

Standards Committee

Feedback on Observations of County Council Meetings

Meeting:	County Council
Date:	22 February 2024
Format of meeting	Delete as appropriate: In County Hall / Online only / Hybrid [online and in County Hall]
Independent member observing:	Nigel Steward Independent Lay Member Powys County Council, Standards Committee

Please provide feedback on the following issues relating to standards and conduct.

Declarations of interest made at the start of the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers made and type – personal or prejudicial ▪ If prejudicial interests made did the councillor leave the room/virtual meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None.

Declarations made during the meeting when they come to light: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers made and type – personal or prejudicial ▪ If prejudicial interests made did the councillor leave the room/virtual meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None. (Some casual references to being school governors) <p>Note: The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and agree the Medium Term Budget for the WHOLE Council and so it was surprising that not one formal declaration of interest was made.</p>

Dispensations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were any dispensations relied on? ▪ State which dispensation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No. ▪ N/A.

Code of Conduct, Standards and Ethic issues: Selflessness / Honesty / Integrity and Propriety / Duty to Uphold the Law / Stewardship / Objectivity and Decision-making / Equality and Respect / Openness / Accountability / Leadership

Comment on any issues observed during the meeting:

One member asked the Chair on several occasions to ensure all those participating in the meeting online were actually in attendance throughout the various debates leading up to voting. On the third or fourth occasion, the Monitoring Officer asked the individual to outline any specific concern.

It was noted that several members made constant use of their mobile phones (they were on silent). Uses included, web browsing, responding to emails and messages. This may have been connected to urgent Council business, but was a distraction to others, disrespectful to the Chair and the member who was presenting at the time. It also provided a perception to the public that they were not fully engaged in the meeting.

Other general observations:

In general, this was a good, well managed meeting.

Conclusion:

Due to the subject and nature of the particular meeting, it lasted a long time (4.5 hours) and at times, the subject matter was complex. In this respect, the Chair should be commended for maintaining order and managing expectations of those many members who requested to speak. Examples of good practice included:

- The microphone system was tested five to ten minutes before the start of the meeting.
- The momentum of the meeting was maintained and the Chair provided intermediate milestones to make it clear when members could ask questions or make comments. Forward notice of the lunch break was also given.
- When it became appropriate to do so, the Chair also sought advice from the Council's Senior Officers.

It was a good meeting, I was made welcome by those that sat nearby or who introduced themselves and it was evident that many members had become aware that an independent member of the Standards Committee was observing the meeting.

Recommendations or Suggestions (if appropriate):

Members of the Standards Committee are asked to consider the expectations of:

- Members making declaration of interests
- The perceived behaviour of those members who attend meetings online, particularly with the ability to disable personal video cameras during debates.
- the use of mobile phones, laptops, tablets etc.

This feedback will be considered at the next Standards Committee. However, any major concerns should be discussed with the Standards Committee Chair, Vice Chair and Monitoring Officer. Any action taken by the Monitoring Officer will be reported to the Standards Committee, as appropriate.

On completion, Email the completed form to: Carol Johnson, Democratic Services Officer carol.johnson@powys.gov.uk