

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4 NOVEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 4 November 2019

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

38. DISPENSATIONS

None.

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

Ken Molyneux presented his verbal report following his visit to a meeting of Shotton Town Council.

Having experienced difficulties in making initial contact with the Town Council to obtain meeting information, he had been provided with an email address for the Clerk who had responded, however the venue for the meeting was different to that shown on the website. He said that the meeting had been well chaired with good participation by those present, but that two members arriving after the start of the meeting had not been given an opportunity to declare any interests. Julia Hughes reported similar problems in contacting the Clerk during previous attempts to attend a meeting.

On one of the points raised, the Monitoring Officer explained that the County Forum meeting dates avoided clashes with meetings of Town and Community Councils.

The following points were raised which were to be fed back to Town and Community Councils:

- To ensure that websites were up-to-date, displaying contact details and information on meetings to assist members of the public who may wish to attend.
- To remind Clerks that members arriving late to meetings should be given the opportunity to declare any interests before participating in the meeting.

An overview of all the visits would be reported to the next meeting, including feedback received from Town and Community Councils.

RESOLVED:

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

40. LIAISON WITH THE COUNCIL ON ETHICAL ISSUES

The Monitoring Officer presented a report on the outcome of the Committee's resolution on 2 September 2019 for the Council to voluntarily adopt a number of best practice recommendations made by the 'Committee on Standards in Public Life'. The report related to the specific recommendation for the Standards Committee Chair and Vice-Chair to meet regularly with senior figures within the Council to provide an opportunity for informal discussion on the Committee's work programme and to raise any concerns about procedures, protocols or Member behaviour.

Following agreement by the Leader and Chair of the Council, a preliminary meeting had been arranged with the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair for 18 November, with the aim for subsequent meetings to be held every six months.

Councillor Johnson's suggestion that the second meeting take place before the date of the Annual General Meeting 2020 was noted.

When asked by Councillor Heesom about including Group Leaders, the Monitoring Officer suggested that the first meeting include consideration on the membership of the group and frequency of meetings. This was welcomed by Councillor Heesom. The Monitoring Officer also clarified that those on the membership would not need to declare personal interests as this was an internal group of the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the agreement of the Leader and Chair of Council to six monthly liaison meetings be welcomed; and
- (b) That the key issues set out in the report form the agenda for such meetings and the first meeting consider the future membership and frequency of meetings.

41. PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW) CASEBOOK ISSUE 21 (APRIL-JUNE 2019) AND ISSUE 22 (JULY-SEPTEMBER 2019)

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report to inform the Committee of the latest publications of the Public Service Ombudsman Wales (PSOW) Code of Conduct Casebook. During the period covered, there were 17 complaints investigated by the PSOW of which eight were found to have no evidence of breach, five led to findings of no action necessary, three led to referrals to the relevant Standards Committees and one led to a referral to the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Julia Hughes referred to an investigation involving a member of Prestatyn Town Council and explained that she had not declared an interest as she had not taken part in those proceedings. She proposed that information on the PSOW Casebook be circulated to Town and Community Councils to share learning, particularly on investigations relating to the Declaration of Interest process. This was agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the findings of those complaints that were investigated by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) during April to June 2019 and July to September 2019, as summarised in issue 21 and 22 of the Casebook, be noted; and
- (b) That the Monitoring Officer circulate a link to the PSOW website to Town and Community Councils for information purposes.

42. UPDATE ON THE VACANCY FOR AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update on the recruitment process for the independent member vacancy on the Committee. He explained the necessary requirements including the need for the interview panel to consist of no more than five people including the lay member.

The Chairman spoke in favour of fewer people on the panel.

It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer would progress the advertisement of the vacancy with a view to the interview taking place before Christmas. He would circulate details of the interview date nearer the time to establish availability for the panel, aiming for three members.

RESOLVED:

That the Monitoring Officer arrange for the advertisement of the vacancy and circulate details of the interview date.

43. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was considered, noting that feedback from the forthcoming informal meeting with the Leader and Chair of the Council would be scheduled.

Councillor Woolley suggested an item in the New Year on any Code of Conduct issues which may have arisen from the election period.

It was agreed that the January meeting would be cancelled unless any dispensation requests were received.

The Chairman submitted his apologies for the February meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

44. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6pm and ended at 6.50pm)

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Chairman