

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
30 SEPTEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at the Town Hall, Caerwys on Monday, 30th September 2019.

PRESENT: **Robert Dewey (Chairman)**

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Earlam and Ken Molyneux

APOLOGY:

Julia Hughes.

TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

Councillors: Roy Wakelam – Penyffordd Community Council; Michael Moriarty, Susan Broadway and Steve Wilson – Caerwys Town Council; Gareth Evans – Higher Kinnerton Community Council; Richard Dolphin and William Glynn – Whitford Community Council; Ian Hodge and Ted Palmer – Holywell Town Council and Huw Morgan – Nannerch Community Council. Phillip Parry, Clerk to Caerwys, Whitford and Halkyn Community Councils was also in attendance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Head of Democratic Services and Team Leader – Democratic Services.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

28. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED:

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

29. DISPENSATIONS

No requests received.

30. ITEMS RAISED BY TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

- (a) To discuss any ethical issues or the work of the Standards Committee raised by Town and Community Councils:

The Monitoring Officer advised that none had been raised in advance of the meeting. The Chair invited any issues from the floor but there were none.

- (b) To gauge interest in a training event for new Councillors on the Code of Conduct and to seek a volunteer to host:

The Monitoring Officer explained that he had been contacted by two town/community councils on the possibility of training being offered to new Councillors on the Code of Conduct. If there was an appetite for such training it could be provided and he sought a volunteer town/community council to host the training.

It was requested that such a session could include training for Chairs which was supported. On a training venue, the Monitoring Officer explained that somewhere in the North West of the County would be preferable as it could encompass required training for new members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. The training would most likely take place at the beginning of November. Councillor William Glynn from Whitford Community Council said he would ask at the next meeting of Whitford Community Council if they would be happy to host the training in Carmel Village Hall.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That training be offered to new Councillors on the Code of Conduct, and that the session also include training for Chairs; and
- (b) That the possibility of using Carmel Village Hall for the training be considered at the next meeting of Whitford Community Council.

Variation of Order of Business

The Chair indicated that the next item to be considered would be The Role of a Councillor.

31. THE ROLE OF A COUNCILLOR

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which provided details of the role of a County Councillor and the potential expectations of them.

A Councillor was an integral part of the Council as collectively, all seventy Councillors in Flintshire were Flintshire County Council.

The role description for a Flintshire County Councillor was published on the website and covered accountabilities, role, purpose and activity.

As a guide, the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) believed that the role of a 'back bench' Councillor was likely to be the equivalent of three working days a week. A Cabinet Member was likely to work the equivalent of a 37 hour week.

Town and Community Councillors had their own separate roles. It was important that County Councillors and Town and Community Councillors worked together in representing their communities and likewise, County Councils and

Town and Community Councils were encouraged to work closely together and may hold regular liaison meetings – this was the purpose of the Flintshire Forum.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) published a new Councillor guide 'A Guide for New Councillors in Wales' which set out the role of a Councillor, and was appended to the report. In addition, a Local Government association guide to working within a political environment was also appended to the report. The Committee welcomed the report, in particular the WLGA guide and requested that this be sent out to all County Councillors and to Town and Community Clerks.

Ken Molyneux commented that the information on social media was sparse within the document. The Head of Democratic Services explained that the WLGA had a separate social media protocol; the Monitoring Officer explained that this had previously been reported to Standards Committee and could also be found on the WLGA website. In addition, he said that other such information would be available, via the Town and Community Clerks, who had access to One Voice Wales or the Society of Local Council Clerks.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be received; and
- (b) That a copy of the WLGA guide 'A Guide for New Councillors In Wales', which set out the role of a Councillor, be sent to County Councillors and Town and Community Council Clerks.

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

Rob Dewey presented his verbal report following his visit as an independent member to Northop Hall Community Council which had taken place on 10th September.

The meeting had been a positive experience and was well led by the Chair with helpful assistance from the Clerk. He reported on the good external signage to the meeting venue, and the use of name plates in the meeting. The Clerk was new and an appropriate training course had been identified for her. She delivered a good and thorough report. He praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

He felt it would be beneficial if Town and Community Councils published draft minutes of their previous meetings, given the timing between meetings, which would be of assistance to any members of the public. Councillor Heesom supported this and requested that the Monitoring Officer look into that being a possibility.

There was one remaining visit outstanding which was Shotton Town Council; Ken Molyneux was visiting there the following week.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be received and feedback given to Town and Community Councils accordingly.

33. FEEDBACK FROM THE INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' VISITS TO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report and explained the independent members of the Standards Committee had attended all but one Town and Community Council meetings over the past 12 months. The visits had been carried out in order to gain a greater understanding of how Town and Community Council meetings were run across the County, with a particular focus on issues pertaining to the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code), and to provide any feedback arising from the visits that may be useful.

The overriding feedback was that Town and Community Council meetings in Flintshire were well organised and attended and that Town and Community Councillors, and their Clerks, should be commended for their hard work and commitment.

Copies of letters sent to Town and Community Councils following each visit had been sent out and were appended to the report.

There were some common themes that had arisen where members of the Standards Committee considered improvements should be made to Town and Community Council meetings, which were:

1. Declarations of Interest should appear as a standing item on all agendas before substantive items were listed;
2. Where Declarations of Interest were made by Councillors, they should both verbally express whether the interest was personal, or both personal and prejudicial, and should also briefly explain the nature of the interest including which item on the agenda it related to and the same should be submitted in writing before the end of the meeting;
3. Agendas should be available prior to meetings on the Council's website and minutes of meetings should also be published on the Council's website;
4. In order to promote accessibility, the location, date and time of meetings should be available on the Council's website and adequate signposting at and around the venue itself should be in place;
5. Name plates should be displayed for Councillors at meetings so members of the public know who the Members of the Council are;
6. Inductions should be arranged for all new Councillors, including an explanation of the expectations upon them under the Code;
7. That the matters required under the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 are published on Town and Community Council websites as follows:
 - a) Information on how to contact it, and if different, the Clerk including:
 - i. A telephone number;
 - ii. A postal address;

- iii. An email address;
- b) Information about each of its Members, including:
 - i. The Member's name;
 - ii. How the Member may be contacted;
 - iii. The Member's party affiliation (if any);
 - iv. The ward which the Member represents (where relevant);
 - v. Any office of the Council held by the Member;
 - vi. Any Committee of the Council to which the Member belongs.
- c) The minutes of the proceedings of the Council's meeting and (in so far as is reasonably practicable) any documents which are referred to in the minutes;
- d) Any audited statement of the Council's accounts; and
- e) The register of Members' interests.

In response to a question from Councillor Johnson, the Monitoring Officer explained that whilst it was a requirement to publish contact details for Members, he was able to give permission, depending on the circumstances explained to him, for such information to be redacted from the website or documents available to be viewed by the public.

The Monitoring Officer sought feedback from Town and Community Councils on whether any of the recommendations outlined in the seven letters had been acted upon. Feedback could be received up to 4th November 2019 to enable the details to inform a final report to the Committee on the visits in December 2019. Holywell Town Councillor, Ted Palmer, said that since the letters had been received, Holywell Town Council now displayed Councillor name plates, had public speaking on the agenda and Declaration of Interest forms were put out on the tables.

A comment was made by Councillor Huw Morgan of Nannerch Community Council that the agenda for the joint meeting with Town and Community Councils should make it clear that the training provided at 6.00pm was open to Town and Community Council representatives and not just Standards Committee members, as was usually the case with Standards Committee meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the report be circulated to all Town and Community Councils in Flintshire and the common theme and suggestions outlined in the report be endorsed as recommendations of best practice to those Councils.

34. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was received.

In November the Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales would be submitted in addition to a report on Liaison with the Council on Ethical Issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

35. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 7.40 pm)

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Chairman