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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held in tbc on Friday, 4 March 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Julia Hughes (Vice-Chair), Peter Lamb and Anne Mellor together with Councillor Gordon Hughes.

ALSO PRESENT

Monitoring officer (GW), Committee Administrators (SW Host) (RTJ).

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for the absence were received from the independent member of the Standard Committee, Ian Trigger.

In his absence, Vice-Chair Julia Hughes would chair the meeting. Julia opened the meeting by informing the committee that the meeting would have been the acting chair's last meeting; he had served the committee for ten years. The committee wanted to extend their thanks to Ian Trigger for his service to the committee.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised with the Vice-Chair prior to the meeting.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 3 December 2021 were presented for consideration.

Matters Arising –

- The committee suggested that the pre-briefing should be renamed to include /training to make it more transparent why the sessions were held.
- The committee stated that before the next standards committee, reminder emails should be sent to ensure that as many standards committee members could attend.
- The Standards Committee Terms of Reference were raised, and whether they had been discussed at the Governance and Audit Committee. The Monitoring officer (MO) informed the committee that the matter had not been presented to the Governance and Audit Committee; however, it would be discussed at the March meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 3 December 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

The Vice-chair invited members to update the committee on any attendance at meetings.

The Committee members who were present at the meeting had nothing to share.

It was a shared consensus amongst the members due to the close proximity to the pre-election period that they postpone any attendance at meetings until the next council was elected.

RESOLVED that the above observations and discussion be noted.

6 ETHICS AND STANDARDS TRAINING

The Monitoring Officer (MO) introduced the Ethics and Standards Training report (previously circulated); the report detailed the arrangements that would be made for the training of new and returning members after the Local Government Elections in May 2022 (the Elections) in respect of the Code of Conduct.

The MO stated that one of the roles of the Standards Committee was to advise and arrange training for Councillors and co-opted members on the Code of Conduct. The Elections would be taking place on 5th May 2022, and it would be necessary for every person who was elected to sign an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct. Therefore it was vital that elected members would receive training as soon as possible following the election.

It was proposed that a Code of Conduct workshop would be held for County Councillors in the first week after the Elections. A programme of events would be provided for members of the City, Town and Community Councils.

The MO informed the committee that following the elections in May 2017, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) produced a standard set of training materials for use by all councils. There were intentions for a similar process will be followed this year, and the WLGA is currently preparing, in consultation with Monitoring Officers, a standard set of training materials for use following the Election. However, the material had not been finalised for release.

The MO highlighted that the Chief Executive has, as part of his vision for the Council, established five principles that, together with the Council's values, will underpin the type of organisational culture that he wants to develop there were –

- Continue to develop our own culture, the Denbighshire Way
- Be a Council closer to our communities
- Have clear performance expectations
- Promote strong Officer/Member relations

- Support and develop our staff

The training that was provided to members following the elections would also cover these principles and values and would incorporate reference to the Council's Protocol on Member/Officer Relations.

The following points were discussed further –

- Members queried whether there would be any cost implications for training for town and community councils, and the MO stated that there were never charges applied previously.
- The timescale of the training was raised and whether the MO knew how long the training would take. The MO responded that there was not a detailed breakdown of timescales. However, the training would be carried out soon following the election.
- Social media training was highlighted and whether any training would be carried out. The MO informed the committee that there was an e-module course on social media available, as well as WLGA training material.
- Monitoring of training was raised, and whether there were any logs of attendance at training were kept to ensure that members received the training which was required. The MO clarified that attendance logs for training were kept for training.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee note the report.

7 STANDARDS CONFERENCE 2022

The report aimed to inform the committee of the contents of the Standards Conference (SC), which was held on the 9th February 2022.

The MO clarified to the members of the committee that the SC was usually held annually; however, due to the pandemic and the restrictions, it was not possible to have the SC. To re-establish the conference, it was agreed that a remote conference would be held, organised by the North Wales local authorities. The conference was held via Zoom on 9th February 2022. The conference's theme was the Independent Review of the Ethical Framework in Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Government (WG) and conducted by Richard Penn.

The MO informed the committee that over 100 delegates from across Wales attended the SC, which was chaired by Julia Hughes in her capacity as Chair of Flintshire County Council's Standards Committee.

A representative from WG, Lisa James, Deputy Director of Local Government Democracy, presented to the conference in respect of the potential changes to the ethical framework that may be considered as a result of the review by Richard Penn. Alongside the presentation from Lisa James, there were presentations from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, Nick Bennett, Paul Egan of One Voice Wales, and Einir Young, Chair of Gwynedd County Council's Standards Committee. They all gave their reflections on the review.

The MO stated that the overall conclusion of the conference was that the review of the framework had been welcome, as had the finding that a significant overhaul of the framework was not required. Delegates expressed their gratitude that the framework had been maintained in Wales and their wish that it should continue with some minor amendments. While there was overwhelming support for the principle of local resolution, particularly in response to the large number of complaints emanating from town and community councils, there were some concerns expressed about the resources required for monitoring officers to be able to deal with the volume of complaints if they were expected to try and resolve all such complaints.

The acting chair Julia Hughes who chaired the SC, agreed with the MO that the SC was beneficial to all who attended.

The committee discussed the following in further detail -

- Shared good practice was raised by the committee and whether good practices could be shared amongst all Councils across Wales. The MO clarified that there was a consensus among delegates that the current good practice identified in the form of the North and Mid Wales Standards Forum should be extended to become an All Wales Standards Forum.
- The committee queried the Democracy handbook, and whether it could be brought to a future meeting to allow it to be discussed by the committee, the MO stated the handbook was currently in draft format and could be brought to a future meeting once it was available.
- The Penn Review was queried and whether elected members were asked to contribute to the review. The MO responded that they were not included in the review, which was an oversight; however, the matter was being looked into.
- The recording of meetings was raised, and members queried how long the recordings (webcasts) were available. The MO stated that the recordings of meetings were available on the website for six months following the meeting.

RESOLVED that members note the report regarding the Standards Conference.

8 PROCESS FOR RECRUITING INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Monitoring officer (MO) introduced the Process for Recruiting Independent Members of Standards Committee report (previously circulated). The report aimed to inform the Committee of the requirement to recruit independent members of the Standards Committee and the process by which this must be done

The Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 set out provisions regarding the size and composition of standards committees. Standards committees must have no less than five members and no more than nine.

The Chair of the Committee, an independent member, was approaching the end of his second term of office, which was due to expire in May 2022. It would therefore be necessary for the Council to set in motion a recruitment process for an

independent member. The Regulations require that the vacancy be advertised in at least two newspapers circulating in the area. The Council must establish a panel of no more than five people, including at least one community councillor and one lay member.

The MO stated that in previous recruitment exercises Council has been asked to nominate three county councillors to sit on the panel in addition to the lay member and community councillor. The Panel would interview applicants and make a recommendation to Council. The council would be asked to appoint the recommended candidate.

The Community Council representative on the Committee was appointed for a first term in February 2018. A Community Council representative's term of office must end at the local government election following their appointment. A Community Council representative could serve a second term if they remain a city, town or community councillor. Before a community council representative may be reappointed, it was a requirement that the Council consults city, town and community councils in its area. This was a process that could be considered following the local government elections.

The current Community Council representative Gordon Hughes, informed the committee and the MO whether he was to be re-elected as a town councillor; he would still like to be a member of the committee.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee notes the contents of the report.

9 STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer (MO) introduced the Standards Committee Forward Work Programme (previously circulated).

- June 2022 – Code of Conduct of employees.
- June 2022 – The democracy handbook could be brought to the June meeting, however, the MO stated that this could be delayed until September 2022.
- September 2022 – review of the training and uptake for newly elected members.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the Standards Committee's forward work programme be approved.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Standards Committee meeting was confirmed for Friday 17th June at 10:00am.

11 CODE OF CONDUCT - PART 3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

The Monitoring Officer (MO) presented the confidential report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an overview of complaints lodged with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales since 1st January 2018.

The MO reported on the ongoing complaints submitted, giving outline details of the nature of the complaints made and the actions taken by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

RESOLVED that the Standards Committee notes the contents of the report.