

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 Wednesday, 21st September 2016 at 10 a.m.

PRESENT

Independent Members

Mr. M. Jehu, MBE (Chairman)

Mrs. A. Jones

Mr. G. Smith

County Borough Councillors

C. Davies and G. Stacey

Community Councillor

R. Butler

Officers in Attendance

Mr. P.J. Lucas – Monitoring Officer

Mr. C.B. Jones – Deputy Monitoring Officer

Mrs. Z. Maisey – Principal Officer, Committee Services

1 CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

On opening the meeting, the Chairman informed the Standards Committee that Mr. Nathan Fear, an Independent Member of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Standards Committee, was in attendance today to observe proceedings. Mr. Fear was welcomed to the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 28th April 2016.

4 MATTER ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

With reference to Minute No.34(1) – the Monitoring Officer advised the Standards Committee that, by invitation, he had attended a training and induction session for new Adjudication Panel Members and spoken on his experiences as Monitoring Officer especially in relation to conducting hearings under the Local Protocol.

The Monitoring Officer had subsequently received a letter from the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales thanking him for his attendance at the training event indicating that the new members, in particular appreciated his thoughts on the resolution of complaints and the likely future issues to resolve. The President commented on how useful she had found the Council's website in explaining standards issues and publishing related information and wished to thank the Monitoring Officer's wider team at the Council for providing this information.

The Standards Committee welcomed the positive feedback received from the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

5 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCES AT MEETINGS – UPDATE

Pursuant to Minute No.28 (Standards Committee, 28th April 2016), the Monitoring Officer, in his report, advised the Standards Committee of the decision taken by the Council at the Annual General Meeting on 25th May 2016 following consideration of the Standards Committee's proposals in respect of the future monitoring of the attendance of Members at meetings.

The Committee noted that the Council had referred its recommendations in respect of the future recording of Members' attendance data to the Democratic Services Committee for consideration and it was planned to convene the next meeting of the Democratic Services Committee in the near future.

During the ensuing discussion, Members agreed that in order to identify and promote the profile and independency of the Standards Committee, an Annual Report should be presented to the Council at its next Annual General Meeting to provide Elected Members with information on the work undertaken and progressed by the Standards Committee along with any recommendations in moving forward in its role.

It was **RESOLVED** –

- (1) To note that the Democratic Services Committee will be considering the Standards Committee's recommendations in respect of Members' Attendances at its next meeting and that the Monitoring Officer would report back to the Standards Committee at its next meeting in December 2016.
- (2) That the Chairman of the Standards Committee attends the meeting of the Democratic Services Committee, if requested to do so.
- (3) To agree that the Standards Committee present an Annual Report to the Council's Annual General Meeting to be held in 2017.

6 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES ANNUAL LETTER 2015/16

In his report, the Monitoring Officer provided a summary of Code of Conduct matters as set out in the Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2015/16 to the Council which was attached as an Appendix.

The Monitoring Officer outlined the report and highlighted the fact that the number of Code of Conduct complaints rose by 19% compared with 2014/15 and the increase was almost entirely attributable to Community/Town Councils where there had been a 49% increase.

The Ombudsman had reported that the introduction of the public interest test last year had helped his staff in dealing with Code of Conduct complaints in an effective manner. He also made reference to an historical "spike" in Code of Conduct complaints against Councillors in the run up to local elections and the fact that he would be most disappointed to see an increase in complaints of a trivial matter over the next 12 months.

The Committee noted that four Code of Conduct complaints against Members of the Council were made during 2015-16. In three of those cases, the decision was made not to investigate and in the other, there was no evidence of a breach.

The Monitoring Officer also referred to the fact that the Ombudsman had requested to attend the next meeting of the Wales Monitoring Officers' Group on 23rd September 2016 and that he would report back to the Chairman of the Standards Committee on any relevant issues arising with regard to Code of Conduct matters.

With regard to Community/Town Councils, the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that he recently, by request, had a meeting with the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales in relation to a number of issues. During the meeting, it was established that One Voice Wales had produced a draft Local Resolution Protocol and also, undertaken work on Code of Conduct training as they had received concerns that any training provided to Community/Town Councillors to date had not been bespoke. In response, the Monitoring Officer stated that whilst, he along with his Officers, have attempted to provide bespoke training to Community/Town Councillors he had indicated to the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales that he would like to see the materials produced by his organisation as it was offering to provide bespoke training for Community/Town Councillors following the local government Elections next year. On receiving this information, the Committee endorsed the Monitoring Officer's views, noting that there was an overlap with Democratic Services Committee over Member Induction issues.

The Monitoring Officer also highlighted the fact that a Standards Committee in Wales had expressed the wish to visit some Community/Town Council meetings in its area to gain a better understanding of how they work. The Committee considered this to be a good idea provided that Community/Town

Councils were advised in advance that Standards Committee Members were planning to attend their meeting to observe proceedings.

Following a discussion on the issues raised, it was **RESOLVED** –

- (1) To note the contents of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2015/16.
- (2) To request the Monitoring Officer to report back to the Chairman, and if necessary the other Standards Committee Members, on the outcome of the Wales Monitoring Officers' Group meeting regarding any relevant issues concerning the Code of Conduct.
- (3) To consider attending Community/Town Council meetings following the next Local Government Elections to observe proceedings.
- (4) To receive further information in relation to One Voice Wales bespoke training in due course.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Members considered the matters they wished to include in their future Work Programme and following a discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the following items be included:

- (1) Members' Attendances at Meetings (following report back from the Democratic Services Committee)
- (2) Preparation and presentation of an Annual Report for the Council's Annual General Meeting in 2017.
- (3) Roll-out of future bespoke training for Community/Town Councillors
- (4) Code of Conduct training for newly elected Councillors post May 2017
- (5) To work jointly with the Democratic Services Committee on preparing Member Induction materials
- (6) Training for new Councillors appointed to the Standards Committee post May 2017 (to include Independent Members).
- (7) Investigate the possibility of joint working with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's Standards Committee to include training events.

8 CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman informed Members that this would be the last meeting of the Standards Committee that Zelda Maisey would attend owing to her forthcoming retirement from the Council.

The Chairman wished to place on record his personal thanks to Zelda for all her hard work and professional commitment to both the Standards Committee and the Council as a whole over her many years of service. The Committee

These minutes are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Standards Committee

Members endorsed the Chairman's comments and all wished her a long, healthy and happy retirement.

**M. JEHU, OBE
CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 10.45 a.m.