

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held
at Conference Room - Usk, NP15 1AD on Monday, 17th June, 2019 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillors: R Williams-Flew, P. Easy, D. Evans,
S. Woodhouse and I. Cameron (Community Representative)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Phillips	Head of Law/ Monitoring Officer
Nicola Perry	Senior Democracy Officer
Andrew Wathan	Chief Internal Auditor

APOLOGIES:

Councillors P. Clarke and R. McGonigle (Independent Representative)

1. Election of Chair

It was proposed and seconded that Mr. T. Auld be elected as Chair of Standards Committee.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

It was agreed that Mr. R. Stow be appointed as Vice-Chair.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair.

5. MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT, 2018/19

The Chief Internal Auditor presented a draft version of the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prior to inclusion into the Statement of Accounts 2018/19.

The Statement demonstrates that Monmouthshire has governance arrangements in place to meet the challenges of the governance principles and that a review has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of those arrangements. It demonstrates that in most areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is further work to do.

Members were invited to comment.

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It was confirmed that in terms of school finances, officers look at a sample basis on a rotation, looking at income, expenditure and payroll. Finances are looked at in general to identify controls in place.

The process around school deficit budgets are supported by school management teams.

It was asked that where training is due, members of Standards Committee are invited to interact.

With regards to Brexit a risk manager is in place to identify mitigations to manage risks. This is monitored on a regular basis.

It was agreed that the within the executive summary, Governance needs revisiting and updating ahead of the constitution review.

It was asked, with regards to Principle A of the guidance, how external providers are required to act with integrity, and how the Council addresses this. We were advised that as well as through the Equalities Act and Data Protection, 3rd party providers are held to account via contract. An exercise had been undertaken a few years ago regarding partnerships and arrangements, it was agreed this could be refreshed.

6. FEEDBACK FROM PSO BRIEF ON NEW POWERS

The Monitoring Officer and Customer Relations Manager had attended the Public Services Ombudsman's briefing.

The PSO has worked with Welsh Government to create a new bill, which is now at the point of coming into force. This is a means to introduce the bill to practitioners which were predominantly health boards, but also housing associations and fire authorities.

The biggest change identified was the introduction of 'own initiative investigations', and being able to accept verbal complaints. The criteria for investigations was identified in five parts:

1. Is it of public interest?
2. Reasonable suspicion of systematic maladministration
3. Impact on citizens who may be vulnerable
4. Weight of evidence
5. Persuasiveness of evidence

There were concerns around who guards the guardians and it was noted that the system would take a while to embed, and further feedback will be useful.

7. DISPENSATION REQUEST DISCUSSION

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The Chair presented a dispensation example for discussion. The Monitoring Officer had emailed a regulations report to provide a checklist.

There were many comments but overall it was recognised that public perception was important. It was agreed this would be an interesting matter for discussion at the upcoming Clerks Conference.

It was agreed that the format of the form should be amended and updated.

8. CLERKS CONFERENCE

The Committee were advised of a Clerks Conference due to take place on Wednesday 26th June 2019 at 9:30 am. All Monmouthshire Clerks are invited to attend as an opportunity to liaise with other clerks and officers. Matters will include a representative from WLGA with regards to a review of Town and Community Councils; an update from One Voice Wales; a representative of the Public Services Ombudsman and an update from Wales Audit Office.

Standards Committee Members were invited to attend.

9. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL WORK PLAN

It was agreed to continue arranging the work plan via email communication.

Items suggested for the following meeting included:

- Protocol for Member self-regulation for conduct
- Whole Authority report on complaints
- Ombudsman Annual Report and Accounts.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 16th SEPTEMBER 2019, 10AM

Noted.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm