

Appendix 1

All Town and Community Clerks

Sent via e mail

Your Ref/Eich Cyf

Our Ref/Ein Cyf

Date/Dyddiad

Ask for/Gofynner am

Direct Dial/Rhif Union

E-mail/E-bost

GO/TC

11th January 2019

Gareth Owens

01352 702344

gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk

All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

As you are aware, the independent members of the Standards Committee are currently undertaking visits to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted. The findings from the visits are reported to the Committee so that feedback can be given to Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from the first four visits, undertaken in October, were received by the Committee this week. The four independent members agreed that these had been positive experiences and praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance. They noted that the meetings had been well controlled by the Chairs (and Vice-Chair in one case), ably supported by Clerks.

Amongst the findings were some minor procedural points that may be of general interest and assistance to all Councils. The points focus on helping members of the public who wish to attend meetings:

- To promote accessibility, it is important that updated meeting information is available on the website and on noticeboards (for members of the public with no internet access) and that venues are clearly signposted where there is more than one room in the building.
- Whilst recognizing the varying levels of resources, Clerks should aim to respond promptly to enquiries from members of the public where possible.
- Following the requirements of the Code of Conduct when declaring interests at meetings including explaining the nature of the interest and how it has arisen helps everyone to understand what is happening.
- It would be helpful for members of the public to know whether they are permitted to speak. For example, some Town/Community Councils provide this opportunity via a separate standing agenda item or by stating on the agenda that members of the public are allowed to speak at the Chair's discretion.

County Hall, Mold. CH7 6NB

www.flintshire.gov.uk

Neuadd y Sir, Yr Wyddgrug. CH7 6NB

www.sirfflint.gov.uk

We welcome correspondence in Welsh. We will respond to correspondence received in Welsh without delay.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth Gymraeg. Ymatebwn yn ddi-oed i ohebiaeth a dderbynnir drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg.



- To note the need to formally agree the minutes of previous meetings.

The Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth Owens', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Gareth Owens
Chief Officer Governance

All Town and Community Clerks

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Your Ref/Eich Cyf

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6th February 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my second update regarding the visits by the independent members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 4th February and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from four further visits, undertaken in October and November last year, were received by the Committee this week. As in the case of the last reported visits, the four independent members agreed that these had been positive experiences and praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

Amongst the findings were some minor procedural points that may be of general interest and assistance to all Councils. The points focus on helping members of the public who wish to attend meetings and some of these points were identified in respect of the last four visits:

- The same point was made again about the importance of the location of meetings being clear and information being available on the website and on noticeboards, as well as venues being clearly signposted where there is more than one room in the building;
- The best use of the layout of the meeting room should be made, in terms of the audibility and visibility of the meeting for any public attending;
- The identity of members of the meeting itself should be made clear for the benefit of any public attending;

- Following the requirements of the Code of Conduct when declaring interests at meetings including explaining the nature of the interest, how it has arisen and what steps you will take in respect of it (e.g. to leave the room if it is a prejudicial interest) and that a request for any such declarations is made by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting prior to considering any substantive business

The Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth Owens', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gareth Owens
Chief Officer Governance

All Town and Community Clerks

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GO/TC

20th March 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my third update regarding the visits by the Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 4th March and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from eight further visits, undertaken in November and December 2018 and January 2019, were received by the Committee. As in the case of the last reported visits, the four Independent Members agreed that these had been positive experiences and praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

In addition to the procedural points, the Committee requested that the following be fed back to Town and Community Councils:

- The recognition of the benefit of youth involvement – Community Councils can, following public advertisement, appoint youth representatives who can play a valuable role in reaching an often neglected demographic. As the local government franchise is soon to be extended to 16 year olds, their participation is to be encouraged;
- The benefit of public consultation sessions;
- Access to the Code of Conduct being made available on the website.

It was also agreed that a list of what Town and Community Councils were required to publish on their website would be sent out. This is attached.

As with previous reports, simple practical arrangements that could make it easier for the public were noted. These were:

- The same point was made again about the importance of the location of meetings being clear and information being available on the website and on noticeboards, as well as venues being clearly signposted where there is more than one room in the building;
- The best use of the layout of the meeting room should be made, in terms of the audibility and visibility of the meeting for any public attending;
- The identity of members of the meeting itself should be made clear for the benefit of any public attending;
- Following the requirements of the Code of Conduct when declaring interests at meetings including explaining the nature of the interest, how it has arisen and what steps you will take in respect of it (e.g. to leave the room if it is a prejudicial interest) and that a request for any such declarations is made by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting prior to considering any substantive business.

The Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

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Gareth Owens
Chief Officer Governance

All Town and Community Clerks

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30th April 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my fourth update regarding the visits by the Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 29th April and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from three further visits, undertaken in January and February 2019 were received by the Committee. As with previous reported visits, the four Independent Members agreed that these had been positive experiences and praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

In addition to the procedural points, the Committee requested that the following be fed back to Town and Community Councils.


One meeting seemed to take a very long time and finished very late. When meetings take this long people may find it more difficult to concentrate and it can mean that people are less able to stay to hear items that may be of importance to them. Tempers can also fray if meetings are overly long leading to intemperate behaviour.

Clearly the length of a meeting will be dictated in large measure by the business to be discussed, number of participants (if there is a large public presence for example) and the significance of issues. In all cases though strong chairing can help to ensure that the business is transacted smoothly and effectively – for example it is important to prevent people from speaking multiple times or repeating points made previously, to move the debate on after the issues have been thoroughly aired etc.

The members have now visited 26 councils and the remaining 10 visits will be scheduled over the coming months. Once all have been completed the Committee aims to pull together an overview of its work into a single document.

As before, the Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

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Gareth Owens
Chief Officer Governance

All Town and Community Clerks

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14th June 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my fifth update regarding the visits by the Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 3rd June and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from three further visits, undertaken in January, February and March 2019 were received by the Committee. As with previous reported visits, the four Independent Members agreed that these had been positive experiences and again praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

Although outside the scope of the visits to Town and Community Councils it has become apparent that a number of Councils are losing their clerks, and that Councils generally are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit. I am aware that several Councils employ the same clerk though they do so as separate employers and therefore do not share the costs of training and the time/effort of appraising and developing the clerk. There are however two Councils (Broughton & Bretton and Hawarden) which jointly employ their clerk, Sharron Jones. They share the salary costs, giving the position longer hours and a more attractive package overall, and they also share the costs of recruitment, development and training. Clearly Councils considering sharing a clerk will need to check that their values and expectations are aligned before proceeding but if you find your Council is in this position then feel free to talk to Sharron Jones.

The Independent Members have also commented on the difficulties they sometimes encounter in locating information on Council websites. Each Council should, of course, be free to choose the design and layout of their websites to reflect their local priorities. However, I have listed below the statutory requirements for what it must include and the key point is that residents must be able to find basic information (such as dates, times and agendas for meetings) quickly and easily.

Under the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 a Community Council must publish the following matters on its website:

(a) information on how to contact it and, if different, its 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 meetings and (in so far as is reasonably practicable) any documents which are referred to in the minutes;

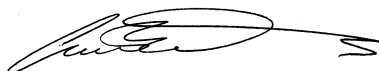
(d) any audited statement of the council's accounts:

(e) the register of members' interests.

I am also aware the local Councils can experience difficulties in getting their websites translated. Many County Councils in North Wales use the translation service provided by Conwy Borough Council, who charge very reasonable rates. Any Council wishing to find out whether Conwy can help them should contact customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk.

As before, the Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely



Gareth Owens
Chief Officer Governance

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2nd July 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my sixth update regarding the visits by the Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 1st July and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from five further visits, undertaken in May and June 2019 were received by the Committee. As with previous reported visits, the four Independent Members agreed that these had been positive experiences and again praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

The following points were raised -

- The Committee still encounter some problems in finding meetings particularly where they take place in buildings with several entrances or different rooms;
- It is common place, particularly when making a repeated/regular declaration of interest, for Councillors not to say why/how the interest arises. It is a requirement of the Code for Councillors to specify the nature of the interest when making the declaration so that any member of the public (who might be unfamiliar with the interest) has sufficient information to understand the Councillor's stake in an item;
- Again just as a point to assist members of the public attending, it would be helpful if Councillors had name plates at the meeting so that it is possible to work out who is who.

The Committee intends to finish its inspections and report the last visits back to the Standards Committee meeting on 2 September. This will enable us to consider at our 30 September meeting, to which you are all invited, an overall report looking at the lesson from the whole of the programme of visits.

As before, the Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Officer Governance

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3rd September 2019

Gareth Owens

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All Town and Community Clerks

Visits to Town and Community Councils

This is my seventh update regarding the visits by the Independent Members of the Standards Committee to Town/Community Council meetings to observe practice and gain an understanding of how local council business is conducted.

The findings from further visits undertaken were reported to the Committee on the 2nd September and I am writing with feedback to all Town/Community Councils to give assurance on good practice and procedures.

The findings from three further visits, undertaken in June and July 2019 were received by the Committee. As with previous reported visits, the four Independent Members agreed that these had been positive experiences and again praised the level of commitment and contributions by those in attendance.

As we've discussed previously, the setting and administrative arrangements for meetings can have a large impact on whether the meeting proceeds in a smooth and orderly fashion. Members have seen good examples where the formality of proceedings helped generate a conducive atmosphere to calm and considered debate without stifling input.

Conversely, they have also found that less structured meetings can be both confusing for members of the public and can contribute to unruly behaviour. An important part of that structure which will help Councillors to comply with the Code of Conduct, is to have an agenda item early in the running order for Members to declare an interest. Such an item not only prompts Members to consider whether they need to declare an interest but also reminds them to do so. It is routinely included as an item after apologies and minutes in most Councils.

Again, the Members have encountered some difficulties in finding the precise location of meetings. Clearly, this could make it difficult for members of the public to attend as well. Please consider putting clear directions on your websites and/or the use of signage at the venue.

As before, the Committee hopes that this feedback is useful and wishes to acknowledge the dedication and good work undertaken by Town/Community Councillors in their voluntary roles.

Yours sincerely

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