

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held
at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Monday, 25th September, 2017 at 10.00 am**

PRESENT: County Councillors: D. Evans, J.Pratt,
R. Stow (Independent Representative),
G. Preece (Independent Representative),
R. McGonigle (Independent Representative) and
I. Cameron (Community Representative)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Robert Tranter	Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillor S. Woodhouse and T. Auld (Independent Representative)

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. To receive the minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2017

The minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held on 12th June 2017 were confirmed as a correct record.

In doing so we noted that Independent and Community representatives had not been noted as present. The minutes would be amended accordingly.

3. Applications for Dispensations to Members

Members were required to consider two applications for dispensations:

1. An application for a dispensation to speak and vote by Cllr Stallard of Rogiet Community Council.
2. An application for a dispensation to speak and vote by Cllr Oliver of Rogiet Community Council.

We welcomed Maureen Williams, the Clerk to Rogiet Community Council, who was in attendance to respond to Member concerns.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in order for Rogiet Community Council to increase its number of elected members it wants to co-opt a further 2 members onto the council to ensure it has some margin of error when a member is absent.

Both Councillor Robert Stallard, and Councillor Susan Oliver of Rogiet Community Council's had submitted applications to speak and vote at a meeting of the community

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council on 4th October 2017 when the co-option of their spouses onto the community council would be considered. Rogiet Community Council should have 11 elected members: it currently has only 4 members and in order to increase the number of members on the council, the council wants to co-opt two further members onto the council.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- Having spouses or partners on the board could be viewed as manipulative. In turn, this could damage public confidence and give rise to questions, particularly as the role of the community council is to make decisions on behalf of residents, and could be seen as an unfair advantage.
- Members questioned why the interested parties had not put themselves forward at the recent election. It was questioned if there had been a reason that people were discouraged from applying, and suggested that this could discourage further.
- We were assured that Community Council did not receive payment and the role was voluntary.
- To be fair and democratic the status of the co-opted members should be reflected in the minutes of the meeting.
- It was understood that due to lack of members the Community Council had not met since July 2017, and the meeting in September had been cancelled
- When the meeting is advertised the names of the co-opted members are publicised.

The Committee resolved to grant dispensations, to both Councillor Stallard and Councillor Oliver, to participate but not vote at the meeting of Rogiet Community Council on 4th October, and agreed to grant the dispensation on the grounds of:

(i) where the member asks the Standards Committee to determine that it appears to the committee to be in the interests of the inhabitants of the area of the Authority that the disability should be removed as possible grounds to grant dispensation. Further Standards Committee members may also consider paragraph, and

(j) where it appears to the Standards Committee to be otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation to be a potential ground to consider a dispensation.

Standards Committee did not grant the dispensation in relation to paragraph (d) *where the nature of the member's interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business* as there were concerns surrounding public confidence.

4. PSOW Annual Report

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The Monitoring Officer presented the annual letter for 2016/17 from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in respect of Monmouthshire County Council. This covers maladministration complaints, and Members code of conduct allegations

We heard that the level of maladministration complaints had decreased from 27 in 2015/16 to 18 in 2016/17. Only one of these complaints was taken forward to investigation. The subject area with the most complaints was roads and transport with four in that area.

The ombudsman closed eight complaints in 2016/17 for Members code of conduct being an increase on three allegations received in 2015/16. We noted most of these allegation referred to one particular meeting.

Following explanation of the data, the Vice Chair asked that we request the annual letter to include information regarding complaints against Town and Community Councillors. We heard that there had been three allegations in 2016/17. When asked about the member on member resolution process, the Monitoring Officer was explained that this was not widely used, and last year there had been just two queries and had not proceeded to complaint level. The process relies in the roles of the Monitoring Officer and Group Leaders.

The Vice Chair commended the Council on the significant reduction in complaints and the continuing low level of allegations investigated further.

Standards Committee resolved to note the contents of the annual letter 2016/17.

5. To note the date and time of next meeting as Monday 27th November 2017

The meeting ended at 11.20 am