

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale on Friday, 25 April 2014 at 10 a.m.

PRESENT

Independent Members	Mr.G.Smith (Chairman) Mr.M.Jehu
County Borough Councillor	G.Stacey
Community Councillor	R.Butler

Officers in Attendance

Mr.P.J.Lucas – Monitoring Officer
Mr.A.Wilkins – Corporate & Democratic Solicitor
Mrs.Z.Maisey – Principal Officer, Committee Services

33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs.A.Jones and County Borough Councillor C.Davies.

34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests in matters pertaining to the agenda.

35 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 24 January 2014.

36 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- (1) Minute No.28(1) – Standards Committee, 24 January 2014 – Members were informed that the report recommending that the cap for indemnity for elected Members for legal representations at Standards Hearings be £20,000 and that the Standards Committee retain the “gate keeper” role was presented to the Cabinet and was subsequently reported to the Council and accepted.

- (2) With reference to Minute No.28(2) – Standards Committee, 24 January 2014 – as part of its Work Programme the Standards Committee had agreed to look at ways of promoting training for elected Members via the Council's website and to invite the Director of Customer Care and ICT to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss the proposal. It was planned to invite the Director to the next Committee meeting to discuss training opportunities for both County Borough and Community Councillors, via the Council's website. Following that meeting, the outstanding meeting between the Chairs of Standards and the Democratic Services Committees would be convened to discuss respective work programmes.
- (3) Minute No.30 – Standards Committee, 24 January 2014 – Members were informed that the Council would be reminded of the requirements regarding the registration of gifts and hospitality including the guidance offered by the Ombudsman at the next appropriate meeting of the Council.
- (4) Minute No.32 – Standards Committee, 24 January 2014 – Members were advised that proposals would be put forward at their next meeting in relation to them undertaking a mock hearing in respect of an allegation made against a Councillor and referred to the Committee for a decision by the Ombudsman.

37 FEEDBACK FROM MONITORING OFFICER – INTRODUCTION OF NEW DECLARATION OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS FORM

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that the new Declaration of Interest at Meetings Form were now being utilised by Council Members at meetings and their use would be monitored over the coming months. An update report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in July 2014.

REPORTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

38 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES – ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

In his report, the Monitoring Officer presented the Adjudication Panel for Wales – Annual Report for 2012-2013 which included:

- A summary of allegations of misconduct
- A summary of Case Tribunals
- A Summary of Appeal Tribunals
- Ongoing Cases

and following consideration thereof, it was **RESOLVED** to note the content of the report and to forward the report to all Councillors and the Clerks of Community/Town Councils for information.

39 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES – THE CODE OF CONDUCT CASEBOOK

In his report, the Monitoring Officer presented the first edition of “The Code of Conduct Casebook” published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Ombudsman’s Casebook featured investigations into complaints about maladministration and service failures and was designed to highlight the findings of investigations and quick fixes so that other service providers could learn from them and improve public services.

Following consideration of the report, it was **RESOLVED** to note the information and to forward the report to all Councillors and the Clerks of Community/Town Councils for information.

40 REVIEW OF MEMBERS’ DECLARATIONS IN RESPECT OF THE ACCEPTANCE AND REFUSAL OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

Pursuant to Minute No.30 (Standards Committee, 24 January 2014) the Monitoring Officer outlined the background to this matter and reported that enquiries had been made of other Welsh Authorities as to their policies and procedures for registering gifts and hospitality. The feedback received from that exercise was outlined which included the thresholds in place across most of the relevant Authorities in Wales.

Having received this information, the Monitoring Officer invited the Standards Committee to consider whether it wished to make any recommendations to the full Council in relation to the threshold adopted by the Authority and/or the operation of the Policy and compliance by elected Members as to declarations of gifts and hospitality.

The Committee was also asked to consider whether the Register of Members’ registration of gifts and hospitality should be published on the Council’s website once any recommendations from the Committee had been considered and dealt with by the full Council.

A discussion ensued and it was **RESOLVED** –

- (1) To note the information set out in the report in respect of the thresholds adopted by Welsh Authorities relating to the acceptance and refusal of gifts and hospitality by elected Members.

- (2) To recommend to the Council that the threshold for the Authority be increased from £20.00 to £25.00 but with the proviso that Members should consider politely refusing any gifts or hospitality offered to them.
- (3) That the Register of Members' registration of gifts and hospitality be published on the Council's website following the Council's decision referred to in (2) above.
- (4) That at the next appropriate Council meeting, the Monitoring Officer remind Councillors of the requirements regarding the registration of the acceptance or refusal of gifts and hospitality including the guidance offered by the Ombudsman.

41 CODE OF CONDUCT AND LOCAL INVESTIGATIONS – REFERRALS BY OMBUDSMAN TO MONITORING OFFICER

With reference to Minute No.31 (Standards Committee, 24 January 2014), the Monitoring Officer provided an update in respect of cases where the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales had decided that Member conduct might have breached the Code but had recommended no further action and referred the matter to the Monitoring Officer for consideration as to whether it should be dealt with by a local investigation.

The Monitoring Officer outlined his report and stated that pending the publication of revised guidance by the Ombudsman, it was proposed to continue to deal with referrals as resolved by the Committee on 24 January 2014 and as set out in his report.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report and endorse the decision taken by Minute No.31(1) of the Standards Committee held on 24 January 2014 in dealing with referrals by the Ombudsman.

42 APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE – INTRODUCTION OF REVISED FORM

Pursuant to Minute No.18(2) (Standards Committee, 18 October 2013), the Monitoring Officer reported that with the agreement of the Chairman, he had amended the form relating to applications for dispensation to the Standards Committee and attached a copy to his report for Members' consideration.

The new form would be introduced and become applicable from 1 May 2014.

Following consideration of the matter, it was **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report and the introduction of a revised form from 1 May 2014 in respect of applications for dispensation by County Borough Councillors and Community/Town Councillors to the Standards Committee as attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

**GUY SMITH
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting terminated at 10.30 a.m.