

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in Conference Room 1b, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin LL15 1YN on Friday, 31 January 2014 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Ms. Margaret Medley, Reverend Wayne Roberts, Mr. Ian Trigger (Chair) and Mrs. Paula White together with Councillors Bill Cowie, Colin Hughes and David Jones

ALSO PRESENT

Deputy Monitoring Officer/Solicitor (LJ) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer (GW)

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interest were raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters were raised.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of Standards Committee held on 25 October 2013 were submitted and the Chair praised the quality and accuracy of minutes produced.

***RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.*

5 REGISTRATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

A report by the Monitoring Officer was submitted (previously circulated) informing members of the legislative changes relating to the Register of Members' Interests and the course of action proposed to ensure that the County Council and Town and Community Councils were complying with the new requirements.

Members were reminded of the requirement for county councillors to register financial and other interests and for the Monitoring Officer to maintain a Register of Members' Interests available for public inspection. Legislative changes would soon be coming into force introducing a requirement to publish the register electronically and advertise how it could be accessed. Democratic Services were in a position to publish the register on the Council's website, linked to each councillor's profile page. Before publication councillors and co-opted members would be asked to

review their current register and update them if necessary. An annual reminder would also be sent to check for accuracy.

In terms of Town and Community Councils it was clarified that there was no requirement for those members to register. It appeared that where a register was maintained the Clerk would be responsible for ensuring an electronic version was published. Advice would be given as to the legal position when it became clearer.

The committee considered the uncertainty surrounding the requirements for Town/Community Councils and some concern was expressed that having to register interests could discourage potential candidates from standing for local election. The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that each Town/Community Council decided individually whether to maintain a register but there was no requirement to do so. She confirmed there was an obligation for each council to have its own website in future and explained the issue was whether, in the interests of transparency, there would be an obligation to publish the register electronically where one was maintained. The new legislation would be interpreted by the Monitoring Officers and Governance Group following which a briefing note would be issued to Clerks of Town/Community Councils setting out the legal advice. Members were assured that no pressure would be placed on town/community councils to conform to a particular practice in terms of choosing whether or not to register members' interests.

There was some general discussion about the obligation placed on town/community councils to publish information online and the availability of grant funding for that purpose. Local councillors reported upon the current practice of their individual councils in this regard and members acknowledged there could be both advantages and disadvantages of maintaining and publishing a register of members' interests. In view of the potential difficulties for some Town/Community Councils to publish an electronic register members considered what support the County Council could offer in that regard. The general consensus was that it was not appropriate for the County Council to maintain a central register on behalf of those councils but further consideration could be given to providing support once there was a definitive view on whether there was a requirement to publish an electronic version. The committee felt it would be useful to seek the views of the Town and Community Councils on maintaining a register and the legislative changes.

As a point of note the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that the power to make the decision had been incorrectly referenced as the 1972 Act in paragraph 10.1 to the report and should read the Local Government Act 2000.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the legislative changes relating to the Register of Members' interests be noted and the steps being taken to ensure that the Council was in compliance with those changes be approved;*
- (b) *the Monitoring Officer be asked to write to the Clerks of Town and Community Councils setting out the legal position and ambiguity over the*

publication of an electronic version of the register and seeking their thoughts and councillors' views on having a register of members' interests, and

- (c) *feedback received from the Town and Community Councils be submitted to a future meeting of the Standards Committee.*

6 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Members of the Standards Committee reported upon their attendance at meetings of the County, Town and Community Councils as follows –

Councillor Colin Hughes regularly attended Henllan Community Council and Denbigh Town Council meetings. He reported no issues of concern at Henllan Community Council meetings. With regard to Denbigh Town Council a potential conflict of interest had been identified and the Monitoring Officer had been asked to deliver some training which had been well received. It was unfortunate that the two councillors involved in the potential conflict of interest had not attended the training session. That aside, meetings were good and operated well with no problems.

Councillor David Jones reported that he had attended a meeting of Ruthin Town Council in January which he had found to be very well ordered with good, relevant debate. Reports had been succinct and discussions well thought out. He commended the preparation of reports by the Clerk, particularly on the precept which had facilitated effective decision making.

Reverend Wayne Roberts routinely attended meetings of the County Council as the Chairman's Chaplain and reported upon the last meeting at which Dr. Peter Higson, Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board had delivered a presentation. He reported that councillors' questions had been good and answered well.

Members also advised of their intention to attend meetings of the following –

Rhuddlan Town Council – Councillor Bill Cowie
Prestatyn Town Council – Mrs. Paula White
Trefnant and Cefn Meiriadog Community Councils – Ms. Margaret Medley
Llanbedr DC Community Council – Councillor David Jones

The Chair queried the political make up of town/community councils and members responded that the majority of councillors were independent with few affiliated to any political party. The Chair thanked members for their attendance and feedback.

RESOLVED *that the verbal reports from members attending meetings be received and noted.*

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair reported that he was unable to attend the next scheduled meeting on 14 March 2014 because of an unavoidable commitment and asked if the meeting could be rescheduled. The Deputy Monitoring Officer put forward a number of alternative dates and members expressed their preferences. It was noted that the last

scheduled meeting for the committee was 9 May 2014 and that preparations were underway for the next cycle of council meetings. The Chair asked that details of future meetings of the Standards Committee for the forthcoming year be circulated to committee members once they had been approved.

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Standards Committee be rescheduled to 10.00 a.m. on Friday 21 March 2014 in Conference Room 1B, County Hall, Ruthin.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

8 CODE OF CONDUCT - PART 3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

The Deputy Monitoring Officer verbally reported that since the last meeting there had been no changes to the confidential report on complaints against members lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. She highlighted that of the three outstanding complaints, one had been dealt with by the committee at the last meeting and two were awaiting outcomes from the Ombudsman. There had been no new complaints.

During debate the Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that, further to the committee's last meeting, a decision notice had been sent to former County Councillor Allan Pennington at his last known address in accordance with legal requirements. The notice had been returned to the Council as not at that address. Members noted that the time limit in which to challenge the committee's decision had expired.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.

Upon completion of the above the meeting resumed in open session.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - MEMBER TRAINING

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair provided the opportunity for members to raise any other business. Ms. Margaret Medley referred to forthcoming elections and was keen for training to be made available as soon as possible, particularly for newly elected councillors, and for the provision of on-going and refresher training.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer (DMO) reported upon in-house training provided free of charge together with sessions subject to a nominal fee of £30 where an external provider was used. Members discussed the range and type of training provided both in-house and via external sources and their own experiences thereof together with associated costs. The committee paid tribute to the quality of training provided in-house and highlighted the need to encourage take up. The DMO reported upon efforts made to boost attendance with sessions being taken to different localities at various times promoted via Town/Community Council Clerks. At the request of the

Chair, she agreed to provide a list of training events organised during the year and welcomed the attendance of committee members at those sessions.

The committee (1) emphasised the importance of training for all councillors, not just chairs and vice chairs, particularly new members, and (2) paid tribute to the in-house training provided by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer.

The Chair thanked members for their attendance valued contribution to debate.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 a.m.