

Agenda Item 3

STANDARDS COMMITTEE **9 MAY 2016**

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of the Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold, on Monday, 9 May 2016.

PRESENT: Edward Hughes (Chair)

Councillors: Hilary McGuill and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted Members: Robert Dewey, Jonathan Duggan-Keen, and Phillipa Earlam

APOLOGIES: Ken Molyneux

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, and Committee Officer

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (including whipping declarations)

None were received.

55. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2016 were submitted.

Planning Protocol

The Deputy Monitoring Officer referred to point 5 of the resolution on page 6 and advised that at the meeting of the Planning Strategy Group held on 21 April 2016 it had been resolved to accept the recommendations of the Standards Committee except that Planning Strategy Group considered that a Member who had submitted an application should not attend the site visit and this would be referenced in the consultations response to the Welsh Minister.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

56. DISPENSATIONS

There were no applications for dispensation.

57. MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS

The Monitoring Officer introduced a report to provide details of the responses to a survey which was undertaken by Members on Member communications. He provided background information and reported on the responses to the survey as detailed in the report.

The Monitoring Officer explained that there had been little interest by Members in the production of Annual Reports which were to be written by the councillors but published by the Council on its website. However, from the survey it was clear that Members themselves regularly communicated with their residents through newsletters and the like. However, the facility to publish annual reports still existed and it was therefore recommended that the Authority contact Members annually during May, with a template annual report, to remind them that annual reports could be placed on the Council's website for publication if they wished.

In response to a question from Robert Dewey concerning editorial control the Monitoring Officer explained that Members' Annual Reports were not allowed to be political or defamatory, but that in all other respects officers would not exercise any editorial control over the content of annual reports.

Councillor Arnold Woolley expressed disappointment at the low number of Members who had taken the opportunity to respond to the survey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the responses to the survey be noted; and
- (b) That Members be contacted in May each year with a template annual report and be advised that any completed annual reports could be placed on the Council's website by Democratic Services.

58. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented the current Forward Work Programme. He provided an update on the Standards Forum and advised that Anglesey Council had offered to host the first meeting, however, the meeting scheduled to be held in June 2016 had been postponed to July 2016. The Monitoring Officer explained that a revised date had yet to be confirmed but suggested that the Committee could put forward any items for consideration at the Standards Forum at the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 6 June 2016.

During discussion Councillors Hilary McGuill and Arnold Woolley referred to the need for all Members (including Town and Community Councillors) to have full knowledge and understanding of the standards set out in the Code of Conduct which they were expected to adhere to. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that following election all councillors were asked to sign an acceptance of office which included an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

Robert Dewey expressed concerns around the behaviour of some councillors and said there was a need for training to be provided to enforce the standards required by the Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer agreed to follow-up the matters raised by members concerning the signing of

Agenda Item 5



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 9 May 2016
Report Subject	Member Communications
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

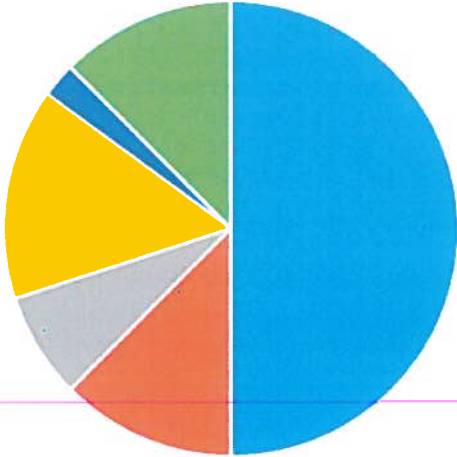
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide details of a survey undertaken on Member Communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To receive the details of the survey; and
2	That Members be contacted in May each year with a template annual report and be advised that any completed annual reports can be placed on the Council's website by Democratic Services.

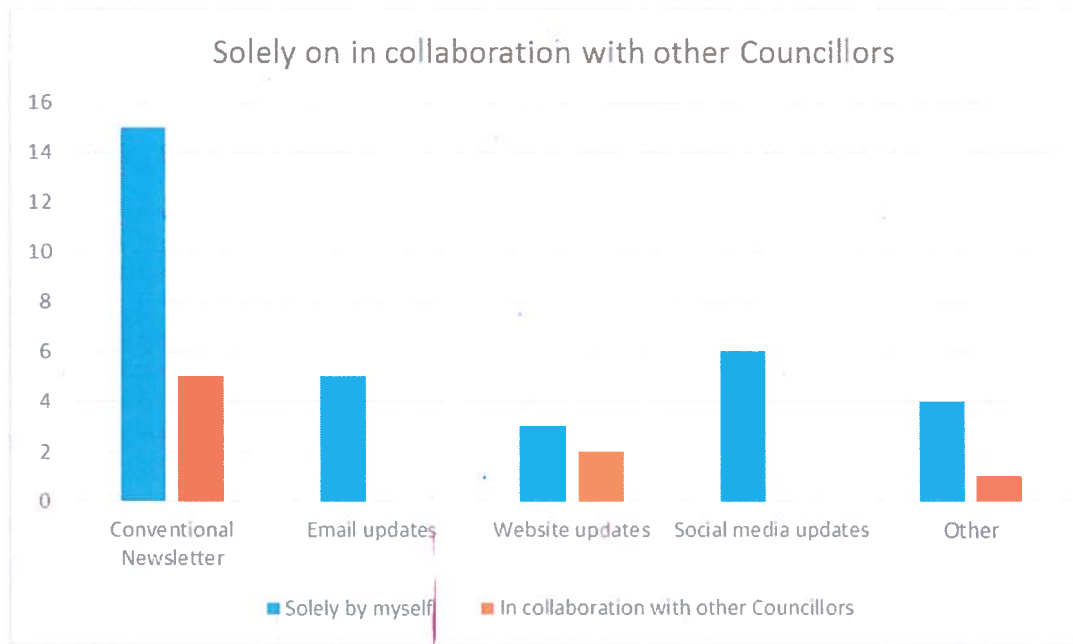
REPORT DETAILS

1.00	MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS														
1.01	At the meeting of Standards Committee on 8 th February 2016 a report was considered on the Review of Protocol on Councillor Newsletters. The report highlighted that since July 2013 there had been little interest in or take up of the production of annual reports by Members with the number being published for 2014/15 being three.														
1.02	The Standards Committee resolved that the arrangements for Councillor newsletters and annual reports was sufficient and did not require amendment. It also resolved that a survey be undertaken to ask Councillors whether they produced any communications and if so, how often.														
1.03	<p>The survey was sent to Members electronically with a paper copy being provided to the four Members who do not use electronic devices. The survey was combined with another survey which had been commissioned on the Frequency and times of Council Meetings. A summary of the questions asked and answers given in relation to Members' communications is below:</p> <p>Question 1 – Do you produce community communications?</p> <p>Yes – 26</p> <p>No – 2</p> <p>Question 2 – Considering the options below please identify the method(s) of your communications</p> <div data-bbox="293 1339 1369 1973" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>Method</p>  <table border="1" data-bbox="363 1921 1326 1951"> <thead> <tr> <th>Method</th> <th>Count</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Conventional Newsletter</td> <td>26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Email Updates</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Website</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Social Media</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Local Free Press</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Method	Count	Conventional Newsletter	26	Email Updates	2	Website	2	Social Media	2	Local Free Press	2	Other	2
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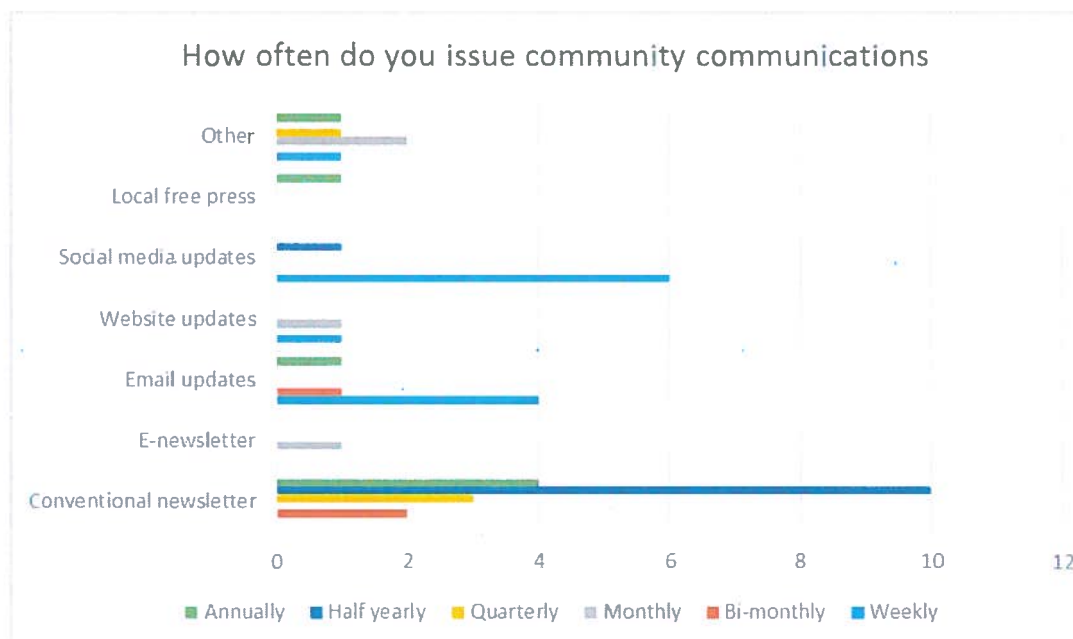
"Other"

Village Newsletter; Church Magazine; Monthly report to Community Council and entries on Community Council Website; Five Villages Chronicle; Report to Community Council and in free Community booklet

Question 3 - Please identify below your level of involvement in the production of the communications



Question 4 – How often do you issue your community communications?



	<p>Question 5 – Do you produce an Annual Report?</p> <p>Yes – 4</p> <p>No – 22</p> <p>Question 6 - When did you last produce your last Annual Report?</p> <p>January 2015</p> <p>2015</p> <p>Question 7 - Do you provide the Council with a copy of your Annual Report for publication on it's website in line with the required provision?</p> <p>Yes – 2</p> <p>No – 1</p>
1.03	At the Standards Committee meeting on 11 April 2016, it was suggested and agreed that Members would be contacted on an annual basis to remind them that Democratic Services could place Councillors annual reports on the Council's website. This reminder would include a template of an annual report for ease of completion.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no additional resource implications. Annual Reports will be placed on the website by staff in Democratic Services who will also send out the yearly reminder.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	All Members of the Council were sent a copy of the survey.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	There are no risks identified in this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Report of the Chief Officer (Governance) to Standards Committee on 8 February 2016 and related minute.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Nicola Gittins, Team Manager – Committee Services Telephone: 01352 702345 E-mail: nicola.gittins@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Annual Reports – the Council is required to make arrangements so that those Members who wish to do so can produce an annual report of their work and have it publicised.</p>



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 8 February 2016
Report Subject	Review of Protocol on Councillor Newsletters
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012 the Committee considered whether to introduce a protocol on councillors using council resources to produce newsletters in their wards. It made recommendations to Council which Council chose not to adopt, preferring instead to prohibit the use of council resources for such purposes.

On a similar note, Section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to make arrangement for every member to prepare an annual report, which it must then publish. Guidance published in May 2013 allowed councils to set conditions/limits on what it contained within such reports, and also for councils to decide how the reports would be published.

On 17 July 2013 the Democratic Services Committee resolved:

- (a) That the following conditions be imposed as part of the arrangements under Section 5 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011:
- (i) That annual reports by Members must comply with the statutory guidance including the standard template referred to in paragraph 1.6 of that guidance.
 - (ii) That the contents of the annual report are not defamatory in the opinion of the Council's Monitoring Officer
- (b) That there are sufficient arrangements for publishing the annual reports and publicising their availability if they are published on the appropriate part of the Council's website and their availability publicised on it.

Since July 2013 there has been little interest in or take up of annual reports. The number published for 2014/15 was three.

By contrast councillors are (anecdotally) known to be regularly producing their own newsletters without support or assistance from the Council. Therefore, there seems no need to amend either the arrangements for newsletters or annual reports. However, it would be useful to have clear data on the number of councillors producing their own newsletters and the frequency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee confirms that the current arrangements for councillor newsletters and annual reports are sufficient and do not require amendment.
2	That all councillors be asked to confirm whether they produce newsletters and how often.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	COUNCILLOR NEWSLETTERS
1.01	The Code of Conduct requires councillors to act in accordance with the Council's requirements when using resources allocated to them. The current protocol on newsletters means it would be a breach of the code to use a council computer to produce such a newsletter.
1.02	The original report on newsletters promoted a wider review of how council resources are used. The Council adopted a protocol on the use of Council IT in 2013.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Whilst the protocol on newsletters remains as currently drafted, there are no resource implications. If Council IT were used to draft but not print newsletters again the implications would be minimal.
2.02	There are 55,000 ca households in Flintshire. Clearly, there would be a significant cost if councillors printed just a single page newsletter for every house once a year.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	If the Committee wishes to change the rules on newsletters or annual reports then a report to Council would be necessary.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	Not permitting the use of Council resources to be used for producing newsletters might have an impact on unwaged councillors. However, the view of the majority of councillors was that this was a small cost that should be covered from the basic allowance.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Report to Standards Committee 3 September 2012</p> <p>Report to Democratic Services Committee 17 July 2013</p> <p>Statutory Guidance on Annual Reports published by Welsh Government 16.5.13</p> <p>Report to Council 25 October 2012</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer (Governance) Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None

