the Annual Letter from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and that a review of the planning code be included on the Forward Work Programme for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

ITEM FOR INFORMATION - NORTH WALES STANDARDS FORUM

The Chair distributed summary notes of a meeting of the North Wales Standards Forum which was held on 21 October 2013. She reported on the topics considered and advised that the Forum was a regional group set up to share experiences, knowledge, and consider issues of concern to assist colleagues and maintain a consistent approach across North Wales. She advised that meetings were held quarterly. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services offered to host the next meeting of the Forum in Flintshire.

During discussion the matter of Town and Community Councils having a web presence was raised. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that in response to a request from Town and Community Councils in Flintshire guidance had been provided concerning the information that should be included on their websites. Mr. R. Dewey commented that he had experienced some difficulty in locating website addresses for Town and Community Councils and suggested that they consider using a standard form of email address.

35. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press and no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30 p.m. and ended at 7.25 p.m.)

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Chair