

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE 12/03/18

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**Present:**

**Elected Members:** Councillors Beth Lawton, Anne Lloyd Jones and Dewi Roberts.

**Independent Members:** Mr Aled Jones, Miss Margaret Jones (Vice-chair chairing) and Mr David Wareing.

**Community Committee Member:** Mr Richard Parry Hughes

**Also in Attendance:** Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sion Huws (Senior Solicitor) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support Officer).

Reference was made to the ill-health of Dr Einir Young's husband, and it was noted that the members wished to send their regards to both of them.

Councillors Beth Lawton and Anne Lloyd Jones were welcomed to their first meeting of this committee.

Since four elected members and three independent members were present at the beginning of the meeting, Councillor Dewi Roberts agreed to withdraw from the meeting, in order to ensure quorum.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Dr Einir Young (Chair) and Ms Jacqueline Hughes.

**2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received from any members present.

**3. URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent matters were raised.

**4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 2 October 2017 as a true record.

**5. COMMUNITY COUNCILS TRAINING**

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer, recommending to submit an alternative system to provide training to town and community councils, which would mean offering to provide a trainer to hold a session on the Code of Conduct in the areas of the councils, rather than centralise sessions at the main centres only.

During the discussion, it was noted:

- That strong encouragement was needed for councils to collaborate with nearby councils on this as it would be impractical for the trainer to visit 64 town and community councils in Gwynedd individually.

- That a regular programme of training sessions could be run, as long as the demand was there, and to tailor sessions as required.
- That a handout could be included in the induction pack provided for new town / community council members to summarise the main points of the Code of Conduct in bullet point form, and provide the Monitoring Officer's contact details.

#### **RESOLVED**

- (a) **To hold a pilot for a year on the training system of providing a trainer on the Code of Conduct to Town and Community Councils, in accordance with the report, and to report back within 12 months on the findings.**
- (b) **To include a concise handout on the Code of Conduct in the induction pack provided for new town / community council members.**

### **6. ROLES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer giving an overview of the Standards Committee's roles, mainly for the benefit of the new members, but also as a method of reminding everyone of what the committee should do and what could change.

During the discussion, it was noted:

- That declaring an interest was a particular problem in the Care Scrutiny Committee. Most of the committee members had chosen to go on this committee as they were interested in the field of care / health, but as this interest frequently derived from their professional backgrounds, or a member of their family, e.g. directly employed, or working in partnership with the health service, it was often required for them to withdraw from the meetings due to their interest in the matters under consideration.
- That work was underway to prepare a note advising on the number of these situations in order to attempt to identify where the boundaries were, as it became increasingly difficult to operate the Code appropriately whilst safeguarding the democratic process.
- If a member had to declare an interest so often, the question should be asked whether this was the best committee for the member to serve on. On the contrary, there was then a danger of losing real expertise on the committee.
- That dispensation was one way forward, but this was dependent on the grounds. It was suggested that there might be a need to raise the scrutiny members' awareness of the fact that they could submit an application for dispensation.
- That it was important that members read the reports that were put forward to different committees and contacted the Monitoring Officer or Senior Corporate Solicitor beforehand if they suspected that they had an interest in an item on the agenda.
- Although most of the complaints to the Ombudsman were ultimately dropped, awaiting an adjudication could mean a very difficult time for the member the complaint was made against. It was confirmed that the procedure was confidential until a full hearing would be put forward to the Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel.

In addition to the content of the report, and as the membership of the Standards Committee was now complete, the Monitoring Officer noted his intention to arrange a short training for members of the committee on the hearings procedure.

**RESOLVED to note the report.**

### **7. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS**

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer noting the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members.

During the discussion, it was noted:

- That the Ombudsman took a long time to come to a decision on individual cases when carrying out an investigation, and that this caused stress for the person subject to the allegation.
- That people were being disappointed by the Ombudsman's decision not to investigate their complaint.
- That there was also a system of deciding locally on complaints, but this was recognised that this was only for minor complaints.

**RESOLVED to note the report.**

## **8. NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM**

Submitted, for information – the minutes of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum meeting held on 10 April 2017.

The Monitoring Officer noted that:

- The membership of the forum had now been extended to include the Ceredigion and Powys councils.
- He had volunteered to hold the next meeting of the forum in Gwynedd during May / June.

**RESOLVED to note the report.**

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 12.10 pm

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**CHAIRMAN**