

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 8 February 2016
Report Subject	Review of Protocol on Councillor Newsletters
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012 the Committee considered whether to introduce a protocol on councillors using council resources to produce newsletters in their wards. It made recommendations to Council which Council chose not to adopt, preferring instead to prohibit the use of council resources for such purposes.

On a similar note, Section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to make arrangement for every member to prepare an annual report, which it must then publish. Guidance published in May 2013 allowed councils to set conditions/limits on what it contained within such reports, and also for councils to decide how the reports would be published.

On 17 July 2013 the Democratic Services Committee resolved:

- (a) That the following conditions be imposed as part of the arrangements under Section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011:
- (i) That annual reports by Members must comply with the statutory guidance including the standard template referred to in paragraph 1.6 of that guidance.
 - (ii) That the contents of the annual report are not defamatory in the opinion of the Council's Monitoring Officer
- (b) That there are sufficient arrangements for publishing the annual reports and publicising their availability if they are published on the appropriate part of the Council's website and their availability publicised on it.

Since July 2013 there has been little interest in or take up of annual reports. The number published for 2014/15 was three.

By contrast councillors are (anecdotally) known to be regularly producing their own newsletters without support or assistance from the Council. Therefore, there seems no need to amend either the arrangements for newsletters or annual reports. However, it would be useful to have clear data on the number of councillors producing their own newsletters and the frequency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee confirms that the current arrangements for councillor newsletters and annual reports are sufficient and do not require amendment.
2	That all councillors be asked to confirm whether they produce newsletters and how often.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	COUNCILLOR NEWSLETTERS
1.01	The Code of Conduct requires councillors to act in accordance with the Council's requirements when using resources allocated to them. The current protocol on newsletters means it would be a breach of the code to use a council computer to produce such a newsletter.
1.02	The original report on newsletters promoted a wider review of how council resources are used. The Council adopted a protocol on the use of Council IT in 2013.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Whilst the protocol on newsletters remains as currently drafted, there are no resource implications. If Council IT were used to draft but not print newsletters again the implications would be minimal.
2.02	There are 55,000 ca households in Flintshire. Clearly, there would be a significant cost if councillors printed just a single page newsletter for every house once a year.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	If the Committee wishes to change the rules on newsletters or annual reports then a report to Council would be necessary.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Not permitting the use of Council resources to be used for producing newsletters might have an impact on unwaged councillors. However, the view of the majority of councillors was that this was a small cost that should be covered from the basic allowance.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Report to Standards Committee 3 September 2012</p> <p>Report to Democratic Services Committee 17 July 2013</p> <p>Statutory Guidance on Annual Reports published by Welsh Government 16.5.13</p> <p>Report to Council 25 October 2012</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer (Governance) Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None