

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
3 DECEMBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 3 December 2018

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

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

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2018 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 32: Updated guidance on the use of social media from the Welsh Local Government Association - the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the guidance had been circulated to County Councillors and Clerks of Town and Community Councils.

Councillor Heesom said that the representatives from Mostyn Community Council had given positive feedback on the meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

40. DISPENSATIONS

Buckley Town Councillors Dennis and Jeannie Hutchinson

The Monitoring Officer provided background information to a dispensation request from Buckley Town Councillor Dennis Hutchinson (and his wife) whose bus company was currently contracted to provide services in the County. As part of a review of local bus routes, the County Council had agreed to a request from Buckley Town Council for additional time to agree a formal response to the consultation, specifically on the 'Shopper Hopper' service which was operated by Councillor Hutchinson's company. Both Councillors were seeking dispensation to

be present, without participating or voting, when the matter was considered at a forthcoming meeting of Buckley Town Council.

There was discussion on allowing Councillors with a prejudicial interest the same rights as members of the public in being allowed to remain in the room to observe meetings, without affecting the openness of the debate. It was also noted that Buckley Town Council had already benefitted by being granted an extension to the consultation deadline and that other bus contractors may not be aware of the meeting which had been specially convened to discuss this one topic.

Julia Hughes proposed that dispensation be refused, which was seconded by Jonathan Duggan-Keen. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

Councillor Woolley asked that his abstention from the vote be recorded.

Councillor Veronica Gay

Members of the Committee were asked to consider a dispensation request from County Councillor and Saltney Town Councillor Veronica Gay, received after publication of the agenda. As a member of a Dementia support group and volunteer for a monthly Memory Café, Councillor Gay was seeking dispensation to make verbal and written representations on specific issues affecting the group and Café, without taking part in voting.

It was explained that although this was determined to be a personal interest, Councillor Gay was seeking dispensation as a safety precaution to enable her to speak and put her name to written representations.

Views were expressed on the value of Councillor Gay's knowledge contributing to related representations without voting rights. Some Members felt that the perception of whether this was a public service was a grey area and should be flagged up with Town and Community Councils in respect of individuals with multi-interests seeking dispensation in similar circumstances.

Officers clarified the terms of the dispensation request including the usual time period and safeguards. This was proposed and seconded by the Chairman and Edward Hughes. On being put to the vote, it was carried. The decision applied to Councillor Gay in her capacity as both County Councillor and Town Councillor.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the dispensation request from Buckley Town Councillors Dennis and Jeannie Hutchinson in respect of discussion on local bus services at Buckley Town Council be refused; and
- (b) That Flintshire County Councillor and Saltney Town Councillor Veronica Gay be granted dispensation under paragraphs (d) (e) (f) and (h) of the Standards Committee (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 to make verbal and written representations to Saltney Town Council and Flintshire County Council on matters relating to the Saltney Dementia

support group and the monthly Memory Café. For public meetings, Councillor Gay is to leave the meeting after speaking, before the application is debated and voted on. For private meetings with County Council officers, there is a requirement for at least one witness to be present, to ensure that there are at least three people involved in the conversation, and that the discussion be minuted. The dispensation to be granted for 12 months, ceasing on 3 December 2019.

41. VISITS BY MEMBERS TO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report to agree a mechanism for reporting feedback to Town and Community Councils from visits being undertaken by independent members of the Committee, as discussed at the previous meeting.

The Committee was asked to consider a set of recommendations which had been drafted by officers to set out the best approach. Written notes from each visit provided to the Monitoring Officer would enable him to plan agendas based on workload. The recommendation for written notes to be attached to the public agenda pack would enable them to be considered by the Committee before meetings as well as using them as feedback to Town and Community Councils.

With regard to the future programme, it was suggested that councils could be revisited in two years' time to allow time for feedback to be considered and changes/training undertaken if it was felt necessary. Future visits could also be scheduled at councils where there had been significant membership changes or a new Clerk. Alternatively, Clerks may wish to request a visit, with or without prior notification.

The Monitoring Officer said that if Members did not wish for their written notes to be included on the agenda, these would be designated as background papers and the Committee would need to agree on the feedback to be given to Town/Community Councils on each occasion. On trend analysis, a report could be provided once or twice yearly to summarise the main issues identified during that time which could inform training requirements.

Whilst some Members spoke in favour of sharing written reports, others felt that the feedback should be agreed by the Committee as a whole and that verbal reports would provide an opportunity to clarify any areas of uncertainty before finalising feedback. It was suggested that a section on website information be included on the template form used for writing notes from the visits.

Julia Hughes proposed an amendment to Recommendation 2 in the report for written notes to be forwarded to the Monitoring Officer and reported verbally by Members at meetings of the Standards Committee to allow opportunity for amendment and clarification if required. The summary of feedback would be recorded in the minutes and made available to the respective Town and Community Councils. This was seconded by Ken Molyneux.

It was also agreed that reports would be considered in date order of the visits as Town and Community Councils were keen to receive early feedback. This would also give them an opportunity to clarify any issues which may have been misinterpreted.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the number of feedback reports from visits to Town and Community Councils considered at each meeting is adjusted so that agendas are not overloaded, unless urgent issues need to be fed back when these will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. The reports are to be considered in chronological order;
- (b) That the written notes (using the agreed template) form background papers to agendas. Verbal reports to be made at each meeting to enable the Committee to resolve what feedback is to be given to Town and Community Councils that have been visited; and
- (c) That Members inform the Monitoring Officer of a visit to a Town or Community Council and send their written notes of the visit to him, as soon as possible after a visit has taken place, for the purposes of agenda planning for the Committee.

42. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was presented for consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

43. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.50pm)

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Chairman