



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIRMAN

This was my first full year became as Chair of the Committee and the first full year with the current membership of the committee.

The committee is increasingly confident in its role and has used its skills and experience to help review the protocols and procedures at the council, promote awareness and offer training on standards issues. The committee has a 3 year rolling programme of reviewing the parts of the Constitution relating to standards. By the end of that period all relevant parts will have been brought up to date and amended in light of best practice as required.

I am pleased that the council has still not had to sit in judgement on alleged breach of the code. It has received numerous requests for dispensation from the code of conduct which I believe demonstrates that councillors are aware of their obligations and are considering the ethical course of action in advance of council meetings.

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.

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

Independent Committee Members

	<u>Appointment Ends</u>
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:

6th October 2014
3rd November 2014
8th December 2014
9th February 2015
13th April 2015
8th June 2015
6th July 2015
7th September 2015

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

1. Audit of Declarations of Interest

At the November committee meeting the committee received an update on the audit of the extent to which members completed notifications where required following a declaration of interest at a meeting. Previous compliance with the rules had been 66% and this had prompted a series of training events for councillors and changes in process to remind them to record in writing those interests declared verbally at a meeting. As a result the levels of compliance had increased to 99% for which all councillors are to be congratulated.

2. Dispensations

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, i.e. a dispensation.

During the year the committee granted a total of 13 dispensations, across a wide range of issues. In each case the committee carefully considered what level of participation by the councillor would be possible whilst still ensuring transparency and being able to protect public confidence in the impartiality of the decision-making process.

3. Complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

There were 8 complaints against County Councillors during the period. The Ombudsman declined to investigate all of them.

4. Local Resolution of Complaints

In the first full year of using the local resolution procedure only 1 complaint was made. The councillor concerned undertook training but declined to give a public apology. The complaint is therefore not resolved. During the coming year, the committee will look to review the evidence of how the system has operated over the 18 months it has been in force.

5. External Reports

The committee considered the annual report of both the Ombudsman and Adjudication Panel for Wales. The consideration of such reports provides the opportunity to learn from experiences elsewhere so as to prevent such issues arising in Flintshire.

6. Code of Conduct for Officers

The Council has reviewed its code of conduct for officers. The committee was pleased to see and support the introduction of a register of interests for senior officers. This will increase transparency and, despite legislative differences, bring the obligations for officers closer into line with those of councillors.

7. Review of Codes and Protocols

During the year the committee has received reports on the review of the various codes and protocols that apply to councillors. In each case the committee made detailed comments that will help ensure the codes remain up-to-date, relevant and effective. The council has now given all its councillors an iPad in order to improve communications. The committee has therefore introduced a protocol setting out the rules and expectations for how they are to be used and endorsed guidance from the WLGA on the use of social media in order to regulate this new area of behaviour.

Useful Contacts

- Gareth Owens, Monitoring Officer - Tel No. 01352 702344
- E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk
- Matthew Georgiou,
Deputy Monitoring Officer - Tel No. 01352 702330
- E-mail: matthew.georgiou@flintshire.gov.uk
- Public Services Ombudsman for Wales - www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk
- Adjudication Panel for Wales - www.adjudicationpanelwales.org.uk