

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Tuesday, 13th July, 2021 at 7.30 pm

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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| Matt Phillips | Chief Officer People and Governance and Monitoring Officer |
| Nicola Perry | Senior Democracy Officer |
| Joanne Chase | Solicitor |
| Ben Davies | Solicitor |

APOLOGIES:

Councillors R. McGonigle (Independent Representative)

1. Declarations of interest

None.

2. Dispensation Request

The Chief Officer for People and Governance / Monitoring Officer presented the report detailing that a Dispensation Request had been submitted to the Standards Committee. The purpose of such a request is to seek authorisation from the committee to participate in the business of Monmouthshire County Council despite the presence of a possible prejudicial interest as defined by the Code of Conduct.

There is currently work being undertaken that will lead to a decision regarding education provision in Abergavenny that relates specifically to King Henry VIII School (KHS) and Deri View Primary School. Ysgol Gymraeg Y Fenni is also directly affected by any decision on this matter. The discussion has been ongoing for a while and had been due to appear at the Children and Young People Select Committee meeting on 8th July 2021.

The advice provided by the Monitoring Officer concluded that as a number of Committee Members were Governors of the 3 schools mentioned above, and that those schools were "particularly" affected, then it was likely that a prejudicial interest was present. Were that to be the case, then not only would the meeting be affected but the wider conduct of Council business as it could prevent those with interests from participating in, for example, a motion raised at Full Council.

In discussion with the Chair, Members of the Committee, and the Monitoring Officer, decision was taken to cancel the meeting and convene the Standards Committee so that a decision could be taken on any potential interests and the need for dispensation.

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Tudor Thomas, Chair of Children and Young People Select Committee who also spoke on behalf of co-opted member Councillor Maggie Harris.

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Councillor Thomas expressed that by holding the position of Mayor of Abergavenny he is representing the interests of the people of Abergavenny.

Councillor Harris also has a broad depth of knowledge of the area and it was considered important that they are both able to take part in discussions.

The Chair advised that the Committee discuss the following five grounds for dispensation as set out in the request.

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.

The participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise.

The business to which the interest relates is to be considered by an overview and scrutiny committee of the relevant authority and the member's interest is not a pecuniary interest.

It appears to the committee to be in the interests of the inhabitants of the area of the relevant authority that the disability should be removed.

It appears to the committee to be otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

The Chair considered that excluding governors would have the opposite effect on public confidence.

Councillor Thomas informed that committee that people had made comments to him in passing but had not received formal communication.

Councillor Thomas felt strongly that Councillor Maggie Harris was best placed to represent Deri View School.

The Chief Officer explained that the dispensation seeks to provide flexibility to the individuals and not necessarily relating to the knowledge of other committee members.

The Chair considered the third point regarding participation to be straightforward and there were no objections.

The impact of the decisions around the three schools were acknowledged.

It was noted that public would find it hard to understand should the dispensation not be granted.

The Committee resolved to grant the dispensation.

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The meeting ended at 8.15 pm