

**Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on
09 February 2023 via Zoom**

Present

Julia Hughes – JH (Chair)
Sally Ellis – SE (Deputy Chair)
Gareth Pritchard – GP
Cllr Marion Bateman, Flintshire County Council
Cllr John Brynmor Hughes, Gwynedd Council

Matt Georgiou – MG (Deputy Monitoring Officer/Clerk)
Lisa Allington – LJA (Member Liaison Officer)

Apologies

Gill Murgatroyd – GM

Absent

Meeting opened at 10:00

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were offered and accepted for Gill Murgatroyd. All other Members were present.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

2.1 None.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 None.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Paragraph 5.2 of the previous minutes was referred to, relating to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee meeting with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the FRA, the Audit Committee and the Executive Panel.

- 5.2 This meeting took place and the matters discussed were: the Penn Review, Independent Members' visits to observe Authority meetings, Member Attendance and the Standards Committee Annual Report.
- 5.3 It was agreed that a further meeting of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs would take place in order to discuss the draft Standards Committee Annual Report, once it had been approved by the Committee.
- 5.4 With regards to paragraph 11.10/iv 'clarify the position in terms of remuneration for observations at meetings', it was confirmed that remuneration would be paid to Independent Members for their time observing meetings.
- 5.5 **RESOLVED to:**
i) arrange a further meeting between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee and the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of all Authority meetings, prior to the Full Authority meeting on 17 April.

6 SCHEDULE FOR REVIEWING CODES AND PROTOCOLS WITHIN THE AUTHORITY'S CONSTITUTION

- 6.1 A paper was presented to Members by the Deputy Clerk which recommended that Members agree a programme for reviewing all the protocols of the constitution, that fall within the remit of the Standards Committee (the Committee), during the term of this North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).
- 6.2 The Deputy Clerk clarified that the whilst the Gifts Policy remained a matter for the Committee, the Whistleblowing Policy now falls within the remit of the Audit Committee.
- 6.3 It was noted that some work had arisen from the Penn review regarding the value of gifts for which members need to make a declaration. This work involved agreeing a uniform value across all relevant authorities in Wales which would form part of all respective codes of conduct.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED to:**
i) adopt the proposed timetable for reviewing codes and protocols.

7 FEEDBACK BY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS ON MEMBER'S OBSERVATIONS OF AUTHORITY MEETINGS (VERBAL)

- 7.1 Within the previous meeting, it had been agreed that the Committee would decide which Members would observe which meetings. As Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Authority had not previously been informed about the proposed, observations had not yet commenced.

- 7.2 Some Members had informally observed recordings of meetings; however, as the agreed format for observations had not been used, feedback was not given to the Committee.
- 7.3 Members felt that observations were more effective when carried out as the meetings were held, rather than reviewing the webcast, and it was agreed that future observations would take place by attending the meetings rather than watching recordings of them.
- 7.4 It was agreed that GM would observe Audit Committee meetings, SE would observe Executive Panel meetings and GP would observe Full Authority meetings, using the official observation form provided. These observations would take place before January 2024.
- 7.5 It was further agreed that, should any of the three Independent Members be unable to observe their allocated meeting, they advise JH and she would attend in their stead.
- 7.6 **RESOLVED to**
i) attend and observe Authority meeting, as allocated in paragraph 7.4.
- 8 **REPORT BY THE DEPUTY CLERK ON COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW) RELATING TO MEMBERS OF FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES IN WALES (VERBAL)**
- 8.1 The Deputy Clerk confirmed that he had reviewed the Annual Reports produced by the PSOW from the 2006/7 report to date and there had been no investigations in respect of breaches of the Code of Conduct of Fire Authority Members during that time.
- 8.2 Two complaints had been received by the PSOW in 2013/14 and one in 2020/21, but these had not been investigated.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED to:**
i) add the above information to the Draft Annual Report (MG)
- 9 **REAPPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE (VERBAL)**
- 9.1 The Independent membership of the Committee was reviewed regularly by the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, and it was noted that the terms of both GP and GM were due to end in August 2023. The regulations allow an independent member to serve a further term as a committee member without the need to advertise and re-recruit.

- 9.2 **RESOLVED to:**
i) recommend that GP and GM be reappointed, should they confirm they are willing and able to serve a further term.

10 **MEMBER ATTENDANCE AT AUTHORITY MEETINGS**

- 10.1 The Deputy Clerk presented a paper which was intended to consider and address any poor attendance at meetings of the Authority.
- 10.2 It was noted that there were currently some low attendance rates but, as there had been relatively few meetings to date, this was not yet an accurate indicator of trends.
- 10.3 One Member noted that the current format of holding meetings online was preferred by them, and felt that this had served to increase attendance by Members.
- 10.4 **RESOLVED to:**
i) consider the rates of attendance at meetings of this Authority since June 2022; and
(ii) write to constituent authorities and any members of the Authority where attendance is below 50% (MG)

11 **PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES – OUR FINDINGS PUBLICATION (VERBAL)**

- 11.1 The Deputy Clerk informed Members that there had been technical issues with the 'Our Findings' publication and as such, the report usually supplied was unavailable.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to:**
i) include the data for this period within the next report at the meeting of 13 October 2023.

12 **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FORUM FOR CHAIRS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN WALES**

- 12.1 The Deputy Clerk presented a paper on the Terms of Reference for the National Standards Forum for Chairs of Standards Committees in Wales, the purpose of which was to receive and note the Terms of Reference for the National Forum for Standards Committees in Wales.
- 12.2 The Chair highlighted the importance of ensuring that anyone deputising at this forum should be thoroughly briefed.

- 12.3 **RESOLVED to:**
i) agree the draft Terms of Reference; and
ii) approve the proposed arrangements to support the National Forum.

13 FEEDBACK ON THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FORUM FOR CHAIRS OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN WALES (VERBAL)

13.1 The first meeting of the National Forum was held on 27 January 2023. Clive Wolfendale, Chair of Conwy Borough Council Standards Committee had been appointed as Chair of the Forum for a term of two years and Jason Bartlett, Chair of Cardiff Standards and Ethics Committee had been appointed as Deputy Chair.

13.2 Feedback on this first meeting was given to Members by the Chair who explained that these meetings were to be used as a forum to discuss matters of note, but did not have power to make decisions.

13.3 It was agreed that the minutes from this meeting would be circulated to members of the Committee once they were available.

13.4 The next meeting of the Forum would take place in June/July 2023.

14.0 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE FOR 2022/23

14.1 The draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee for 2022/23 was presented by the Deputy Clerk for Members' comments and consideration.

14.2 It was noted that it was no longer only a matter of good corporate governance for the Standards Committee to provide the Authority with an annual report on its activities during each financial year, but a statutory requirement.

14.3 It was further noted that the next Authority meeting would take place on 17 April, not 14 March as indicated at paragraph 4(i) of the report.

14.4 One Member asked for it to be noted within the report that spending had been consistent with previous years, although this may increase slightly due to observation of meetings. An exact figure would be inserted into the report when it was presented to the Full Authority.

14.5 It was agreed that the updated draft would be circulated to all members of the Committee for approval, and in the absence of any comments, the updated draft report would be taken as approved.

- 14.6 **RESOLVED to:**
i) consider the attached draft report and suggest amendments as necessary, noting that the final version will be presented to the FRA meeting on 17 April 2023, and a summary of the matters considered and discussed at the meeting of the 09 February 2023 should be added.

15 FORWARD WORK PLAN

15.1 The Deputy Clerk introduced the Forward Work Plan (FWP) to Members.

15.2 It was agreed that the specific protocols of the Committee would be added to the FWP.

- 15.3 **RESOLVED to:**
i) move forward with the FWP, with the above amendment.

16 URGENT MATTERS

16.1 There were no urgent matters for discussion.

16.2 **There were no resolutions for this item.**

Next meeting to be held on 13 October 2023

Meeting closed at 11:35