
STANDARDS COMMITTEE, 23 November, 2009

PRESENT: ELECTED MEMBERS: Councillors Margaret Griffith, Keith Greenly-Jones and Stephen Churchman.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS: Mr John Pollard (Chairman), Mr Gwilym Ellis-Evans, Mr Malcolm Jones, Mr Sam Soysa and Mr Gwyn Williams.

ALSO PRESENT: Dilys Phillips (Monitoring Officer), Siôn Huws (Propriety Officer) and Ioan Hughes (Committee Officer).

APOLOGIES: Mr David Clay (Member of Community Committee)

WELCOME Mr Gwyn Williams was welcomed to his first meeting of the Standards Committee.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any member present.

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 12 October 2009, as a true record.

3. APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATION

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer, noting that three councillors had applied for dispensation in relation to the Council's primary schools organisation. The applications had been received from Councillors Elwyn Edwards, Dylan Edwards and Eric Merfyn Jones and they were considered individually.

Members were reminded that this Committee had decided on specific guidelines for considering applications involving primary schools organisation.

According to the guidelines "*a husband or wife, children, brother or sister would amount to too close a connection to allow dispensation in terms of a specific school, since it would be difficult for the public to gain confidence in the way a decision would be reached.*"

The strategy adopted by Gwynedd Council for the reorganisation of primary schools was outlined. The basis of the strategy was to review the future of primary schools within specific catchment areas. This would be achieved by forming Review Panels and subsequently the portfolio leader would form proposals for each catchment area. She would be supported in this work by a county advisory panel, namely six members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

The Monitoring Officer explained that permission had been granted in the past for all members to participate fully in the activities of the Catchment Area Review Panel. She added that it was unlikely that the Panel would vote on any matter, since the final decision would be made by the full Council. Even if the Catchment Area Review Panel were to vote, it would not affect the final decision.

Application of Councillor Elwyn Edwards

It was reported that the application by Councillor Elwyn Edwards was relevant to the primary schools review in the catchment area of Ysgol y Berwyn, Bala. The application for a general dispensation was made by Councillor Elwyn Edwards because his daughter's children attended Ysgol Bro Tegid, Bala.

It was noted that the application was made because it was important for the member to contribute to discussions locally when consideration would be given to all schools in the catchment area rather than one specific school.

A member expressed concern because in his opinion a granddaughter or grandson was too close a relative to allow the dispensation. He noted that the guidelines should be amended to include this relation and he emphasised that councillors should be safeguarded by ensuring that their decision to declare a personal interest appeared to be correct.

Another member expressed concern that establishing boundaries that were too strict could lead to all important decisions being made by a small percentage of the Council's membership.

Several members were of the opinion that grandfather/grandmother and granddaughter/grandson were relatives that could influence councillors' decisions and they should be included within the boundaries of the guidelines. In addition, it was concluded that the relation of father/mother should be added to the guidelines.

RESOLVED:

- i) to refuse the general application but approve under paragraph (ch) and (ff) of the regulations;**
 - a) a dispensation for the member to contribute to discussions in the Catchment Area Review Panel and**
 - b) a dispensation on matters associated with the county's primary schools organisation but not at times when they will be associated directly with Ysgol Bro Tegid, Bala.**
- ii) that the guidelines for considering applications for dispensations in relation to primary schools organisation are adapted so that they will read as follows:**
“a father/mother, grandfather/grandmother, grandson/granddaughter,

husband or wife, children, brother or sister would amount to too close a connection to allow dispensation in terms of a specific school, since it would be difficult for the public to gain confidence in the way a decision would be reached.”

Application of Councillor Dylan Edwards

It was noted that the member was making an application for a general dispensation to enable him to speak at meetings of the Catchment Area Review Panel only.

The application had been made by him because his wife was a teacher in the schools, his son was a pupil at Ysgol y Berwyn, Bala and his brother's children were pupils at the schools.

It was noted that the application was made because it was important for the member to contribute to discussions locally when consideration would be given to all schools in the catchment area rather than one specific school.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the application referred to the Catchment Area Review Panel and it was an application to speak only that had been submitted. Members did not object to this proposal.

RESOLVED to allow under paragraph (ch) and (ff) of the regulations, the member to receive a dispensation to speak at meetings of the Catchment Area Review Panel.

Application of Councillor Eric Merfyn Jones

It was reported that the application had been made for general dispensation in relation to the organisation of primary schools in Gwynedd.

The member had submitted an application because his son was the Head Teacher of Ysgol Penisarwaun and it was noted that he was submitting the application in order to participate and represent his electorate and the county.

Members noted that it would be fair for the member to participate fully in general discussions on the organisation of primary schools. However, it was emphasised that he could not participate should the discussion be involved in any way with Ysgol Penisarwaun.

Although this specific school was outside the boundaries of the member's electorate, a member was concerned that the family relation was too close to allow the dispensation.

RESOLVED to allow under paragraph (ch) and (ff) of the regulations, the member's application to speak and vote on matters associated with the county's primary schools organisation unless the matter under consideration is associated directly with Ysgol Penisarwaun.

CONFERENCE

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer on the Standards Conference Wales 2009, held in Cardiff on 15 October.

The officer noted that the matter that had come to the fore at the Conference was the need to raise the profile of the Standards Committee. Consequently, she suggested that a clear work programme should be arranged and three or four dates within the Council's calendar could be allocated for meetings of the Committee.

The officer also referred to the importance of establishing close connections with the political leaders of the Council and she added that an annual report could be prepared that referred to the work of the Standards Committee and this could be given publicity.

The officer reported further that there was a need to arrange training for members and community council members regarding the Code of Conduct along with preparing a leaflet noting the expectations.

In response to an enquiry, the officer stated that it was expected that the guidelines, to which everybody should adhere, would be submitted by the Ombudsman before the end of the month. The Chairman welcomed this information and he added that several of the targets set could be achieved by considering alternative methods such as presenting information on the internet.

Further information was submitted by Mr Sam Soysa on information presented at the Conference in workshops and presentations. A further report was provided by Mr Gwilym Ellis-Evans and both were thanked for their work.

RESOLVED to accept the reports and implement in accordance with the recommendations of the Monitoring Officer by arranging a clear work programme for the Standards Committee.

The meeting commenced at 2.30am and concluded at 3.45pm

CHAIRMAN