

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE, HELD AT COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS ON WEDNESDAY 1st FEBRUARY 2012.

PRESENT: P. Swanson. (Chair)

Mr R. Miller, Mrs M. Harris, Mrs S. Jarman, Mrs H. Rhydderch-Roberts, County Councillors K.W. Curry, Miss V.E. Evans and M.D. Hodges.

Observers: Community Councillors H. Evans and Revd A. Jevons.

Officers in Attendance: C. Meredith (Strategic Director – Law and Governance), Ms S. Tamboo (Solicitor – Corporate), W. Richards (Scrutiny Services Manager) and Mrs E Patterson (Committee Clerk).

The Strategic Director mentioned that this was the last meeting that Mr Peter Swanson would be attending and chairing as his term of office ended on 2nd March 2012. He thanked the Chair for the tremendous support he had given to him in his role as Monitoring Officer. Members of the Committee expressed their thanks for the professional way he had conducted the meetings and the Community Councillors were grateful for the way the Chairman had included them in the work of the Standards Committee which was of benefit to the Standard Community Sub-Committee.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Jacqueline Evans the newly appointed Independent Member as an Observer to the meeting prior to her commencing her term of office on 2nd March 2012.

1.	APOLOGIES	S1 - 2011
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An apology for absence was received from County Councillor F. Barker.

2.	MINUTES	S2 - 2011
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The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30th November 2011 as a correct record subject to the amendment of the second sentence of item H to read 'The Committee *noted* that...'.
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3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	S3 - 2011
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There were no declarations of interests from Members.

4.	CORRESPONDENCE	S4 - 2011
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There were no items of correspondence of such urgency as to warrant consideration.

5.	REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR – LAW AND GOVERNANCE	S5 - 2011
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The Committee received the report of the Strategic Director – Law and Governance.
(Copy filed with signed minutes)

A. General Training for Members.

A1. Training of County Council Members – Member Development Strategy / Programme.

It was confirmed that a training programme was being drawn up for the new intake of Councillors in May 2012. Peter Keith Lucus from Bevan Brittan had been booked to provide the Code of Conduct training to County Councillors on the 16 May 2012. Independent Members of the Standards Committee would be invited to attend this training.

B. Referral of Councillors to the Public Services Ombudsman.

It was confirmed that one longstanding complaint regarding one County Councillor had been decided by the Ombudsman. He had concluded that there was no evidence that the Member had failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. (ref 1/11CC)

The Ombudsman had received a complaint regarding two County Councillors (ref 5/11CC) which he had decided not to investigate.

C. Other Standards Issues

C1 Social Networking

The Political Group leaders were considering this policy and the Member Development Working Group would consider their comments before drafting a final report for adoption by the Council.

D. Minutes of meetings

D1 Meeting of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny, Audit and Standards Committee

The notes of the meeting held on 8th December 2011 were noted. Additional meetings of the group had been held in the meantime but these were relating to the structure of the Council's scrutiny function.

E. Dispensations

No applications for dispensation had been received.

F. Renewable Energy Issues.

The Committee again noted the responses which had been received.

RESOLVED:	Reason for Resolution:
(i) that a further reminder be sent to Members requesting a response to the questionnaire.	In order that the complete picture can be gained of Members' interests in relation to renewable energy issues.

G. Standards Conference.

A letter from Cardiff Council thanking Powys for organising a successful conference was received.

H. Attendance at Committee.

The Committee considered responses from the following Members:

County Councillor R George

The Committee, whilst noting Cllr Georges' explanation were aware that another Member also in the same position as Councillor George (concurrently a County Councillor and Assembly Member) had managed to maintain a level of attendance above 60%.

County Councillor P Lewis

The Scrutiny Services Manager confirmed that he had spoken to Councillor Lewis who had advised him of the nature of the personal circumstances which were confirmed as an appropriate reason for his level of attendance.

County Councillor R W Morgan

The Scrutiny Services Manager confirmed that an email had been received advising that the Member had experienced problems attending meetings due to clashes with essential farm work. The Member had also been recently diagnosed with a condition which would require several hospital visits and advised that his attendance record would not be likely to improve. Concern The Committee, whilst noting Councillor Morgan's explanation, were aware that other Councillors have high work commitments and manage to attend the requisite number of Council meetings.

County Councillor P Pritchard

An email was received from Councillor Pritchard detailing respectively those meetings where he had been present and absent. Councillor Pritchard expressed the view that when two meetings were held on one day Members who were unable to attend should not be penalised by recording two absences. The Committee was not satisfied that Councillor Pritchard had provided the Committee with adequate reasons for his absences. Members were also of the opinion that all meetings used to calculate attendance should be taken into account including those called at short notice and in those cases where two separate meetings are called on the same day.

County Councillor J Steadman

A comprehensive email was received from Councillor Steadman detailing the reasons for his absence from the meetings that he had missed. The Committee accepted Councillor Steadman's explanation of his attendance level.

RESOLVED that	Reason for resolution
i) The Chairman notifies to Councillors Pritchard and Morgan of the Committee's concern regarding their	i) to encourage County Councillors to meet the attendance level set by the Standards Committee.

level of attendance and advise them of the expectation that their attendance levels would improve over the next period.	
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Circulation of attendances in future to Committee will be preceded by a distribution of the full list to all Members of the Council with a note advising that those Members with less than 60% attendance will be asked for an explanation by the Committee.

I. Independent Remuneration Panel – Care Allowances.

The Strategic Director – Law and Governance advised the Committee that subsequent to consideration of this matter at the November meeting the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had published its annual report for the period 2012/13. Rather than confirm that the Care Allowance would be an annualised figure as the Council had been led to believe by the IRP prior to publication of the 2012/13 report the report stated that the Care Allowance would continue to be a monthly figure. The Strategic Director had sought further clarification from the IRP who simply confirm that the Care Allowance would remain a monthly allowance but gave no explanation for their stance.

The Strategic Director undertook to seek the views of the other 21 authorities in Wales on this matter and to ask the IRP for the reason for their decision

The Strategic Director confirmed that Committee would be updated on this issue at their next meeting.

J. Membership of Standards Committee

At the meeting of Powys County Council on 20th October 2011 the reappointment of Independent Member Mr Ralph Miller for a second term of office was confirmed for a further 4 year period to 26th January 2016. Mr Miller thanked the Council for extending the term and confirmed that he was prepared to continue in the role of Vice-Chair.

At the meeting of Powys County Council on 8th December 2011 the appointment of Independent Member Mrs Jacqueline Evans for a period of 6 years from 2nd March 2012 to 2nd March 2018 was confirmed.

K. Meeting Dates

The following dates for the Standards Committee were confirmed:

4th April, 2012
4th July, 2012
5th September, 2012
5th December, 2012

Work Programme

The Strategic Director advised that the following matters would be coming before the Committee over the coming months:

- Appointment of Independent Member as Chair
- Dispensations – all dispensations cease on 3rd May 2012. Blanket dispensations to be considered. All Members to be invited to apply for individual dispensations if required.
- Training
- Constitutional Changes
- Predetermination guidance
- Appointment of T&CC representatives.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking the Committee for their help and support over the last 10 years. He was proud of the way the Committee had developed over this period but he remains frustrated that the Ombudsman decides not to send complaints to the Standards Committee for determination where a breach has been found on the basis that the Ombudsman is of the opinion that the Standards Committee would not impose a sanction.

P. SWANSON
Chairman