

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
2 DECEMBER 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 2 December 2019

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Julia Hughes and Ken Molyneux

APOLOGIES: Phillipa Earlam, and Monitoring Officer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

46. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 5, minute 41, Julia Hughes asked that the second paragraph be amended to read that she had 'referred to an investigation involving a member of Prestatyn Town Council'.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

47. DISPENSATIONS

None.

48. FEEDBACK FROM TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS ON INDEPENDENT MEMBER VISITS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced a report to provide feedback from Town and Community Councils on the visits undertaken by Independent Members. He advised that nine responses had been received and were summarised in the appendix to the report. Overall the feedback was positive

and a number of suggestions had been made by the Councils, as detailed in the report, to further improve processes.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer said that Town and Community Councils reported that they found the programme of visits valuable and had provided changes for the better in some practices. The Committee was asked to consider the comments appended to the report and if they wished to adopt any further suggestions or amend existing processes.

Councillor Patrick Heesom congratulated the Chief Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Independent Members of the Committee on the success of the programme which he said had worked well and was an exemplar of good practice to be adopted by other authorities.

Councillor Arnold Woolley referred to the suggestion that the Committee might consider reviewing Town and Community Council websites for completeness and provide feedback if mandatory information was missing. He spoke in support of the need for advice and guidance to be provided to Town and Community Councils to ensure their websites were compliant with statutory requirements, commenting on compliance with the Equality Act as an example.

Julia Hughes emphasised the importance of key information being made available to the general public on all Town and Community Council websites on the dates and times of meetings, venue, agenda, minutes and reports. She also spoke in support of the need for advice and guidance to be provided to ensure Town and Community Councils were compliant with regulatory requirements. She referred to the recommendation in the report that checks be undertaken on Town and Community Council websites and suggested that preparatory work for this be included as an item on the Forward Work Programme and a list of the requirements be provided to assist Independent Members to undertake the checks.

Councillor Paul Johnson suggested that it would be useful if Town and Community Councils could provide data on their website usage.

Councillor Patrick Heesom commented on the need for contact details for Clerks of Town and Community Councils to be made available on websites but said their personal home address should be anonymised.

Ken Molyneux referred to the feedback from Nannerch Community Council which had been helpful and drew attention to the comments regarding attendance at meetings of the Standards Committee, opportunities for feedback, and 'right of reply'. The points raised were acknowledged and the Committee commented that in addition to the written feedback provided to Town and Community Councils following meetings there was also an opportunity to hear verbal feedback at the meetings of the Standards Committee which were public meetings and to raise questions or concerns at the joint meeting of the Standards Committee and Town & Community Council representatives. To provide the best support to Town and Community Councils it was felt that it may not be appropriate to provide immediate verbal feedback at a meeting.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Jonathan Duggan-Keen. It was agreed that the word 'inspections' in the second recommendation be changed to read 'visits'.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee organises a rota of checks on Town and Community Council websites;
- (b) That the process for future visits should include an opportunity for Councils to respond to feedback; and
- (c) That Town and Community Councils be thanked for their feedback and participation in the process

49. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The current Forward Work Programme was considered. Julia Hughes said that an item to provide feedback on the meeting held on 18 November with the Leader and Chair of the Council and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee was to be scheduled on the Programme.

Councillor Arnold Woolley referred to the current vacancy for an Independent Member and with a view to interviews being held at the end of the year he suggested that an update be included as an item on the Programme in the New Year.

In response to a query from Julia Hughes, the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that following publication of the next PSOW Code of Conduct Casebook a report would be submitted to the Committee.

Julia Hughes suggested that feedback on the checks undertaken on Town and Community Council websites be scheduled on the Programme for future meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be noted.

50. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There was one member of the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 6.35pm)

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Chairman