

Minutes



Standards Committee

Date: 14 January 2016

Time: 5.30 pm

Present: Councillor J Guy, Mr B John and Mr J Pickering

In Attendance: G Price (Head of Law and Regulation), J Owen (Chief Legal Officer) and A Jenkins (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Taylor, D Fouweather, H Thomas and Hancock

1. Apologies for Absence

Hazel Taylor, Councillor H Thomas, Councillor Fouweather and G Hancock.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received.

3. Minutes of the Meeting dated 22 October 2015

The minutes of the meeting of 22 October 2015 was submitted. J Pickering was not marked as in attendance at the meeting.

Agreed:

That the minutes were approved subject to the above.

4. Matters Arising

The Report on the recent Wales Standards Conference which took place in October 2015 was published by Cardiff City Council. A paper copy of the document was distributed to those present, with a view to discussing the contents at the next meeting.

A Jenkins would send an electronic copy to those members not present.

5. Chair's Announcements

No announcements to report.

6. Complaints

Since the last meeting there were no further complaints.

7. Forward Work Programme

Member Training and Development

The draft Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) (Amendment) Order 2016 and the draft Local Government (Standards Committees, Investigations, Dispensations and Referral) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations were given consideration by those present.

The Monitoring Officer suggested deferring the work programme item regarding Code of Conduct training, until these draft statutory instruments had been issued and finalised. They were currently out for consultation with a view to being enacted prior to the Welsh Assembly elections on May 2016.. Mention was also made of the next local and community council elections in May 2017 and whether it would be advisable to defer any further training until then.

It was noted that only minor changes were proposed to be made to the Model Code of Conduct (the Code) to remove the requirement to report all breaches to the Ombudsman, in the light of local resolution protocols, and the removal of the conflict of interest provisions in relation to ward matters under paragraph 10(2) (b). Other minor changes reflected the legislative amendments that required community councils to be responsible for the maintenance and publication of their registers of members' interests.

The Chair asked whether the amendment was under a consultation period if members wanted to response. The consultation period had not yet expired however as the amendments were few the only response would be a favourable one. The consultation document was however on the Welsh Government website if members wanted to put forward their comments.

It was general considered that until the Committee was in receipt of a revised Code of Conduct, it would be too soon to discuss training and therefore training would be revisited at May's Committee.

The Monitoring Officer informed those present that there were proposed amendments regarding joint standards committees and referrals to other council's standards committees in accordance with the legislative framework.

Finally the document extended the elected member's terms of office. The four years term of office was due to expire this year, however as this coincided with the Police Crime Commissioner and Welsh Government elections legislation had been put in place to accommodate the fact that the next local elections would take place in May 2017. This effectively stated that Standards Committee co-opted members did not have to terminate their office in four years and the end of term of office would coincide with elected member five year term of office.

Agreed:

That training would be deferred to 12 May meeting.

8. Review of Community Councils

A letter was distributed to members for information regarding the Standards Committee Review of Ethical Standards. This was distributed electronically to Community Councils. The Monitoring Officer's letter invited Community Councils to adopt the Council's local resolution protocol on a voluntary basis. There had been two responses to date, all responses would be collated and compiled for the meeting in May to be discussed. It was considered that there would be a mixed response in terms of compliance as the Community Councils were so different in size.

Confirmation was also requested that they were maintaining their registers, if they were being published to their website and who the proper officer was. Community Councils were also expected to publish their Agendas and Minutes. The letter also informed Community Councillors about refresher training and what they might benefit from.

Newport City Council had adopted a local resolution protocol for resolving low-level complaints which was attached to the letter for their information.

Agreed:

To revisit this at the next meeting once all responses were collated.

9. Any Other Business

Further to the previous meeting where members of the Standards Committee from Torfaen County Borough Council attended, it was suggested that it might be beneficial to organise joint meetings of the Standards Committees with the five councils. This would be included on the Agenda for May's meeting.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 12 May 2016, Committee Room 4 at 5.30pm.