
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE, 10/01/24

Present:-

Elected Members:- Councillors Anne Lloyd Jones and Beth Lawton.

Independent Members: Mr Aled Jones, Mr Hywel Eifion Jones (Chair), Mr Mark Jones and Mr Dave Wareing.

Also in Attendance: Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Democracy Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillor Dawn Jones (for item 4) and Councillor Gwynfor Owen (for item 5).

Councillors Dawn Jones and Gwynfor Owen were welcomed to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Dewi Owen and Mr Richard Parry Hughes.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Mr Aled Jones declared a personal interest in item 5 as he knew Councillor Gwynfor Owen personally and professionally through his work.

The member was of the opinion that it was a prejudicial interest, and he withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on the item.

Councillors Dawn Jones and Gwynfor Owen had a personal interest in their own applications, although the Standards Committee had granted a general dispensation which allowed those applying for dispensations to attend meetings of the Standards Committee solely for the purpose of answering any questions regarding their applications. The members withdrew from the meeting after dealing with the questions.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION – COUNCILLOR DAWN JONES

Submitted – the Monitoring Officer's report requesting the committee consider an application for a dispensation for Councillor Dawn Jones to represent the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the Task and Finish Group established by the Care Scrutiny Committee to discuss the implementation of the Gwynedd Autism Plan.

Before considering the application, the Monitoring Officer outlined the context, and noted that the Standards Committee had adopted arrangements that permitted applicants for dispensations to attend Committee meetings solely for the purpose of answering questions from the committee.

The Monitoring Officer detailed the application in question, and noted:-

- Councillor Dawn Jones had declared a prejudicial interest in the matter as individuals with whom she had a close personal connection were receiving the services that were the subject of the scrutiny.
- The application had been submitted in relation to point (dd) of the relevant regulations, namely "*the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise*".
- Although Councillor Dawn Jones worked for Sylfaen Cymunedol, a company that delivered community projects to support young people across Anglesey, Conwy and Gwynedd which inevitably came into contact with young people with autism, having discussed the matter with the member it was not considered that the nature or level of this involvement was affected by the matter in question.
- The role of members in the Task Group was not to advise or provide guidance, but rather to review the field, and although they would not be making decisions, their report would influence the direction of scrutiny in this field.
- The Ombudsman's guidance on the Code of Conduct noted that the Standards Committee would need to balance the public interest in preventing members with prejudicial interests from taking part in decisions, against the public interest in decisions being taken by a reasonably representative group of members of the Council.
- If the Committee wished to approve the application, it should be satisfied that the member had a specific role or expertise in the field that would contribute to the work of the Task Group.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions of the Monitoring Officer.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions of Councillor Dawn Jones.

Councillor Dawn Jones then withdrew from the meeting.

In discussing the application, the Committee considered the following factors:-

- Councillor Dawn Jones had worked with children and young people for 34 years and for 15 years she had been supporting families where a child or young person was waiting for an assessment and a diagnosis of autism.
- She had also attended a number of professional training courses in the field of autism.

The Committee agreed that the member reached the threshold relating to a specific expertise in the field and that a dispensation should be permitted for her to sit on the Task Group. However, it was suggested that she should not be appointed as Chair of the Task Group.

RESOLVED to allow dispensation for Councillor Dawn Jones to represent the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the Task and Finish Group established by the Care Scrutiny Committee to discuss the implementation of the Gwynedd Autism Plan, on the condition that she was not appointed as Chair of the Task Group.

5. APPLICATION FOR DISPENSATION - COUNCILLOR GWYNFOR OWEN

Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer asking the committee to decide on a request for dispensation by Councillor Gwynfor Owen:-

- To represent the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the Task and Finish Group established by the Care Scrutiny Committee to discuss the implementation of the Gwynedd Autism Plan.
- To receive a general dispensation that would allow him to speak and vote on any occasion when this issue arose.

The Monitoring Officer detailed the application in question, and noted:-

- Councillor Gwynfor Owen had declared a prejudicial interest in the matter as an individual with whom he had a close personal connection was receiving the services that were the subject of the scrutiny.
- The application had been submitted in relation to points (ch),(dd) and (e) of the relevant regulations, namely *"if the nature of the member's interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business"; "if the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise" and "if the business to which the interest relates is to be considered by an overview and scrutiny committee of the relevant authority and the member's interest is not a pecuniary interest"*.
- The role of members in the Task Group was not to advise or provide guidance, but rather to review the field, and although they would not be making decisions, their report would influence the direction of scrutiny in this field.
- The Ombudsman's guidance on the Code of Conduct noted that the Standards Committee would need to balance the public interest in preventing members with prejudicial interests from taking part in decisions against the public interest in decisions being taken by a reasonably representative group of members of the Council.
- If the Committee wished to approve the application, it should be satisfied that the member had a specific role or expertise in the field that would contribute to the work of the Task Group.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions of the Monitoring Officer.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions of Councillor Gwynfor Owen.

Councillor Gwynfor Owen then withdrew from the meeting.

In discussing the application for a dispensation to sit on the Task Group, the Committee considered the following factors:-

- Councillor Gwynfor Owen had experience of involvement in the field of autism beyond family experience, as he had dealt with a number of parents of children with autism in his ward, and was also Chair of the Governors of Ysgol Hafod Lon which had a high proportion of children who had received a diagnosis of autism.
- He had also attended courses on autism for parents and had attended meetings related to autism.

The Committee agreed that the member reached the threshold relating to a specific expertise in the field and that a dispensation should be permitted for him to sit on the Task Group. However, it was suggested that he should not be appointed as Chair of the Task Group.

In discussing the application for a general dispensation to speak and vote on any occasion when the issue arose, members expressed the view that the current application was far too open-ended to approve as there was insufficient information regarding the period of the

dispensation and the context in which the matter could arise. Therefore, it was not considered that the application reached the threshold for approving a dispensation.

RESOLVED

- (1) To allow dispensation for Councillor Gwynfor Owen to represent the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on the Task and Finish Group established by the Care Scrutiny Committee to discuss the implementation of the Gwynedd Autism Plan, on the condition that he was not appointed as Chair of the Task Group.**
- (2) To refuse dispensation for Councillor Gwynfor Owen to speak and vote on any occasion when this issue arose as there was not enough information regarding the application to reach an appropriate conclusion.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11:40am.