

**Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at County Hall, Usk,
on Monday 13th January 2014 at 9.30 a.m.**

PRESENT:

Mrs P Reeves (Chairman)
County Councillor D. Evans

INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVES:

Mr G Powell, Mr. M. Sutton and Mr G. Preece

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Mr. S.M.W. Andrews- Monitoring Officer
Mr. R. Tranter – Deputy Monitoring Officer
Mr. R. Williams - Democratic Services Officer

1. ONE MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Chairman informed the Committee that Mr. David Hedley, Community Committee member of the Standards Committee, had recently passed away. She therefore asked members to stand for a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from County Councillor R.P. Jordan and Mr. T. Auld.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

We resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In doing so, the Monitoring Officer stated that a training session had been established for Town Councillor Julia Haskey in November 2013. However, Town Councillor Haskey was unable to attend that training session but the Monitoring Officer was able to deliver suitable training to Ms. Haskey last week.

5. GUIDANCE ON GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY REGISTER FOR MEMBERS

We received a report by the Monitoring Officer and foreword from the Committee Chair regarding a draft guidance on the Gifts and Hospitality Register for Members.

The Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with the following issues to consider:

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- If a Member is offered a gift valued in excess of £25 but declines it, should the Member still register that he / she had been offered the gift but had declined the offer?
- The Register of Interests is available for public inspection. The view of the Information Commissioner has been sought as to whether the publication of the register on-line would breach any of the data protection principles. To date, the Information Commissioner's view has yet to be received.

We resolved to approve the draft guidance and foreword with the following amendments:

- The final paragraph of the foreword to be reworded to indicate that the guidance was for Members' protection.
- The Gifts and Hospitality Guidance for Members and Co-opted Members, Point 6 – Procedure for Declaring Gifts and Hospitality over £25 in Value, paragraph 4, should be in bold with additional wording to indicate that this was for the Members' protection.

6. MEMBER PROTOCOL FOR SELF-REGULATION

We received a report by the Monitoring Officer regarding Member Protocol for Self-Regulation.

We reviewed the operation of the protocol for self-regulation as set out in the appendices to the report.

We resolved that the Monitoring Officer reports to Council that the Standards Committee has reviewed and endorses the report on Member Protocol for Self-Regulation.

7. PROTOCOL ON MEMBER / OFFICER RELATIONS

We reviewed the report by the Monitoring Officer regarding the protocol on Member / Officer Relations agreed by the Council on the recommendation of the Standards Committee in February 2009.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the County Council was engaged generally on a review of its consultation following the production of a model constitution under the auspices of Monitoring Officers across Wales and funded by the Welsh Local Government Association.

The current protocol on Member / Officer relations has been in place since 2009.

A significant advantage in considering the adoption of the new protocol was that potentially it was a document that could be adopted across Wales and offer a degree of consistency in dealing with this aspect of Local Authorities' ethical framework.

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We resolved that, as part of the overall review of the Council's constitution, the new model protocol on member / officer relations should replace, or inform a review of the existing protocol.

8. FAMILY ABSENCE FOR MEMBERS

We received a report by the Monitoring Officer and were informed that the Family Absence for Members of Local Authorities (Wales) Regulations 2013, "(the Regulations)" made under Part 2 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ("the Measure") require the Council to make Standing Orders as soon as practicable to give effect to the prescribed conditions to be satisfied to meet the entitlement to absence set out in the regulations.

The Committee was informed that the report would be presented to Council on 16th January 2014 for consideration.

Having received the report the following points were discussed:

- It was suggested that Members should notify their respective Group Leaders if they intend to be away from their Council duties for more than six months.
- All reports presented to Council and Cabinet are subject to an Eqia assessment.
- A report was likely to be presented to the Democratic Services Committee for further consideration in respect of the matters set out in paragraph 3.4.

We resolved to receive the report and note its content and acknowledged that the report would be presented to Council on 16th January 2014.

9. URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS

The Chairman agreed to consider the following urgent item of business as the matter would not be dealt with in time if it was considered at the next ordinary meeting of Standards Committee.

10. REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that Chepstow Town Councillor Ned Heywood had requested the Standards Committee to consider his request for dispensation for him to speak at an emergency meeting of Chepstow Town Council on 15th January 2014 to consider the following motions:

Chepstow Museum, having considered the financial information provided and the funding request of Monmouthshire County Council for the following budgetary contribution: 2014/2015 £10,000; 2015/2016 £25,000; and, 2016/2017 £45,000, the Service Devolution Working Party recommends:

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That Chepstow Town Council contributes an additional £10,000 towards the cost of Chepstow Museum in 2014 / 2015 in order to safeguard the operation of Chepstow Museum for the next financial year, during which time the Town Council requests that Monmouthshire County Council makes available clear and comprehensive financial and operational information available to the Town Council in order that the Town Council may make informed decisions regarding future years funding for Chepstow Museum. The Town Council also notes that the level of on-going financial support required by the Museum will be influenced by the potential development of Trust status.

Chepstow Tourist Information Service, having considered the financial information provided and the funding request of Monmouthshire County Council for a budgetary contribution of £47,000 in 2014/2015, the Service Devolution Working Party recommends:-

That Chepstow Town Council contributes £25,000 towards the cost of Chepstow Tourist Information Service in 2014/2015, conditional on the service being operated from the existing premises. During the next financial year the Town Council requests: (a) that Monmouthshire County Council review the accounting practice whereby the whole cost of the Business Development Officer post is charged to the Chepstow Tourist Information Service; and, (b) makes available clear and comprehensive financial and operational information available to the Town Council in order that the Town Council may make informed decisions regarding future years funding for Chepstow Tourist Information Service.

Town Councillor Heywood's partner is the curator of Chepstow Museum. However, the Town Councillor had indicated that he would like to speak at this meeting and also vote, should it be necessary, in respect of the motion relating to Chepstow Museum.

The Monitoring Officer provided the Committee with the following options:

- Paragraph 14(ii) of the Code of Conduct would allow Town Councillor Heywood to speak but not vote in respect of this matter.
- The Committee could grant Councillor Heywood dispensation to speak and vote on the matter.
- The Committee could refuse to grant Town Councillor Heywood with a dispensation to speak and vote and allow the remainder of the Town Council to determine this matter.

Having considered the options it was considered that there were no appropriate grounds on which to grant a dispensation to Town Councillor Heywood.

We therefore resolved not to grant a dispensation to Town Councillor Heywood.

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11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that there were no current pending investigations and that there would be very few items to present to the Committee at the next meeting.

We therefore resolved that, for the time being, the next meeting would be held at County Hall, Usk on Monday 3rd March 2014, but the commencement time of the meeting would be changed from 2.00pm to 2.30pm to accommodate members of the Committee attending Planning Committee Site Inspections that were being held on that day. However, if the status quo remains and no further business is received two weeks before the date of the meeting, then the meeting would be cancelled.

The meeting ended at 11.05am