

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
11 JANUARY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Monday, 11 January 2021

PRESENT: Rob Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Earlam, Julia Hughes and Mark Morgan

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Support Officer

20. TRIBUTE TO THE LATE COUNCILLOR KEVIN HUGHES

At the start of the meeting, all those present paid a silent tribute to commemorate Councillor Kevin Hughes who had sadly passed away.

21. STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman advised that a letter had been sent to thank Ken Molyneux for his service, following his resignation as a co-optee of the Committee.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

23. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October were approved, subject to a minor amendment to the resolution on minute number 10. The minutes of the meetings on 2 November and 30 November 2020 were approved without change.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record.

24. DISPENSATIONS

None.

25. INDEPENDENT MEMBER ATTENDANCE AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report to agree a rota of attendance for Independent Members to attend Committee meetings and associated guidelines. He asked that the Committee consider a draft rota and five suggested guidelines to clarify the process and purpose for the visits.

It had previously been agreed that one Independent Member was required to attend each meeting and that two should attend full County Council meetings where possible. On guideline (3), it was agreed that the officers would provide a brief statement for the attendees to read out at meetings, should they be asked to do so.

It was suggested that the meeting on 8 March should be moved to 1 March 2021 to accommodate the end of the Chairman's term of office and that the aim was to include feedback from attendance at meetings on that agenda. On that basis, it was agreed that the Independent Members would provide the Democratic Services Officer with their preferred meeting dates to populate the rota.

The Monitoring Officer drew attention to the library of recorded meetings available on the Council's website as a useful reference. He also advised that meetings in April would be cancelled to divert resources to the Elections in May.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee agrees a rota of attendance and the guidelines for how they should be undertaken.

26. RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to agree the timetable and process for recruiting Independent Members to the Standards Committee. The two vacancies were to replace Ken Molyneux who had resigned and Rob Dewey (the Chairman) whose term of office was coming to an end.

Having sought volunteers, it was agreed that the recruitment panel would comprise of Councillors Patrick Heesom and Paul Johnson, Julia Hughes and Mark Morgan, together with the lay person (Noella Jones). In the event that Mark Morgan was unavailable, Phillipa Earlam would be called upon.

The County Council would need to approve the establishment of the recruitment panel at its meeting on 26 January, prior to the vacancies being advertised. The Monitoring Officer would contact panel members to confirm the interview dates which were likely to take place in March.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee accepts the report and nominates Councillors Patrick Heesom and Paul Johnson, Julia Hughes and Mark Morgan (or Phillipa Earlam if not available) to the proposed appointment panel.

27. STANDARDS FORUM & ETHICAL LIAISON PRE-BRIEFING

The Monitoring Officer presented a report to seek the Committee's views on issues to be raised at forthcoming meetings of the Mid and North Wales Standards Forum and the biennial meeting between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee with the Chair and Leader of the Council (which had been deferred due to the emergency situation).

In preparation for the latter meeting, the Committee was asked to consider suggestions to put to Group Leaders which would help the Committee to fulfil its role and meet requirements of the new legislation. During discussion, it was agreed that the suggestions would be better informed once Independent Members had taken the opportunity to observe formal meetings (as discussed earlier on the agenda) and reported back on their findings at the March meeting.

In welcoming this, Phillipa Earlam suggested attendance at training could be one of the issues to raise. Councillor Johnson said that the Committee itself could explore this issue at a future meeting.

As requested by Julia Hughes, it was agreed that the meeting with the Chair and Leader of the Council would take place first to seek their views prior to the meeting with Group Leaders. The Monitoring Officer would make the necessary arrangements.

It was noted that the next meeting of the Standards Forum was scheduled to be held in October, to be hosted by Powys County Council.

RESOLVED:

That an item on the suggested topics for discussion with the Chair and Leader of the Council be considered at the March meeting, following feedback from Independent Members attending formal committee meetings.

28. REVIEW PROTOCOL ON THE PRODUCTION OF COUNCILLOR NEWSLETTERS

The Monitoring Officer presented the report to review the protocol on the production of Councillor newsletters, which was part of the rolling review of codes and protocols undertaken by the Committee.

The Committee was reminded that during the last review, a survey had been carried out to establish the number of Councillors who produced their own newsletter.

During discussion about the impact of the emergency situation and greater reliance on social media, Julia Hughes asked about the merits in conducting another survey to establish how many Councillors had produced a newsletter in 2020 and whether any were intending to produce do so in 2021 and also whether the methodology had changed.

The suggestion that a further survey be undertaken was supported. Due to other workload commitments, it was agreed that the results of that survey would be scheduled on the Forward Work Programme for later in the year.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the current protocol is not amended; and
- (b) That a report on the results of a further survey of Councillor newsletters be scheduled for later in the year.

29. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration and advised that the public consultation on the Public Services Ombudsman Wales (PSOW) revised guidance to the Code of Conduct would be scheduled when it became available.

Following discussion on the earlier item, Councillor Heesom proposed that the meeting scheduled for 8 March be moved to 1 March 2021. This was seconded by Councillor Woolley and supported by the Committee.

As discussed, the Forward Work Programme would also be amended to include feedback from Independent Members attending committee meetings at the March meeting. To allow for this, the Review of Dispensation Procedures at Conwy, Denbighshire and Wrexham would be moved to the May meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be amended.

30. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.20pm)

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Chairman