



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, TREDOMEN ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH NOVEMBER 2009 AT 2.00 PM

PRESENT:

M.G. Warrender - Chairman
K.C. Mock - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

J.B. Criddle

Messrs L.C. Davies, D.R.G. Parry, Mrs. E.J. Rowlands (Independent Members)

Together with:

Deputy Monitoring Officer (Mrs G. Williams), Scrutiny and Members Services Manager (J. Jones), Corporate Support Officer (Mrs S. Richards), Committee Services Officer (Mrs. R. Thomas)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L.R. Rees and his substitute Councillor H.W. David, Community Councillor I.L. Racz and the Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer (D. Perkins)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the beginning or during the meeting.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th September 2009 (minute nos. 1-7, on page nos. 1-3) be approved and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

3. Grants Of Dispensation – Former St. Ilan School, Caerphilly (Minute No. 3.1)

It was noted that although the Standards Committee had granted dispensation, none of the Councillors had addressed the full Council.

4. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny and Members' Services Manager that detailed expenses and allowances that had been paid to Caerphilly County Borough Councillors from 2004 to 2009.

A detailed discussion took place, with officers of the authority advising on the procedures in place to ensure payments were made in line with the county borough's Constitution (Part 6, Members' Allowances).

It was noted that random audits were conducted and comprehensive records were in the public domain. In closing, officers confirmed the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales are reviewing the current WAG scheme of members' allowances and expenses. Further information about any new scheme will be presented to a future meeting.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – PRESENTATION

The Deputy Monitoring Officer demonstrated the processes in place to monitor and record members' declarations of interest, together with acceptance and/or refusal of all gifts and hospitality offered.

Consideration was given to the need for members to register all financial, memberships and management positions upon their acceptance of office, and of the ongoing register for any personal and/or prejudicial interests that may arise whilst carrying out their duties. In addition a separate register recording offers of gifts and hospitality, where the value of the gift exceeds £25, was highlighted. All registers are in the public domain and can be viewed at any time.

6. COMPLAINTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN

The report on complaints made to the Ombudsman which had been rejected by him as not accepted for formal investigation or that he was satisfied with the action taken, those complaints which remained at the enquiry stage or were awaiting determination and those complaints which were not upheld was noted.

The Committee asked if it were possible on future reports, to show the date of receipt for each complaint.

7. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – VERBAL REPORT

A discussion paper on the wider functions and development of the committee's role was distributed at the meeting.

Consideration was given to the statutory and non-statutory responsibilities of the committee and a discussion ensued as to possible development and promotion of the committee. The following proposals were received favourably:

- Production of an annual report (please see the next minute reference);
- 6 monthly review of the Register of Members' Interests with Registers of Gifts and Hospitality;
- Attendance and presentation on standards at an annual conference for Community Councillors within the county borough;
- To engage more with Council Members by holding bi-annual meetings with political leaders;
- To attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel to raise the profile of the Code of Conduct;

- To engage more with senior council officers by attending and presenting at Management Network Sessions to raise the profile of conduct issues;
- To develop specific information booklets for Council Members and officers on the Whistleblowing Policy and the Member Code of Conduct.

OTHER BUSINESS

8. Caerphilly County Borough Council's Standards Committee Annual Report 2009

The Chairman tabled a first draft of the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Standards Committee Annual Report 2009, for the members to review.

Members were asked to forward any comments/observations to the Scrutiny and Members' Services Manager, who will collate the data on behalf of the Chairman. A target of two weeks was suggested. Legal Services would then prepare a final draft.

The Committee agreed that the draft document will need to be updated following the outcome of the previous agenda item and that the committee should aim to publish the report by the end of January. Officers highlighted the need for consultation before the report was finalised, and suggested passport sized photographs of the committee be taken at the next meeting for Appendix 1 of the report.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that, unless any urgent matters arise in the meantime, the next meeting be held at the end of January 2010, on a date to be agreed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

CHAIRMAN