

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
5 JULY 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Monday, 5 July 2021

PRESENT: Julia Hughes (Chair)

Councillors: Gladys Healey and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members: Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Earlam, Mark Morgan and Gill Murgatroyd

APOLOGY: Councillor Patrick Heesom

IN ATTENDANCE: Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer (minute numbers 1-4) and Democratic Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May were approved, subject to minor amendments on minute numbers 42 and 45. On that basis, the minutes were moved by Councillor Arnold Woolley and seconded by Mark Morgan.

Committee Membership

The Monitoring Officer provided an update on the outcome of the recruitment process and advised that two preferred candidates would be appointed at different stages, facilitated by the early retirement of Phillipa Earlam. The Chair thanked Phillipa for enabling this change and for her valued contributions to the Standards Committee during her term of office.

RESOLVED:

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

3. DISPENSATIONS

None.

4. AMENDMENTS TO THE PLANNING CODE OF PRACTICE

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the report to review the Planning Code of Practice in line with a resolution of the Committee and Council earlier in the year. He provided an overview of the changes appended to the

report, which would need to be approved by the Constitution & Democratic Services Committee and full Council.

The following further changes were agreed for consistency:

- Retain reference to 'Chair' throughout the document (as opposed to Chairman/Chairperson).
- The same wording to be used in sections 5.5 and 5.8 to describe Members not being able to take part in an item on which they had a pre-determined stance.
- To use the correct title for the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment & Economy) in sections 11 and 12.

On that basis, the recommendation was moved by Councillor Gladys Healey and seconded by Mark Morgan.

RESOLVED:

That the alterations to the Planning Code of Practice identified in tracked changes appended to the report be approved, together with the additional changes raised by this Committee.

5. OVERVIEW OF ETHICAL COMPLAINTS

The Monitoring Officer presented the regular report on the number of ethical complaints alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct which had been submitted to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). The information was anonymised with references assigned to differentiate between individual Councils and Councillors.

The Monitoring Officer provided clarification on points raised by the Committee. In response to comments about chairing meetings, he agreed to contact the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to enquire about the possibility of a training session or video to assist Chairs of Town/Community Councils in maintaining conduct during meetings which may help to reduce the number of complaints.

The recommendation in the report was moved by Gill Murgatroyd and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the number and type of complaints be noted.

6. REVIEW OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

The Chair provided a verbal update on a meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum which she had attended with Mark Morgan (Vice-Chair) and Monitoring Officer. They shared feedback on a range of topics discussed at the meeting, including consultation on the review of the Ethical

Standards Framework currently being undertaken by Richard Penn on behalf of Welsh Government (WG).

The Monitoring Officer advised that Richard Penn would be submitting his recommendations to WG by the end of September 2021 to enable changes to the model Code of Conduct to be implemented in time for the 2022 Local Government Elections. He reminded the Committee of representations previously made on the need for flexibility around sanctions available to the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Councillor Arnold Woolley's proposal to note the report was seconded by Phillipa Earlam.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be noted.

7. REVIEW AND ASSURANCE ON MEMBER/OFFICER PROTOCOL

The Monitoring Officer provided a verbal update on the outcome of a further light touch review of the Member/Officer Protocol to give assurance of appropriate procedures in place to promote mutual respect between officers and elected Members.

Councillor Arnold Woolley's proposal to receive and note the report was seconded by Mark Morgan.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be received and noted.

8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration, noting the following:

- Penn Review of the Ethical Standards Framework to be scheduled (possibly in November).
- Outcomes from the Ethical Liaison meeting to be scheduled (possibly for the November joint meeting with Town/Community Council representatives).

The changes were moved by Phillipa Earlam and seconded by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be approved.

9. PLANNING THE AGENDA FOR THE LIAISON ON ETHICAL ISSUES MEETING

The Monitoring Officer presented the report to plan the agenda for the meeting between the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee, the Chair and Leader of the County Council and Group Leaders. The following suggestions were put forward for consideration:

- Outcome of the Independent Member visits to Council meetings.
- New legislative duties to be implemented in 2022 on which draft guidance from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) was shared privately (paragraph 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)).
- To support the new duties, the suggestion that returning elected Members be involved in the induction process for new Members and that training sessions be held for each political group, supported by Group Leaders.

Whilst the Committee had not received a report on the outcome of all visits to Council meetings, the points raised had been summarised in the minutes of previous meetings. The Chair noted that the inclusion of a procedural note on all formal agendas had been one of the recommendations from the feedback and that this was in place already.

In response to a question from Gill Murgatroyd, the Monitoring Officer provided clarification on the resource implications of the suggested training.

The recommendations put forward by the Monitoring Officer were moved by Councillor Gladys Healey. In seconding the Motion, Phillipa Earlam thanked the Chair, Vice-Chair and Monitoring Officer for their work on this matter and for their attendance at the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft agenda for the next Ethical Liaison Meeting be agreed; and
- (b) That the final agenda be agreed by the Chief Officer (Governance) in consultation with the parties to the meeting.

10. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 8.10pm)

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Chair