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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held
at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 14th March, 2016 at 9.30 am**

PRESENT: Mrs. P. Reeves (Chair)

County Councillors: D. Edwards, D. Evans and P. Jordan

INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVES:

Mr. T. Auld

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

Mrs. I. Cameron

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Robert Tranter
Richard Williams

Head of Legal Services & Temporary Monitoring Officer
Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES: Mr. M. Sutton and Mr. G. Preece

In order for the meeting to be quorate, County Councillors D.L. Edwards and D. Evans agreed that they would not vote on any issues discussed at the meeting. However, they would take part in the debate.

1. Declarations of Interest.

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 14th September 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Draft Local Government Wales Bill.

We considered a report by the Head of Legal Services in which the Committee received an update on relevant changes proposed in the Local Government (Wales) Bill.

The Bill's main aim is proposed local government reorganisation and outlines the establishment of the new counties by the merger of existing counties and county boroughs; and a new and reformed legislative framework for local government democracy, accountability, performance and finance.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- Abergavenny Town Council had looked at the Boundary Commission suggestions that some community councils should merge. It would make sense

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for Abergavenny Town Council, Llantilio Pertholey Community Council and Llanfoist Community Council to merge to create one larger Town Council.

- The amalgamation of some town / community councils will make them more effective.
- On Local Government Reorganisation Monmouthshire is likely to become part of a much larger Greater Gwent Authority which will become the largest Council in Wales.
- Part 4 of the Bill refers to Councillors duties but does not state whether councillors have to sit on a committee. However, it was considered that councillors should be committed to attend meetings.
- Members serving on the proposed Greater Gwent Council will likely have an increase in workload due to the size of the proposed authority. This could potentially make it a full time job and preclude some individuals with a full time occupation from becoming a councillor.
- Part 4 of the Bill makes councillors accountable to the public.
- Currently, members are required to attend at least one meeting within a six month period. However, the Council can extend this ruling if the councillor can provide suitable reason for his / her absence, e.g., illness.
- It is Mandatory for all Planning Committee Members to attend a appropriate training before attending Planning Committee meetings.
- The annual report is not currently mandatory. However, councillors may produce an annual report.
- Surgeries are held.
- Correspondence responses – Councillors will leave themselves open to complaints if they do not respond within a reasonable timeframe.
- It was considered that the non-response from some officers to members' queries should be addressed. Currently, this matter was outside the remit of the Standards Committee. However, should the Draft Local Government (Wales) Bill be passed, then this matter will fall within the remit of the Standards Committee.

We resolved to note the contents of the report and the potential consequences of the Draft Local Government (Wales) Bill becoming law.

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4. Changes to the Members' Code of Conduct.

We considered a report by the Head of Legal Services regarding the proposed changes to the Code of Conduct brought about by the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) (Amendment) Order 2016.

Having received the report, the following points were noted:

- The report will highlight the differences with the new Code of Conduct. All Members and the public will be aware of the changes.
- Consideration should be given to providing a booklet for Councillors and Town / Community Councillors providing a brief summary of the new Code of Conduct. Such a booklet could be produced for the new County Council following elections in 2017.
- The Ombudsman has produced guidance on the Code of Conduct which may be found on the Ombudsman's website.

We resolved to endorse the proposed changes to the Code of Conduct which will be adopted by the Council at its annual meeting in May 2016.

5. Standards Conference Wales 2015.

The Head of Legal Services provided Members with information regarding the Standards Conference Wales 2015. This year's theme was 'Standards and Ethics in a Changing World' to reflect the challenges being faced by the Welsh local government sector.

In doing so, the following points were noted:

- The Welsh Local Government Association has produced guidance on social media use which has already been passed on to Members.
- The Head of Legal Services is keen to provide the Standards Committee with a report on Whistleblowing at the June 2016 meeting.
- The Conference had been well attended, was well organised, informative with some good workshop activities.
- However, an independent representative of the committee stated that he had preferred the conference that had been held two years ago in Llandudno. The 2015 conference had not provided much of an opportunity to interact with other representatives.

We resolved to receive the update and noted its content.

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Before concluding the meeting, the Head of Legal Services provided the Committee with the following information:

- A report would be presented to the June 2016 Standards Committee meeting regarding details of an Adjudication Panel for Wales that he had attended in respect of an allegation of a breach of the members' code of conduct by a community councillor.
- Training for this community council had been undertaken in February 2016 as requested by the Ombudsman.
- A meeting involving the Standards Committees of the local authorities within Greater Gwent would be arranged in due course.

The meeting ended at 11.10am.