

Draft Minutes

Standards Committee

Date: 07 January 2021

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Virtual Teams Meeting

Present: P. Westwood (Chair), J. Davies, T. Britton, A. Mitchell, K. Watkins, P. Worthington and Councillors D. Wilcox and P. Hourahine.
Gareth Price (Head of Law & Regulation) Pamela Tasker (Governance Support Officer).

Apologies: Councillor W. Routley

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor W. Routley

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting 16 January 2020

Actions Points Discussed:

On page 4 of the minutes, the Chair commented on the duty of group leaders to promote ethical standards in political groups and how they were going to monitor this. The Head of Law and Regulation confirmed that it was to make the Committee aware of the provisions in the Local Government & Elections Bill, which was now enacted and the provisions in this Bill would be brought into force in time for the next local elections in May 2022. At that point in time the obligation on group leaders to be responsible for ethical standards would apply. We were now waiting on further guidance from Welsh Government on how this would work in practice.

Agreed:

The Minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

The Chair commented on Page 5 of the minutes in relation to a courtesy letter to the group leaders of the respective groups in regards to the Ethical

Standards Questionnaires. The Head of Law and Regulation confirmed that this was a formal acknowledgement to the Leaders of their support. The conclusions of the questionnaire was mentioned in the Standards Committee report which was sent to full Council where the leaders were thanked for their support.

Councillor Hourahine raised a point on the Declarations of Interest form filled out by Members each year and whether they could be made more user friendly as it was discussed that Members were not always filling these out.

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that reminders had been sent to Councillors from the Democratic Services Team in the last few months to remind them to keep their Declarations of Interest forms updated. The Head of Law and Regulation also explained that it was important for Members to keep their Declarations of Interest updated as after the elections Councillors were required to fill in a declarations form within 28 days but it needed to be continually updated e.g. a change in employment. There was also a revision form for Members to update their Declaration forms. It was noted that Committee membership was not an issue but that a change in membership in a school governing body would mean the register would need to be updated.

5. Chairs Announcements

The Chair congratulated Councillor Wilcox on her membership to the House of Lords in November 2019.

6. Succession Planning and Appointment of Independent Members

The Chair confirmed that two independent members were finishing their terms this year; the Chair and Ms Britton.

The Chair enquired as to how interviews were being conducted due to the Covid Pandemic restrictions. The Head of Law & Regulation confirmed that all interviews were carried out remotely on Microsoft Teams and the Job Advertisement was amended to reflect this in terms of the recruitment process.

It was confirmed that there were two independent members whose 8 year successive terms were ending this year. The Chairs term would be ending in March 2021 and Ms Britton's term would end in October 2021. The report sets out the procedure to appoint new independent members.

The Head of Law and Regulation invited the Committee Members to agree the process and to agree the job requirement form and job application form.

It was also discussed that a special appointment sub-committee of 4 members would need to be set up. This would consist of Mr J. Davies as a Community Council representative, at least one Councillor and at least one independent member to form the appointment panel to interview the shortlisted candidates and make a recommendation to Council.

The Chair enquired as to whether they needed to attend and it was confirmed by the Head of Law and Regulation that this decision was up to the Chair but that a new Chair needed to be appointed as soon as possible.

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that they were happy to have volunteers and the interviews would be held virtually on Microsoft Teams.

The Chair agreed that the job advertisement needed to be sent out as soon as possible.

Councillor Hourahine asked whether present lay members were able to stand as Chair if they wished to and Councillor Hourahine also expressed a wish to sit on the appointments panel which Councillor Wilcox agreed with.

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that the Committee could have as many as they wanted on the panel for interviews, as their recommendations would go to full Council for approval. Post April 2021, a new independent Chair would need to be appointed.

It was discussed that as Ms Britton's term did not end until October 2021 was it worth interviewing for two candidates now rather than having another appointment process later on in the year.

Mr Watkins stated that they would like to put themselves forward to be on the appointments panel and that it was perhaps better to have the two interviews at once.

The Chair stated that it might be best to see how many applicants applied to the advertisement and if there were two strong candidates that would be ideal but if not, then the process could be repeated later on in the year.

Mr Mitchell and Dr Worthington also stated that they would be happy to sit on the appointments panel

7. Complaints

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that there were two current complaints with the Ombudsman. A complaint in relation to a city Councillor and a complaint involving a Community Councillor, which involved issues with the clerk. There is no further information on this and the Ombudsman were investigating these complaints at present. The Committee would be updated on these complaints in due course.

Any other Business

The Chair asked whether there would be any changes to the calendar. The Head of Law and Regulation stated that there was a full programme of remote Council Meetings and with this meeting there were issues with independent members dialling in and so this meeting was being recorded rather than being broadcast live. It was the intention for the next meeting to be broadcast live for transparency, as public members should be allowed to watch live.

Mr Davies asked as to why the meeting needed to be broadcast live if it was not usually live. The Head of Law and Regulation explained that, in relation to remote meetings as the Standards Committee was a statutory committee it needed to be broadcast live to comply with regulations and for openness and transparency. However recording the meeting was also another option if the meeting could not be broadcast live which was the minimum requirement.

It was acknowledged that external members were having some difficulties dialling into a live event.

Mr Mitchell acknowledged the Democratic Services Team and thanked them for their work in setting up Live Events and training.

Councillor Hourahine asked as to whether those two complaints mentioned came back to the Chair. The Head of Law and Regulation confirmed that the Chair was not involved at all in the Complaints process, as members were to remain impartial. In the event that the Ombudsman found there was a case to answer then they would produce a report, then the Standards committee would have to view this report and have a full hearing.

The Head of Law and Regulation stated that if the Ombudsman were to take any further action and investigate then the Head of Law and Regulation would be notified and if a full hearing were to take place before the Standards Committee so the absence of a Chair would not be a problem.

The Committee thanked the Chair for their time in chairing the committee and wished them well for the future.

8. Date of Next Meeting:

15 April 2021