

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 27/01/20

Present:

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

Independent Members: Mr Hywel Eifion Jones, Miss Margaret E. Jones, Mr David Wareing and Dr Einir Young (Chair)

Community Committee Member: Mr Richard Parry Hughes

Also in Attendance: Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Siôn Huws (Senior Solicitor - Corporate) Eirian Roberts and Gruff Ellis (Democratic Services Officers).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Mr Aled Jones.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal 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 4 November 2019 as a true record.

5. ETHICS STANDARDS IN OUTSOURCING AND COLLABORATION ARRANGEMENTS

The Monitoring Officer's report was submitted, giving an overview of the range of different governance arrangements involved with the Council's collaboration across a range of projects in various fields, and explaining how issues of propriety are addressed.

The Monitoring Officer noted, as there was a history of close collaboration between North Wales monitoring officers, that a great deal of co-ordination work happened behind the scenes and made it easier to reach a consensus on different matters.

Specific reference was made to:-

- The table in Appendix 1 of the report, which gave a brief overview of the types of collaboration and outsourcing models most frequently used.
- The Code of Conduct for North Wales Ambition Board Consultants.

An enquiry was made as to how all of this was presented to councillors so that the requirements were perfectly clear to them. In response, it was explained that this had to be dealt with on a case by case basis. E.g. the monitoring officers advised members regarding joint committees. There was a protocol for the Ambition Board regarding the arrangements, and in the case of companies such as Byw'n Iach, the board of directors had been instructed to go through the requirements with the councillors.

In response to a further question, it was noted that no problems had arisen in terms of declarations of interest in a collaborative situation, whether by misunderstanding or offence. These issues were quite evident on the whole, and it was possible to have a sensible and mature conversation whenever a situation arose. It was also important to have that conversation early enough.

RESOLVED to note and accept the contents of the report.

6 REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Submitted - the report of the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) presenting details regarding the procedure for registering members' interests and inviting the committee to offer any observations on actions which could be taken in relation to this.

It was noted that some organisations re-distributed forms for the upfront declaration of interests annually, and that this could be considered rather than sending reminder notices only. It was suggested that the community councils should be informed that registering beforehand was mandatory rather than just good practice. In response, it was explained that community councils could not be forced to do this as their members were not required to register interests upfront.

It was noted that, in the attempt to create an informal / welcoming environment at community council meetings, there was a tendency to inform members who had interests that they did not have to leave the room during the discussion on the matter at hand.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that there could be a piece of work to be undertaken looking at the way interests were registered. Regardless of the climate in terms of enforcement, members conformed as that was the right thing to do, and not because there was any requirement for them to do so. It also generated a better image if the member who had an interest left the room.

It was noted that Gwynedd councillors were urged to meet with the Monitoring Officer or the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) beforehand to check whether or not they had an interest in an item on a committee agenda.

It was noted that community council clerks did not declare interests. In response, it was explained that the Code of Conduct was not relevant to staff, and as the only officer working for a community council, that it could be difficult for the clerk to step aside. Despite this, it would be possible to put arrangements in place for the management of such a situation as this all involved public image. It was suggested that this could be included in the clerks' training.

The training arranged in Tywyn recently was praised, and the Monitoring Officer was thanked for attending.

It was noted that the form did not clearly highlight that the interests of partners etc. were also relevant.

The members were asked, as users, to take a look at the upfront registration form and the form for the registration of declarations made in meetings, and to contact the Monitoring Officer with any suggestions for improvement.

RESOLVED to note and accept the contents of the report.

7. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST MEMBERS

Submitted, for information, the report of the Senior Solicitor (Corporate) presenting information about the Ombudsman's decisions on formal complaints against members. It was noted that the Ombudsman was investigating one complaint and considering whether or not to investigate another.

Observations from the discussion:

- It was noted that it was encouraging to see so few complaints, but that some members had concerns regarding the time it took to receive a response from the Ombudsman. It was noted that this was a matter which had also been raised at the full Council.
- The Monitoring Officer explained that the complaint needed to be substantial for the Ombudsman to investigate and take action.

RESOLVED to note and accept the contents of the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN