

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
7 JANUARY 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 7 January 2019

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Earlam, Edward Hughes, Julia Hughes and Ken Molyneux

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

On the dispensation request from Councillor Peers (Agenda Item 4), officers advised Members with links to housing associations to declare a personal interest only if they felt it necessary. Julia Hughes declared a personal interest as she was a board member of another housing association and chose not to participate in that discussion.

45. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2018 were approved, subject to the typographical error in the last sentence of minute 41.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendment, the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

46. DISPENSATIONS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented two dispensation requests for consideration, received after publication of the agenda.

Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke

County Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke wished to speak and write to officers about planning application 058118 which related to land in her ownership. The dispensation would allow Councillor Davies-Cooke and her husband (as the co-applicant) to communicate with officers on the application which was becoming a complex matter. She did not wish to speak or vote on the application when it was considered at Planning Committee.

In response to comments, officers advised that although a similar previous request had been refused by the Committee, in that case the Member had sought

permission to speak at Planning Committee. Reference was made to the restrictions which now applied when granting requests to speak with officers, involving witnesses and notes of those discussions.

Edward Hughes proposed that dispensation be granted on this basis, which was seconded by Ken Molyneux. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

Councillor Mike Peers

A request by County Councillor Mike Peers sought permission to participate in discussions of the Planning Committee and other Council meetings on matters relating to Pennaf Housing Group where his son was employed in the IT department. Councillor Peers wished to speak and remain in the room for such debates, as a member of the public, but not to vote. A planning application submitted by Pennaf Housing Group was due to be considered by the Planning Committee.

In respect of the Planning Committee, Officers advised that this was a personal rather than prejudicial interest, as set out in paragraph 10(2)(c) of the Members' Code of Conduct. In the absence of further information, it was not possible to advise whether there would be a prejudicial interest if the matter was to be discussed at other Council meetings.

During discussion, Members questioned the level of impact from the application on Councillor Peers' son, along with the perception of whether this should be treated as a prejudicial interest.

The Committee determined that this was not a prejudicial interest and therefore dispensation could not be granted. It would be a decision for Councillor Peers whether he remains in the room and votes during discussions at Planning Committee. There was insufficient information to consider the request to speak at other Council meetings, as they may involve circumstances in which a prejudicial interest may arise.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Flintshire County Councillor Adele Davies-Cooke be granted dispensation under paragraph (d) of the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 to make verbal and written representations to officers of Flintshire County Council on planning application 058118, or any application which, in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, is similar. This allows for speaking to officers provided there is at least one witness, which will ensure that there are at least three people involved in the conversation, and that the conversation be minuted. When the item is considered at Planning Committee, Councillor Davies-Cooke is to leave the meeting before the application is debated and voted on. The dispensation to be granted for 12 months, ceasing on 7 January 2020; and
- (b) That the dispensation request from County Councillor Mike Peers in respect of discussion at Planning Committee on matters relating to Pennaf

Housing Group be refused on the basis that he does not have a prejudicial interest on the matter. The request for permission to speak on the same matter at other Council meetings is also refused given there is insufficient information.

47. THE COUNCIL'S PLANNING CODE OF PRACTICE

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report to update the Planning Code of Practice as part of the rolling review of the Council's Constitution. He suggested that paragraph 4.7 be inserted to give clearer guidance on the position of Executive Members serving on the Planning Committee.

The following additional changes were agreed to improve understanding and consistency of the document:

- To change the word 'should' to 'must' throughout the document.
- Paragraph 4.7 to refer to 'Senior Officer of Legal & Democratic Services'.
- The last sentence of paragraph 5.1 to read 'Officers should be made aware of...'
- The last sentence of paragraph 5.4 to read 'the Member(s) for that ward is (are) entitled...'
- Further clarification needed to reference in paragraph 5.5 to 'that Member must stand down...'

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Planning Code of Practice is fit for purpose regarding the advice relating to the Members' Code of Conduct and the Protocol on Officer/Member relations, subject to the proposed amendment referred to in paragraph 1.05 of the report and the additional changes listed above; and
- (b) That the Planning Code of Practice be reported to the Council's Constitution & Democratic Services Committee with advice from this Committee that it be amended in accordance with recommendation 1 above.

48. OFFICERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

The Monitoring Officer presented a report on the Officers' Code of Conduct as part of the rolling review of the Council's Constitution. He provided explanation on proposed alterations to give clearer guidance and reflect changes to Council posts and services.

The following additional changes were agreed by the Committee:

- To change the title to 'Employees' Code of Conduct'.
- To change the word 'should' to 'must' throughout the document.
- To re-word paragraph 10.2 to reflect that permission would not be given to undertake paid outside work that overlapped with the employee's primary role and that further consideration would be needed if this was not the case.

- Paragraph 10.3 to refer to 'using' Council facilities and outgoing as well as incoming correspondence.
- The second sentence of paragraph 11.14 to refer to seeking advice from 'their' Manager.
- To correct the typographical error in the last bullet-point of section 4 of the Officers' Declaration of Interest form.
- To add 'Department' to section 1 of the Officers' Declaration of Offer or Receipt of a Gift/Hospitality and to include 'delivered to workplace' in the third section on how it was offered or received.

Following comments by Councillor Johnson, the Monitoring Officer agreed that the Flintshire Joint Trade Union Committee would be consulted on the revised document and the outcome reported back to the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the proposed changes to the explanatory guidance and forms in the Officers' Code of Conduct be approved; and
- (b) That the revised Officers' Code of Conduct be submitted for consultation to the next meeting of the Flintshire Joint Trade Union Committee and the outcome reported back to the Standards Committee.

49. REPORTS FROM INDEPENDENT MEMBER VISITS TO TOWN/COMMUNITY COUNCILS

The following independent members presented their verbal reports:

Julia Hughes - Nannerch Community Council
 The Chairman - Higher Kinnerton Community Council
 Julia Hughes - Treuddyn Community Council
 Ken Molyneux - Mostyn Community Council

All reported that observing the meetings had been a positive experience and that they had been well led by Chairs (and a Vice-Chair in one instance) with assistance from Clerks and good participation by attendees.

Some minor procedural points were identified which could assist members of the public wishing to attend meetings:

- Ensuring that up-to-date meeting information is available on the website and on noticeboards (for members of the public with no internet access) and that venues are clearly signposted where there was more than one room in the building.
- Whilst recognizing the varying levels of resources, Clerks should aim to respond promptly to enquiries from members of the public where possible.
- The importance of complying with the Code of Conduct when declaring interests at meetings, eg explaining the nature of the interest and how it has arisen.

- Clarity for members of the public on speaking at meetings, for example by a separate standing agenda item or by stating on the agenda that members of the public were allowed to speak at the Chair's discretion.
- The need to formally agree the minutes of previous meetings.

During discussion, comments were raised on youth representatives and the need to ensure that the purpose of the visits was understood. In conclusion, the Committee agreed that the findings reflected well on Town/Community Councils, and commended the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal reports be received and feedback given to the four Town and Community Councils.

50. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was received. Following earlier discussion, the outcome of consultation with Trade Union colleagues on the Officers' Code of Conduct would be reported to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

51. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.10pm)

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Chairman