

THE FLINTSHIRE STANDARD

This document explains the standard of conduct expected from Flintshire County Councillors and co-opted members in dealing with each other and with officers. It should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct and the Protocol on Member-Officer Relations. It adds to those documents and does not detract from them.

In each case behaviour under the Flintshire Standard will be judged objectively. That is to say, it will be judged based on what a reasonable person knowing all the facts would conclude from observing the behaviour.

Freedom of speech, particularly political expression is important within a democratic society. In exercising the right to free speech and when acting on Council business, the following standards are expected of Flintshire County Council members:-

Public behaviour:

- Show respect to each other and officers
- Do not make personal or abusive comments about each other or officers
- Do not accuse each other or officers of lying or falsifying facts or documents
- Do not make malicious allegations against each other or officers
- Do not publish or spread any false information about each other or officers
- Show respect to diversity and equality
- Do not accuse or imply that officers are acting from political motives

Behaviour in Council and Committee meetings:

- Behave with dignity in meetings
- Show respect to and obey decisions of the Chair
- Make points based on the issue under discussion not personal remarks about others
- Allow others to speak without interruption or heckling
- Not to use indecent language nor make discriminatory remarks or remarks which prejudice any section of society
- Exclude officers from the scope of political remarks

Confidentiality:

- Keep the confidentiality of exempt papers and any other documents which are not public.
- Not to release confidential information to the press or the public.
- Return or securely destroy confidential papers.
- Not to use confidential information for purposes other than intended.

Local members

- Work with any joint ward member and/or members of adjoining wards for the benefit of the locality.
- If dealing with any matter relating to another ward
 - Explain to anyone seeking assistance that he/she is not the local member
 - Inform the local member, unless it would lead to a breach of confidentiality
- Ensure that officers are treated with respect at public meetings within their ward. Where several councillors are at the same public meeting all share this obligation equally.

LOCAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS ABOUT BEHAVIOUR

INTRODUCTION

1. The Flintshire Standard and the Protocol for Member-Officer Relations are important in promoting good co-operation between members and between members and officers within the Council, thereby allowing the council to fulfil its duties effectively and professionally. It is therefore important that any allegations against a member that he/she has breached the standard and/or protocol can be dealt with quickly and effectively. The purpose of this procedure is to introduce a simple and easy way to understand the method of dealing with such allegations.
2. It is important that poor behaviour is quickly addressed and matters are handled whilst recollections are fresh. This procedure will therefore only apply to incidents or behaviour occurring in the 90 days prior to a complaint being made in writing to the Monitoring Officer.

STAGE 1 OF THE PROCEDURE

3. Any member or officer who wishes to submit an allegation under this procedure should send the complaint to the Monitoring Officer. Officers wishing to make a complaint should first consult with their Head of Service. Following receipt of the complaint the Monitoring Officer will act as follows:-
4. The Monitoring Officer will not deal with the allegation at this stage in order to preserve their ability to advise the Standards Committee later in the process. In the first place the allegation will be referred either the Deputy Monitoring Officer (or another officer nominated by the Monitoring Officer) who will advise whether the allegation falls within this procedure or whether it should be referred to the Ombudsman as an allegation of breach of the Members Code of Conduct.

N.B. The complainant has the statutory right to complain to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales ("PSOW"). Should the complainant exercise that right then this procedure will not be used, and any efforts to resolve a complaint using this procedure will be stopped. The process will only resume if the matter is referred back for local resolution.

5. This procedure is only suitable for allegations made by officers or members of Flintshire County Council that a member has breached the Flintshire Standard or the Protocol on Member/Officer relations. It is not suitable for complaints:
 - made by members of the public;
 - which in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer allege a serious breach of the code of conduct; or
 - alleging repeated breaches of the code of conduct, or breaches where are similar to complaints that have been handled at Stage 3 of this procedure.

If the complaint is suitable for this procedure then the Deputy Monitoring Officer will give advice about how to possibly resolve the complaint. If the complaint is not suitable for this procedure then the Deputy Monitoring Officer will give advice about what (if anything) can be done.

6. If, following the first stage, the complainant wishes to proceed with the allegation under this procedure, the matter may be referred either:
 - to a conciliation meeting under Stage 2; or
 - to a hearing by the Standards Committee under Stage 3.

STAGE 2 OF THE PROCEDURE

7. At Stage 2 a meeting will be held between:
 - the complainant;
 - the member against whom the complaint is made;
 - the Chief Executive
 - the leader of any relevant political group(s), that is to say the subject member's group leader and, if the complainant is a member, his/her group leader.

If the complainant is an officer, then it will be possible for the complainant to have a colleague or senior officer with him/her.

It is also possible for the matter to be dealt with in the complainant's absence in exceptional cases.

8. The purpose of this meeting will be to try to resolve the matter by conciliation. If deemed necessary the Chief Executive can call on the Monitoring Officer, or the Deputy Monitoring Officer, for advice and assistance.

STAGE 3 OF THE PROCEDURE

9. The third Stage is a hearing before the Standards Committee. The complainant will be asked to submit the substance of the complaint in writing and the member concerned will be asked for a written response. These papers, together with any additional written evidence that is submitted by either side will be distributed to the members of the Standards Committee.
10. Both the complainant and the member have the right to appear before the Standards Committee and to submit evidence from witnesses. Both will have the right to representation or to have a colleague present. The Council will not meet the costs of representation.
11. If either side wishes not to be present or fails to attend the hearing may be held in their absence.
12. After the evidence has been heard, both sides and their representatives will be asked to leave the chamber and the Standards Committee will come to a conclusion on the allegation. The Monitoring Officer will be available to advise the Committee.
13. The Committee can come to one of three conclusions, namely :-
 - a) That there is no basis to the complaint.
 - b) That there is a basis to the complaint but that no further action is required.

- c) That there is a basis to the complaint and that the member should be censured.

In addition the Committee can make recommendations to the Council regarding changing any procedures or taking any further action.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATTERS

14. The papers for the hearing will be exempt and it will be recommended that the hearing will take place with the press and public excluded. Publicity will not be given to the names of either the member or the complainant unless it is decided TO UPHOLD the complaint and that the member should be censured.
15. Stages 2 and 3 do not have to be following sequentially. Although it is possible for a complainant who remains dissatisfied after the conciliation meeting to ask for the matter to be referred to a hearing before the Standards Committee, it is also possible for a matter to proceed directly to the Standards Committee without going first to a conciliation meeting.
16. The aim of this procedure is to try and resolve complaints regarding members quickly and effectively. Nothing in this procedure prevents a complainant from submitting a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales that a member has breached the Members Code of Conduct.