

GWENT POLICE AUTHORITY

GWENT JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE

4th December 2006

Present: D B Hughes (Chair) P E Davies and B P L Wallis (Gwent Police Authority Standards Committee), D Davies and G Hughes (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Standards Committee), L C Davies, K C Mock, J Rao, M Warrender and Councillor A Pritchard (Caerphilly County Borough Council Standards Committee), J Frost and M S Miah (Newport City Council Standards Committee), R J Higginson, M Harbinson, M Davies, J Harvey and J Pritchard (Monmouthshire County Council Standards Committee), R Chater (Torfaen County Borough Council Standards Committee), C Shearman (Brecon Beacons National Park Standards Committee)

Together with: S A Bosson – Monitoring Officer and S Curley – Committee Clerk (Gwent Police Authority), S M W Andrews – Monitoring Officer (Monmouthshire County Council), D John - Monitoring Officer (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council), I Medicott - Monitoring Officer (Caerphilly County Borough Council), D Harries (Torfaen County Borough Council)

The meeting commenced at 5.30pm

Actions

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Critchley and J Hale – Gwent Police Authority; K Etheridge, G Parry, C Roberts and J Rowlands – Caerphilly; Councillor Knight and N Todd – Newport; Councillor Major, Councillor Wilcox, P Williams, S Thomas, L Webb – Monmouthshire; Councillor James, Councillor McGill, Councillor Pead, E Shilcott – Torfaen; Councillor H Morgan, Councillor K Silk, J Suter, Mr Yemm - BBNPA

MINUTES

3. The minutes of the Gwent Joint Standards Committee held on 12th June 2006 were received and confirmed subject to the following amendments:

‘Caerphilly County Borough Council Standards Committee’ should be included in the attendance list after A Pritchard.

Minute 4a should read ‘ the annual conference in Aberaeron’ not Aberystwyth.

Minute 4f should read ‘the distinction between a councillor acting in his official capacity as opposed to attending as a concerned relative’.

We noted that the Monitoring Officer for Blaenau Gwent had written to the Adjudication Panel regarding the time taken to convene hearings and then to hear them. A response had been received stating that delays were due to volume of work but that the comments would be taken on board.

REPORTS FROM MONITORING OFFICERS**4. Blaenau Gwent**

We noted that the Committee had re-appointed four of their independent Members for a second term of office.

There had been concern that there was no specific statutory provision allowing an authority to withhold a Member's allowance during any period of suspension. However, the recently published consultation document on draft regulations relating to Members/ Councillors' allowances included a provision allowing authorities to withhold a Member's allowance during suspension. A request was made for all authorities to support this.

The Committee had decided to initiate a programme of training based on the current Code of Conduct due to the considerable debate over the revised version.

Caerphilly

The Council had welcomed the changes to the Standards Committee regulations which had allowed three Members of the Standards Committee to be re-appointed for a further term.

The Committee had received a presentation from the Wales Audit Office on whistleblowing and intended to further promote and highlight the whistleblowing regime to staff across the authority.

Monmouthshire

The Committee had recently reviewed the County Council's corporate customer feedback (complaints) policy and procedure.

Members had received a presentation on the County Council's political management arrangements. We considered that it could be useful for members of Standards Committees in all authorities to receive further information on their political arrangements.

**Monitoring
Officers**

The Committee had also considered the advice of Carwyn Jones AM relating to land use planning and code of conduct issues.

Newport

The Committee had also considered it appropriate to organise training on the existing Code of Conduct.

The Committee had concluded that it would permit a Member to attend the Standards Committee meeting when their application for dispensation was under consideration. **Actions**

Torfaen

We stood for a moment's silence in respect of Mr Mike Jacob, one of the Independent Members of Torfaen's Ethics and Standards Committee, who had recently passed away

Due to the death of Mr Mike Jacob, Torfaen was seeking to recruit a replacement Independent Member.

The Committee had indicated that it would recommend that the Standard Indemnity prepared by the ACSes Group by approved by the Executive and Council.

The Committee had also considered an application for the grant of dispensation in relation to housing stock issues. A general discussion took place at this meeting regarding the issues that this topic generated.

Gwent Police Authority

The Committee had not received any applications for dispensation or any complaints.

The Committee had considered the requirement for Members and Officers to notify receipt of gifts and hospitality in excess of £25. It had been felt that the £25 level remained relevant and this had been endorsed by the Police Authority. Some Members of this meeting considered the £25 level to be too low.

The Chairman commented that he had recently attended a meeting of Full Authority and a meeting of the Professional Standards Committee which he found to be very informative and useful.

Brecon Beacons National Park

We welcomed Members of the Brecon Beacons National Park Standards Committee to their first meeting.

The Committee was shortly to consider the re-appointment of two Independent Members for a further term of office.

ALL WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEE CONFERENCE 22nd SEPTEMBER 2006

5. We considered the notes from the All Wales Standards Committee Conference which had taken place on 22 September 2006 in Aberaeron.

Following discussion, the differences were explained between role of the Standards Committees and the Adjudication Panel. Some Members enquired whether the Standards Committees could relieve some of the workload of the Adjudication Panel.

Reference was made to having an agreed format for dispensations which could simplify and improve the process. The Monitoring Officer for Monmouthshire would circulate a pro-forma used by their Standards Committee.

Actions
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The Feedback sessions at the conference had been very useful. We noted that it had been useful to hear the diversity of opinions that had been expressed regarding certain issues.

REVISED CODE OF CONDUCT

6. Members noted that work had begun on the revised Code of Conduct in 2003 and was still ongoing. Requests had been made for completion by Autumn 2007 in order to allow time to prepare for post election training.

A letter had been sent from Stephen Phipps to Steve Thomas providing an outline timetable which allowed for possible approval in September/October. It was hoped that all Standards Committees would write to WAG supporting the timescale.

Monitoring
Officers

JOINT TRAINING ON THE CODE OF CONDUCT

7. Members supported the possibility of joint training on the Code of Conduct in order to ensure a consistency of approach.

Monitoring
Officers

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8. It was agreed that the date of the next meeting should be in June 2007 and take place at Caerphilly County Borough Council.

The meeting concluded at 7.10 p.m.