

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
10TH JANUARY 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Monday, 10th January 2022

PRESENT: Julia Hughes (Chair)

Councillors:

Gladys Healey, Patrick Heesom and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

David Wyn Davies, Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Jacqueline Guest, Gill Murgatroyd and Mark Morgan

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2021 were approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

35. DISPENSATIONS

None.

36. AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT ETHICAL LIAISON MEETING

The Monitoring Officer presented the report and explained that the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended that the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee met periodically with senior Members of the Council to discuss ethical issues.

At the last meeting the principal topic of discussion was the forthcoming statutory duty on Group Leaders to promote good standards of behaviour. The primary focus was on training/induction and Group Leaders agreed a number of actions to assist in the Induction Programme for Members after the elections in May 2022. There was insufficient time to discuss how the Committee would report on the performance of the duty and that should be discussed at the next meeting.

An early draft of the statutory guidance in respect of the Group Leaders' duty had been received and gave a good indication of what would be expected under the new duty and could help frame the expectations of Group Leaders against which the Committee would report.

The draft statutory guidance suggested that failure to fully comply with the duty might be regarded as bringing the office of Group Leader into disrepute, so it was necessary to be precise about what could reasonably be expected of Group Leaders. For example, the new duty did not make Group Leaders responsible for the behaviour of their group members, so a breach of the code by a Group member should not necessarily reflect on the Leader of that Group.

Details of the standards that appeared to be those against which levels of compliance should be reported were outlined in the report. Also outlined in the report was the suggested wording to be used on reporting to the Committee.

Gill Murgatroyd suggested that the Standards Committee could meet to suggest proposals to be added to the report prior to the next Ethical Liaison Meeting. She also referred to paragraph 1.07 in the report and sought clarification around the reference to paragraph 3.7 in the first sentence. The Monitoring Officer explained this was a typographical error and should read 3.5. She also sought confirmation that the Committee referred to in the first sentence was the Standards Committee. Gill Murgatroyd referred to page 25 of the report and said paragraph 2.7 appeared to be missing. The Monitoring Officer said this was as received and was an error in the draft document.

In response to the questions and comments from Councillor Gladys Healey the Monitoring Officer advised that it had been agreed with Group Leaders that all Councillors would attend training on the Code of Conduct.

In response to the comments by Mark Morgan regarding a timetable and the number of reports, the Monitoring Officer explained there would be one report and part of that would be information on how well Group Leaders were doing. The Monitoring Officer responded to the comments raised by the Chair and Mark Morgan around the reporting process, non-compliance and presentation of the Annual Report.

Councillor Gladys Healey commented on the Race Equality Action Plan for Wales and sought clarification of the goals referred to in paragraph 1.9 of the report. The Monitoring Officer said he would circulate the Race Equality Act for information to Committee members.

Jonathan Duggan-Keen proposed that the Chair and Mark Morgan attend the Group Leader's Ethical Liaison meeting and provide feedback to the Standards Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Arnold Woolley. Mark Morgan suggested that a report template be presented to Group Leaders for discussion. This was agreed by Councillor Gladys Healey.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft agenda for the next Ethical Liaison Meeting be approved;
- (b) That the final agenda be agreed by the Chief Officer (Governance) in consultation with the parties to the meeting; and
- (c) That the Chair and Mark Morgan attend the Group Leader's Ethical Liaison meeting and provide feedback to the Standards Committee.

37. NATIONAL FORUM FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Monitoring Officer presented the report and explained that the Penn Report on the Review of the Ethical Regime in Wales commented on the variety of practices across Wales in how Standards Committees discharged their duties.

Richard Penn commented positively on the work of the forum for Chairs of Standards Committee in North and Mid Wales and recommended that a national forum for the Chairs of Standards Committees should be established, modelled on that forum.

Following the previous meeting, the Monitoring Officer had consulted other Councils on whether they would wish to support the creation of a national forum and the Monitoring Officers in those authorities were consulting with their Standards Committee on the issue.

There were a number of things to consider with the creation of such a national forum and they were outlined in the report but none appeared unsurmountable.

It was proposed by Mark Morgan and seconded by Councillor Arnold Woolley that the Committee support the creation of an All Wales Forum for Standards Committee Chairs.

RESOLVED:

That the creation of an all Wales Forum for Standards Committee Chairs be supported.

38. ALL WALES STANDARDS CONFERENCE 2022

The Monitoring Officer explained that the All Wales Standards Conference would take place on Wednesday 9th February at 10am and advised that it would be a virtual meeting.

The Chair recommended attendance at the Conference which was informative and helpful.

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.

39. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Monitoring Officer presented the Forward Work Programme for consideration.

The Programme had been structured as agreed at a previous meeting of Standards Committee.

The Chair referred to the item on the Independent Member Visits to Council meetings which was scheduled for the June meeting and suggested that a new cycle of visits be arranged for Councillors following the local government elections held in May 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme be agreed.

40. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.41pm)

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Chair