

Minutes



Standards Committee

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| Date: | 15 September 2016 |
| Time: | 5.30 pm |
| Present: | Councillors Taylor (Chair), D Fouweather, Hancock, John, Westwood, Britton and Pickering |
| In Attendance: | G Price (Head of Law and Regulation) and A Jenkins (Democratic Services Support Officer) |
| Apologies: | Councillor J Guy |

1) Apologies for Absence

As above

2) Declarations of Interest

None received.

3) Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 26 May 2016 were submitted. There were a few typing errors, which were noted by the Chair.

Agreed:

That the subject to the above the minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4) Matters Arising

Item 9 Community Council Review: An email went out to all clerks to ensure that the statutory registers were being maintained.

Agreed:

That a further email would be disseminated ensuring that the new Code of Conduct has been adopted by all community councils.

5) Chair's Announcements

The Chair, Hazel Taylor announced her end of term of office and that this would be her last meeting. The Chair has been associated with the Standards Committee for 15 years. She was initially appointed in 2001 when Newport established its own committee, well before legislation made such a committee mandatory. She was a member for a few years and then became Chairman and then stood down in 2005 when her term of office came to an end. The Chair re-applied in 2012, initially as a member and then as Chairman.

Hazel Taylor had been an outstanding member of the Standards committee and had made a professional and impartial contribution to the committee. She took the opportunity to thank members, Gareth and staff for their contribution and support over the years.

The Chair also announced that it was John Pickering; Vice Chair's last meeting as his term of office also came to an end. The Chair paid tribute to John for his support and all those present agreed.

John Pickering took the opportunity to reiterate the Chair's comments with regard to the support from staff and members. John had been a member of the Standards Committee for eight years.

6) Complaints

The Head of Law and Regulation informed the committee that only one complaint had been received however the Ombudsman decided not to pursue this.

There was another complaint that the Council was aware of which was yet to reach a conclusion.

7) Standards Committee Annual Report 2015/16

The Standards Committee was due to present an Annual Report to the Council on 27 September 2016, which provided information about the work undertaken by the Committee during the past 12 months, identifying particular issues that had arisen and setting out the forward work programme for the forthcoming year.

A draft of the Annual Report for 2015/16 was attached for comment and approval prior to its presentation to the Council.

The Head of Law and Regulation outlined the report to those present.

Training was under review and with the new members Code of Conduct in mind, this would be arranged for next May 2017 after the local and Community Council elections. The New Code of Conduct was attached as Appendix 1 at the end of the report.

It was generally considered that the Code of Conduct training could be 'tagged' on to the end of a Standards Committee meeting.

T Britton thought that it might be too long to wait but for training if new members were appointed several months before the May 2017 elections. There would however be induction training for new members, which would also be an ideal time for refresher training for existing members.

There was only one issue relating to the local resolution protocol last year which did not go to Standards. It was mentioned that the Community Councils could also adopt the local resolution protocol.

The All Wales Standards Conference last year was insightful and informative, it would be beneficial for the committee to take up some of the training that was mentioned at the conference.

The Committee had agreed previously that an All Gwent meeting would be an ideal information sharing exercise. This was a regular arrangement which had originally taken place some years ago and would therefore be advantageous for all concerned to continue.

The Committee was informed that 2015/16 was another successful year of avoiding any breaches of the code. Newport City Council had managed to maintain a proud record of not losing a member.

The Chair thanked Gareth for his hard work in preparing the annual report, this was echoed by the members of the committee.

Any amendments to the report in relation to the Chair's Foreword would be sent to A Jenkins Friday 16 September in time for the presentation at Council.

Agreed:

That the Standards Committee approved the Annual Report for presentation to full Council on 27 September 2016.

8) Protocol on Member/Officer Relations

The Standards Committee had previously undertaken a review of the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations as part of their Ethical standards audit. The Protocol formed part of the Constitution and, as such, required approval and adoption by full Council. The purpose of the Protocol was to supplement the statutory Members Code of Conduct and the contractual Employee Code of Conduct by providing practical guidance on the application of the general principles of mutual trust, respect and integrity which were enshrined in both codes.

The last review was undertaken in 2012 and a copy of the revised version was attached as Appendix 1. This was submitted for approval to Council in January 2012, but it was not approved and adopted because of concerns about its status and impact. The original version was therefore still included within the published Council Constitution, albeit that it was marked as being "under review". This was attached as Appendix 2.

In addition, the protocol needed updating as it referred to out of date information such as the National Code of Conduct.

A brief discussion took place regarding the relevance of the document and it was suggested that an All Member seminar be arranged to discuss the Protocol before it went to Council. It was considered however that the protocol did not warrant such intense scrutiny as it was more of a useful guide in general.

It was suggested that the report might be presented to the Democratic Services Committee in the first instance where a recommendation could be made to Council on whether or not to adopt the Protocol. After general discussion it was agreed that this would be the best way forward.

Agreed:

That the Protocol for Member/Officer relations be considered at the next Democratic Services Committee meeting in November 2016 for recommendation to Council.

9) Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2015/16

Following the publication of his Annual Report for 2015/16, the Ombudsman had issued the Council with his Annual letter, which set out information relating to the numbers of complaints, maladministration and misconduct which were referred to his office during this period relating to Newport City Council and its Councillors.

There was a reduction in the number of complaints in relation to Local Authorities although Nationally the figures had increased by 19%, this was however attributed to Community Councils.

In terms of maladministration complaints, there were no reports within the last 12 months. One was upheld in part but this was more of a procedural issue. Maladministration was more about the corporate complaints and there would be a public interest report which would follow. Any minor failings such as delay in correspondence would be dealt with under local resolution protocol.

It was noted that the figures for Education within Newport were above the local authority average. There would be a report to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee on how we dealt with complaints, as in terms of relative figures the graphs in the letter did not give a prescriptive indication. The high figures however mostly referred to school appeals and were directed towards the panel. Additionally there were no findings of maladministration or complaints with school appeals.

Agreed:

That the Report and the Ombudsman's Annual Letter was noted by the Committee.

10) Succession Planning

An advertisement for two vacancies was sent to the South Wales Argus as well as being advertised on the Newport City Council website. There had been to date five applicants, which was quite impressive as the closing date was 30 September. A date would be set to short list the candidates, this was likely to be in October, once this had been carried out, a panel of Standards Committee Members and Councillors would be put in place to interview successful candidates. Finally, the panel would recommend to full Council the most suitable candidates for the two vacancies.

Agreed:

- That a date for shortlisting of candidates be arranged for October 2016.
- That a panel would be convened for interviews.

11) Work Programme

The next meeting was due to take place in January 2017 where a new work programme would be brought to the Committee following the approval of annual report in September.

12) Date of Next Meeting

19 January 2017 at 5.30pm in Committee Room 4.