

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Conference Room 1B, County Hall, Ruthin on Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2010 at 10.00 a.m.

**PRESENT**

Mr C.B. Halliday (Chair), Councillors G.A. Green, H.LI. Jones and Ms M.E. Medley, Mr G.F. Roberts and Mrs P. White.

**ALSO PRESENT**

The Monitoring Officer and Administrative Officer (C.I. Williams).

**1. APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

***RESOLVED** – that no Members declared any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at this meeting.*

**3. URGENT MATTERS**

No items were raised which in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.

**4. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Standards Committee held on Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2010 were submitted.

***RESOLVED** – that the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

**5. ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

The Committee were informed that there were no written reports relating to the attendance by Members of the Standards Committee at County, Town or Community Council meetings.

Mr G.F. Roberts informed the Standards Committee that he had attended a meeting of the Lifelong Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2010 in County Hall, Ruthin. He explained that he was pleased to report that the Scrutiny Committee had carried out its work effectively and efficiently.

In response to a request from Ms M.E. Medley regarding the provision of details pertaining to the times, dates and venues of Town and Community Council meetings, the Monitoring Officer agreed that lists containing this information, which were currently being compiled by the Engagement and Consultation Manager in the Policy Unit, could be circulated following their completion.

Mr G.F. Roberts explained that details, including telephone numbers, relating to the Clerks of Town and Community Councils had been included in the County Council diary. The Chair confirmed that prior to attending Town and Community Council meetings he would contact the Clerk to the respective Council to seek confirmation that the meeting would be held, and inform them of his intention to attend the meeting. Councillor G.A. Green expressed the view that it would, in some instances, be advantageous if the attendance of Members of the Standards Committee was not announced prior to the meeting. He felt that this would enable Members to observe how meetings were conducted under normal circumstances.

**RESOLVED** – *that the position be noted.*

## **6. TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL MEMBER VACANCY**

The Monitoring Officer explained that, at its meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2010, the Standards Committee had noted Councillor D.A. Thomas's resignation from the Standards Committee and the subsequent proposal that consideration might be given, by Full Council, to appointing one of the nominees who had submitted an application at the time of Councillor Thomas's appointment. He informed Members that, in view of the passage of time since the last consultation following the 2008 Council Elections, Full Council had requested the Monitoring Officer re-consult Town and Community Councils and their Associations to seek nominations plus supporting statements or Curriculum Vitae's in respect of the vacancy.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the Monitoring Officer provided details of the criteria for the appointment of the Town and Community Council Member to the vacancy. He highlighted the importance of treating each nomination equally whilst achieving a geographic, gender and linguistic balance as well as examining all relevant circumstances pertaining to the appointment.

Following further discussion, it was:-

**RESOLVED** –*that the Standards Committee note the position, and the resolution of Full Council that the Monitoring Officer re-consult Town and Community Councils and their Associations to seek nominations plus supporting statements for the vacancy.*

## **7. STANDARDS CONFERENCE IN WALES**

Members of the Committee were informed that, as agreed by the Standards Committee at its meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2010, the Chairman, Councillor G.A. Green and the Monitoring Officer had attended the Standards Conference in Wales held in Cardiff on the 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2010. Mrs P. White

explained that due to family commitments she had been unable attend the 2010 Standards Conference Wales.

The attendees at the 2010 Standards Conference Wales provided reports in respect of the following Workshop Sessions which they had attended:-

### **Workshop – Session One**

Town & Community Council Issues – Councillor G.A. Green and Monitoring Officer.  
Standards & Ethics Committee Hearings – Chairman.

### **Workshop – Session Two**

Engaging with new Social Media – Councillor G.A. Green.  
Proactive Standards & Ethics Committees – Chairman and Monitoring Officer.

Councillor G.A. Green informed Members that the speaker at the Engaging with new Social Media session had promoted social media highlighting many of the positive aspects without referring to any of the negative areas. Reference had been made to the possible dangers relating to the publication of written material and the risks of being susceptible to litigation. He highlighted the benefits and positives relating to social media tools in terms of monitoring or listening tools where information could be obtained which related to local areas and neighbourhoods. The possible risks to individuals, particular reference being made to Councillors, who participate or respond to comments made on social media network sites such as Blogs or Twitter were also highlighted by Councillor Green.

Members were informed by Councillor Green that during the session they had also looked at County Councils web-sites, and he provided details and examples of how other Local Authorities had improved and promoted their respective web-sites. Members were informed by Councillor Green that attending the 2010 Standards Conference Wales had been very worthwhile and it had been a fascinating day.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Head of Customer Care had undertaken work relating to Social Media and had requested guidance as to whether an item relating to this topic could be presented to Informal Council for consideration. He informed Members that the respective guidelines had been examined and he felt that pursuing this area of work could assist in improving lines of communications and in agreeing and setting parameters. During the ensuing discussion, Members agreed that the Monitoring Officer convey the support of the Standards Committee to the Head of Customer Care in respect of the pursuance of this topic.

The Chair referred to the Proactive Standards & Ethics Committees session where, he felt, the general consensus of opinion had been to return to the previous system where, as in England, the respective County Councils addressed complaints received themselves rather than referring them to the Ombudsman. The Chair explained he personally had not supported this view and informed Members that as the session progressed views altered and it had been suggested that Standards Committees should become more proactive. He referred to examples given and

highlighted the importance of identifying and clarifying the role of Standards Committees between monitoring and possibly dictating.

Reference was made by the Chair to a recent occurrence where a County Councillor had been dismissed from a post within the County Council with what appeared to be a written reference to a possible breach of the Code of Conduct. The Chair referred to the discussions which had taken place at the Proactive Standards & Ethics Committees session, regarding the suggestion that Standards Committees should become more proactive, and questioned whether the Standards Committee should intervene in this particular case, having become aware of the alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. He explained that the matter would need to be reported to the Ombudsman, however, if a Member of the Standards Committee reported the matter to the Ombudsman they would then be precluded from taking part in any subsequent Hearing pertaining to the complaint.

Councillor G.A. Green referred to the letter sent to all County Councillors, informing them of the situation in question, which he considered had implied that there had been a Breach of the Code of Conduct. He stressed the importance of ensuring that any actions taken by the Standards Committee were perceived as being open and transparent. Mr G.F. Roberts highlighted the need to have all the relevant facts and information pertaining to the case in question prior to arriving at any decisions.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the Standards Conference in Wales had presented a clear message that Standards Committees should be more proactive and engage more with the political and democratic machinery. However, he expressed the opinion that a specific intervention was not necessarily within the remit of the Standards Committee. The Monitoring Officer highlighted the importance of establishing boundaries for proactive Standards Committees and the need to identify the role of Local Members and the line between local, personal and prejudicial interests.

Members considered the facts before them and requested that the Monitoring Officer communicate, to the Leader of the County Council, the concerns expressed by the Standards Committee and seek his views as to what action he would be taking in respect of this matter.

Following further discussion, it was:-

***RESOLVED*** –that the Monitoring Officer convey the concerns expressed by the Standards Committee to the Leader of the County Council, and seek his views as to what action he would be taking in respect of this matter.

Meeting ended at 11.45 a.m.

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