



# **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14**



## FOREWORD BY THE CHAIRMAN

I became Chair at the end of the year covered by this report having previously been Vice Chair of the committee. I would like firstly to pay tribute to the work undertaken by Patricia Jones as Chair, Vice Chair and committee member during her time on the committee which ended in July. Earlier in the year Mr Chris Bretherton-Watt retired from the committee and again I would like to record thanks for the contribution he made to the work of the committee. His place was taken by Kenneth Molyneux who is making a valuable contribution to the work of the committee.

During the year we have used our differing experiences, skills and knowledge in the discharge of the work of the committee. The work of the committee has concentrated on proactively promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst County Councillors, Town & Community Councillors and co-opted members.

It was not necessary during the year to hold a formal hearing to deal with any alleged breach of the Members' Code. During the year there has been a lot of activity in relation to training. Normally meetings of the committee are preceded by an informal training session on topics of relevance to its work. Training sessions have also been arranged on the Members' Code of Conduct for County, Town & Community Councillors. Meetings of the committee are annually hosted by a Town or Community Council and open to all such Councils. This enables discussion of any issues or concerns they may have and to assist or advise them as to any particular approach which should be taken.

On the 29 April Flintshire hosted the North Wales Standards Committee Forum attended by representatives from the six North Wales County Councils. On the 1 July Anglesey hosted a training day for the six North Wales Councils facilitated by Mr Keith-Lucas. The feedback for both these events was positive and provided the opportunity for matters of common interest to be shared.

Lastly I would like to thank the officers who have advised, arranged and attended the meetings of the committee during the year.

Edward Hughes  
Chair of the Standards Committee

## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Although the Standards Committee is one of Flintshire County Council's Committees, the majority of its members are independent of the running and the day to day operation of the Council or local government. In addition to these independent members the Committee includes a member who represents the interests of all the 34 Town and Community Councils within Flintshire, as well as three elected members of Flintshire County Council.

Mr Kenneth Molyneux became an independent member of the Committee from December 2013 for a term of 5 years.

During the year the Chair of the Committee, Mrs Pat Jones' term of office as an independent member came to an end and she decided to stand down with effect from July 2014. Mr Edward Hughes, (formerly the Vice Chair) was appointed as the new Chair of the Committee at its September meeting with Mr Robert Dewey being appointed as Vice Chair.

The members and the dates when they are due to retire are set out below:-

### Independent Committee Members

### Appointment Ends

Mr Robert Dewey	May 2017 (Vice Chair)
Mr Kenneth Molyneux	December 2018
Mrs Phillipa Ann Earlam	May 2019
Mr Edward Hughes	May 2019 (Chair)

### Community Committee Member

Councillor Jonathan Duggan-Keen	June 2017 (at the next Council elections)
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### Flintshire County Council Members

Councillor David Cox (Labour)	May 2017
Councillor Hilary McGuill (Liberal Democrat)	May 2017
Councillor Arnold Woolley (Independent)	May 2017

## THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

The committee's main role is to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and to assist them to observe the Members' Code of Conduct. It is responsible for doing so for Members of Flintshire County Council and the County's 34 Town and Community Councils.

The committee is responsible for considering and deciding upon complaints, referred to it by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, that members have breached the Code of Conduct.

It also considers applications made by members for dispensations to allow them to take part in discussions even though they have a prejudicial interest under the Code.

### Frequency of Meetings

During the year the Committee has met on the following occasions:

14 October 2013 – combined meeting with Town and Community Councils  
4 November 2013  
2 December 2013  
10 March 2014  
7 April 2014  
12 May 2014  
7 July 2014  
1 September 2014

The work of the committee has involved discussions on issues including:-

#### **1. Audit of Declarations of Interest**

At the November committee meeting a report was presented on the results of an audit of the extent members completed notifications where required following a declaration of interest at a meeting. This led to either the Monitoring Officer or his Deputy providing a short training session prior to scheduled meetings of all committees reminding members of the need to ensure verbal declarations were formally registered or notified. A recent further audit has shown a much improved practice in meeting this requirement.

## **2. Dispersations**

The Members' Code of Conduct provides that a Councillor cannot take part in a discussion if he/she has a 'prejudicial interest' under the Code of Conduct. However, the member does have the right to make an application to the committee for permission to take part in the discussion despite the existence of the interest, ie. a dispensation.

During the year the committee granted a total of 30 dispensations, 17 of these related to County Council members who had close personal associates employed by the Council that were affected by the single status negotiations that were concluded following a report to County Council. Whenever an application was granted appropriate safeguards were put in place to ensure transparency and to protect public confidence in the impartiality of the decision-making process.

## **3. Allegations Against Members**

There were four complaints against County Councillors during the period. So far three have been resolved and the Ombudsman has decided not to investigate. One remaining complaint is still being considered.

## **4. Local Resolution of Complaints**

At the start of the year the Council agreed its local resolution of complaints procedure. This provides a way of speedily resolving low level complaints made by a County Councillor or officer against a County Councillor to be speedily resolved. During the year three such complaints were resolved by the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer.

## **5. External Reports**

At its meeting in December the committee considered the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales annual letter 2012/13. At the committee's March meeting it considered the Adjudication Panel for Wales annual report 2012/13. The consideration of such reports provides the opportunity to learn from experiences elsewhere so as to prevent such issues arising in Flintshire.

## 6. Review of Codes and Protocols

During the year the committee has received reports on the review of the Officers' Code of Conduct and on the review of the Flintshire Planning Code. Both codes form part of the Council's Constitution and play an important part in ensuring high standards of conduct by Members and officers. In each case the committee made detailed comments that will help ensure the codes remain up-to-date, relevant and effective.

### Useful Contacts

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Public Services Ombudsman for Wales - [www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk)

Adjudication Panel for Wales - [www.adjudicationpanelwales.org.uk](http://www.adjudicationpanelwales.org.uk)