

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room 1, Ty Nant, Nant Hall Road, Prestatyn on Friday, 14 September 2012 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

C. B. Halliday (Chair), Ms M Medley, Mrs P White and G F Roberts together with Councillors David Jones and Bill Cowie

ALSO PRESENT

The Monitoring Officer (GW), the Deputy Monitoring Officer (LJ), the Democratic Services Officer (RAH)

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor Colin Hughes had submitted his apologies for the meeting.

The Monitoring Officer (MO) also notified the Committee that the translator booked to provide simultaneous translation at the meeting had contacted Democratic Services on the morning of the meeting to say that she would be unable to attend due to a family emergency. Democratic Services did not have enough time to arrange another translator to deputise and so the meeting would proceed without provision for simultaneous Welsh translation.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests declared

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Committee examined the minutes of the previous meeting on 13th July 2012 for accuracy and matters arising. Ms Margaret Medley highlighted that she had been erroneously titled as 'Mrs', which was noted to be amended. The Committee approved that the minutes were otherwise accurate.

The Committee had understood from the previous meeting of the Committee that a list of the times and dates of town and community councils would be made available to the Committee, but that this had not yet been followed up. The MO confirmed that this would be looked in to and that an updated list would be circulated before the next Standards Committee meeting.

Mr Geraint Roberts referred to the minutes in identifying that while the Council was obliged to pay the rates set by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales, members of the Council had a personal choice in determining whether they wished to claim expenses due. He suggested that members should be asked whether or not they wish to receive the remuneration that they are entitled to on an annual basis as this would give a greater opportunity for councillors to forego their entitlement should they be so inclined. The MO said he would explore this possibility with Steve Price, the Democratic Services Manager, and with the Council's Payments Department and update the Committee.

The MO confirmed that the County Council had agreed to re-appoint Councillor David Jones and Mrs Paula White to serve additional terms as members of the Standards Committee. An update was also given of the arrangements to replace Mr Clive Halliday and Mr Geraint Roberts on the Committee, as the terms of both members were due to end in and neither member would be eligible for re-appointment. The County Council had confirmed that Councillors Bill Cowie, Colin Hughes and Martyn Holland would be appointed to an appointments panel to consider applications for the two lay representative vacancies. The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that adverts for these vacancies would be published in the week beginning 10th September.

RESOLVED – *that, subject to the above, the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Councillor David Jones had recently attended a chairs' meeting at County Hall and reported that members of community councils had remarked on the effectiveness of the chair. He emphasised the need for town and community councils to also conduct themselves professionally in the execution of their duties and Ms Medley noted the importance of effective training for chairs to facilitate this. The MO stated that training on the Code of Conduct had been prioritised recently but that he would look in to the possibility of training being arranged for chairs of town and community councils similar to the training offered by the Welsh Local Government Association for chairs of Denbighshire County Council (DCC) committees.

The MO said that it was possible for a representative of the Standards Committee to visit and observe a town or community council if there were recurring issues with the conduct of members, and also suggested that members of the Standards Committee remind members of town and community councils of their obligations to report breaches of the Code of Conduct. It was agreed that in the longer term, the effectiveness of town and community councils would only be guaranteed if their chairs were well trained and had confidence in DCC's procedures.

RESOLVED – *that the position be noted.*

6 NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Mr Geraint Roberts had attended the North Wales Standards Forum at Bodlondeb in Conwy on 17th July, and circulated an update of the topics discussed, including

member training, the disclosure of criminal convictions of members and public access to forums. DCC had been commended for its approach in making standards training mandatory for all members, and other Councils were encouraged to do the same. The MO advised that at the latest Access Wales meeting of all 22 Monitoring Officers in Wales the suggestion of mandatory training had been positively received. A suggestion had also stemmed from the Access Wales meeting that Chairs of Standards Committees across Wales could write to non-attending members to advise of the importance of attending training events.

Mr Roberts confirmed that the North Wales Standards Forum would only be inviting Chairs of Scrutiny Committees to future meetings, with votes to be allocated as one per local authority. Monitoring Officers would be asked to provide agendas for the Forum in future, and the MO confirmed that Monitoring Officers from North Wales local authorities would be meeting on 17th September and that the formulation of agendas would be discussed. The Chair of the Committee thanked Mr Roberts for attending the meeting of the North Wales Standards Forum in his place, and also for taking the time to write a very helpful summary.

RESOLVED – *that the discussions which took place at the last meeting of the North Wales Standards Committee be noted.*

7 CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING EVENTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer (DMO) introduced a report which gave details of the Code of Conduct training events that were being offered to all town and community councils following the success of a similar event that was organised for County Councillors after the election. A list of planned events had been circulated and Members of the Standards Committee were invited to attend in order to offer the benefit of their experience to those taking part in the training. Attendance at the training events was agreed as below:

Wednesday 26th September, Llangollen	No-one available
Wednesday 3rd October, Corwen	GF Roberts
Monday 8th October, Rhyl	P White, DE Jones
Monday 22nd October, Rhyl	P White, DE Jones
Wednesday 21st November, St Asaph	M Medley, DE Jones, B Cowie
Wednesday 5th December, St Asaph	M Medley, DE Jones, B Cowie
Wednesday 12th December, Ruthin	DE Jones
Thursday 20th December, Ruthin	DE Jones

RESOLVED – *that the Committee notes the arrangements for Code of Conduct training and that Members attend the events agreed.*

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The MO confirmed that the next meeting would be held at 10am on 19th October in Prestatyn. The terms of office of the Chair, Mr Clive Halliday, and the Vice-Chair, Mr Geraint Roberts, were due to expire at the end of October, but the MO advised that they would both still be considered to be members of the Standards Committee and should attend the next meeting. Mrs Pauline White stated that she would be unable to attend on 19th October and tendered her apologies in advance.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee notes the date of the next meeting.*

9 CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

The meeting moved in to Part 2 in order to receive a confidential report from the MO which gave an overview of the complaints lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales which related to the county, town and community councils in Denbighshire, in accordance with s.100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972. The MO gave an update of progress in the investigation of each complaint listed in the report and the Committee discussed a number of issues stemming from the complaints lodged with the Ombudsman.

The MO also clarified the new arrangements stemming from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's Annual Report 2011/12, which specified that cases that the Ombudsman did not intend to follow up would be referred to Monitoring Officers or Standards Committees in order to give an opportunity for a local investigation prior to the closure of a complaint.

RESOLVED – *that the Committee notes the contents of the report.*

The meeting concluded at 11:10am.