

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
4 FEBRUARY 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Clwyd Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA on Monday, 4 February 2019

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom and Paul Johnson

Co-opted members:

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

APOLOGIES: Councillor Arnold Woolley

IN ATTENDANCE:

Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

53. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

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

54. DISPENSATIONS

None were received.

55. OVERVIEW OF ETHICAL COMPLAINTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which provided a running total of the ethical complaints alleging a breach of the code that had been submitted to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. He advised that as per the Committee's resolution at its meeting in March 2018, the complaints distinguished between different Councils and Councillors whilst remaining anonymous.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported on the list of complaints received during 2017/18 which was appended to the report. He advised that two complaints had been received since the last report. The Deputy Monitoring Officer reported that a significant number of complaints had been submitted in respect of one Town Council. One of these was from a member of the public and investigation was still in progress.

During discussion the Deputy Monitoring Officer provided clarification on the year when the complaints had been made. The Chair commented on the number of alleged breaches made regarding bullying and suggested that more training should be provided to Town and Community Councils to address the issue.

In response to a query by Julia Hughes on the frequency of reporting ethical complaints, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that it had been agreed that an overview of ethical complaints would be included as a standing agenda item for consideration by the Committee and an update provided when new complaints arose. He agreed to review the Committee's decision and report back.

RESOLVED:

That the number and types of complaints be noted.

56. COUNCILLOR TRAINING 2018

The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided a verbal report to inform the Committee of attendance at Councillor training on the Members' Code of Conduct which was delivered on 17 October 2018. He explained that the training session had been organised by Saltney Town Council and had been well attended by a number of representatives from Town and Community Councils. The Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that 21 people had signed the attendance register at the training session on 17 October, but commented that a greater number had been present in the room.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

57. REPORTS FROM INDEPENDENT MEMBER VISITS TO TOWN/COMMUNITY COUNCILS

The following independent members presented their verbal reports:

Phillipa Earlam - Llanasa Community Council
Julia Hughes – Caerwys Town Council and Ysceifiog Community Council
The Chairman - Nercwys Community Council

All reported that observing the meetings had been a positive experience and that they had been well led by Chairs (and a Vice-Chair in one instance) with support from Clerks and good participation by attendees.

The following points were identified to assist Town and Community Councils and members of the public who wished to attend meetings:

- 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

Councillor Patrick Heesom sought additional information from the independent members on the procedures followed for consideration of planning applications during their visits to Town and Community Council meetings. He commented on the need to ensure that Town and Community Council views were appropriately expressed during meetings.

Councillor Paul Johnson commented on the cost of setting up a website and felt that this was a significant expense for small Councils. He asked if the agendas and minutes of Town and Community Councils could be held on a central website provided by the Authority which could give access to the general public. The Chair referred to the requirements of the Local Democracy Act 2013. Councillor Johnson expressed the view that professional technical support was needed to assist Town and Community Councils to set up and maintain a website.

Ken Molyneux asked that a copy of the feedback on visits which had been undertaken be provided to independent members at the same time as it was sent to Town and Community Councils.

The Chair suggested that the number of verbal reports from independent members on their visits to Town and Community Councils be increased at future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal reports be received and the above feedback be given to the four Town and Community Councils.

58. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was received.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that the outcome of consultation with Trade Union colleagues on the Officers' Code of Conduct was still awaited and was not expected to be available to report to the next meeting.

Following a suggestion from Phillipa Earlam it was agreed that an update on Community Asset Transfers be included on the Forward Work Programme for consideration by the Committee at a future meeting.

In response to a question from Julia Hughes, the Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed to make enquiries to determine if the quarterly casebook by the Ombudsman had been released for public view.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the Forward Work Programme be noted.

59. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

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

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 7.35 pm)

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Chairman