

**Minutes of a Joint Meeting between Powys County Council Standards Committee and Brecon Beacons National Park Standards Committee held at County Hall, Llandrindod Wells on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2010**

**PRESENT:**

**Powys County Council**

Mr Peter Swanson – Chairman - Independent Member Standards Committee  
Mrs Helen Rhydderch-Roberts – Independent Member Standards Committee  
County Councillor Michael Hodges – Standards Committee  
County Councillor Kelvyn Curry – Standards Committee  
Community Councillor Ms Clare Evans – Standards Community Sub-Committee  
Community Councillor Mr Hywel Evans – Standards Community Sub-Committee  
Community Councillor Revd Alan Jevons – Standards Community Sub-Committee  
Mr Clarence Meredith – Monitoring Officer  
Ms Saira Tamboo – Solicitor  
Mr Wyn Richards – Scrutiny Services Manager  
Mrs Liz Patterson – Committee Clerk

**Brecon Beacons National Park**

Mr Chris Shearman – Vice-Chairman – Independent Member Standards Committee  
Mr Nick Jacobs – Standards Committee  
Ms Margaret Underwood – Standards Committee  
County Councillor Mrs Kathryn Silk – Powys Park Member – Standards Committee  
Mr Murray Andrews – Monitoring Officer  
Mrs Julia Gruffydd – Democratic Services Manager  
Mr Chris – Head of Planning

Mr Swanson welcomed everyone to the first joint meeting of the Powys County Council and Brecon Beacons National Park Standards Committees. This was an opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest relating to Standards and Ethics in both authorities which covered, in parts, the same geographical area.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Powys County Council  
County Councillors F. Barker and Miss V. E. Evans, Independent Members  
Mrs M. Harris, Mrs S. Jarman and Mr R. Miller  
Brecon Beacons National Park  
Park Members Roger Chater and Mrs Helen Wyn and Ms Rhiannon Edwards  
National Park Solicitor.

## **2. Standards Matters**

A number of matters were considered for discussion as detailed below:

### Training

The BBNP confirmed that the authority has no responsibility for Town and Community Councils in their area with regard to Standards issues – this responsibility remained with PCC. PCC confirmed that there had been occasions where Town and Community Councils within the Park area had turned down training offered by PCC on the basis that the majority of matters dealt with related to planning and therefore it would not be relevant to them. The BBNP offered to write to all Town and Community Councils in their area urging them to take up any training offered by Principal Councils on the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Park also suggested working in conjunction with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action who were able to assist in providing training to Town and Community Councils. This training could be offered to Town and Community Councils on the Members' Code of Conduct and acting as a Trustee.

### Ombudsman

Both authorities expressed disappointment at the way the Ombudsman was dealing with complaints. Both authorities had only had one incidence of having to determine a case sent to the Committee by the Ombudsman. In all other cases where the Ombudsman had found a breach of the Code he had determined that the Standards Committee would not impose a sanction. Both authorities expressed concern at this position and felt strongly that the Ombudsman should send cases to them where he had concluded a breach had occurred and they would decide whether or not a sanction was warranted. It appeared from the Standards Conference that the Ombudsman had admitted that the office was overworked. It may be that regional Ombudsmen are appointed. This was seen as unnecessary when a network of Standards Committees across Wales were already in existence.

### Standards Conference

PCC advised that they were exploring the possibility of hosting the Standards 2012 Wales Conference. The BBNP expressed an interest in working jointly on a specific Standards in National Parks Workshop but would be unable to assist in organising the conference. The Monitoring Officers confirmed that this would be discussed at the next ACSeS meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

### Standards Committees

Both authorities had noted the proactive approach taken by some other authorities across Wales in particular Cardiff. The publication of an Annual Report from the Standards Committee was noted as good practice.

### **3. Planning Protocols**

The BBNP has responsibility for planning in the Park authority area. PCC has responsibility for planning for that area of Powys not covered by the BBNP.

The BBNP has a Planning Committee which consists of all Members of the BBNP authority.

PCC has a Planning Committee of 15 Members with the remaining 58 Members playing a 'Local Member' role in planning matters.

Both the PCC and BBNP Planning Protocols were broadly similar although the PCC Protocol has to address the Local Member role that Powys has along with Planning Committee Members who wish to play a Local Member role.

It was agreed that the Protocols were useful but couldn't hope to address all eventualities and whilst Officers could offer advice it was the responsibility of individual Members to act as they saw fit.

The BBNP are undertaking training for Town and Community Councils on the planning process and how to make representations in conjunction with Planning Aid Wales.

#### Site Visits

It was confirmed that legally it was not necessary for a Member to attend a site visit in order for that Member to take part in the decision-making process. Both authorities felt that this was incompatible with the need to remain in the meeting room throughout the debate on a particular item or be disbarred from voting on the matter. Both authorities urged Members to attend site visits which were only called occasionally when there a site visit was essential for decision-making. However, the decision whether or not to attend a site visit remained with the individual Member.

#### Attendance at meetings

There was some debate regarding the attendance of Members at meetings. On occasions it had been noted that Members were using laptops for purposes other than for reading agendas and that were the public to be aware of this particularly in relation to a planning decision there could be serious consequences. It was suggested that a Protocol for use of electronic media in meetings could be considered. It was also suggested that for meetings requiring intense concentration then the Chair should arrange regular breaks in proceedings.

### **4. Future Meetings**

It was suggested that the Joint Meeting be repeated on an annual basis.