

**Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on  
14 October 2022 via Zoom**

**Present**

Julia Hughes – JH (Chair)  
Sally Ellis – SE (Deputy Chair)  
Gill Murgatroyd – GM  
Gareth Pritchard – GP

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

**Apologies**

Cllr John Brynmor Hughes, Gwynedd Council

**Absent**

Cllr Marion Bateman, Flintshire County Council

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**1 APOLOGIES**

1.1 Apologies were offered and accepted for Cllr John Brynmor Hughes. Cllr Marion Bateman was not in attendance.

**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 10 February 2022 were approved as a correct record.

**5 MATTERS ARISING**

5.1 Paragraph 7.5 - the 50% minimum attendance requirement had been included in the Annual Report and in terms of reminding Local Authorities about the expectation, an email had been sent to all Heads of Democratic Services. It was acknowledged that it would have been better to have done this sooner and apologies were given for this.

5.2 With regards to paragraph 8.2 - having considered the issues raised in the document, it was agreed to make amendments to the

presentation of the document and thereafter share it with the FRA Chairs and all members following the local authority elections. It was also suggested going forward that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee start meeting with the Chairs of FRA and its Committees to develop a rapport - this had not yet been actioned but it was acknowledged that this did need progressing. It was agreed to discuss this further under Agenda Item 11.

- 5.3 In terms of item 11.5(iii) the Clerk had a number of meetings regarding WG's implementation of matters arising from the Penn review, and had made this clear during those discussions. There could also be a written response to the formal consultation by WG.
- 5.4 Paragraph 7.4 - that failure to attend any meetings within a three-month period should result in a warning letter being sent to the Councillor - was discussed. It was agreed that this should be re-worded to read 'Any Councillor whose attendance dropped below the minimum threshold of 50% attendance at any meeting within a three-month period should receive a warning letter, along with informing the Head of Democratic Service for the relevant authority. However, any known personal circumstances or medical issues should be considered and discretion applied to whether a letter was appropriate in the circumstances.
- 5.5 It was clarified that this resolution covered all meetings of any committee, as well as the full Fire Authority meeting. However, as Independent Members were not paid a salary if they did not attend a meeting, the Standards Committee itself was excluded from this resolution.
- 5.6 One member queried if there was an existing mechanism to remove an Independent Member whose attendance had become a concern and responded that there was not. It was noted that this could not be put in place by this Committee as the term of Independent Members was a statutory matter.
- 5.7 **Resolved to:**  
**i) amend the minutes from the meeting of 10 February 2022 as stated above.**

## **6 FEEDBACK ON THE MEMBERS' INDUCTION IN JUNE 2022 (VERBAL)**

- 6.1 An Induction Day had taken place at Rhyl Fire Station in June 2022 whereby all Principal Officers had attended and given an overview of their areas of responsibility (references). A presentation had also been given by the Clerk on governance issues. The Deputy Clerk felt that it

had been a very effective Induction and that it gave a good insight into the operational side of the Fire Service.

6.2 A second Induction Day had then taken place on 06 October 2022 as a 'mop-up' session to allow members who had been unable to attend the June meeting to receive the same Induction. It was noted that six Councillors had not attended either date.

6.3 Those members of the Standards Committee who had attended the June induction had found the experience extremely valuable, as it had allowed them to gain an insight into how the Service worked and to be able to meet key personnel.

6.4 Confirmation had been received by the Clerk that all Fire Authority Members had completed their Code of Conduct training with their respective Councils.

6.5 It was suggested that these Induction Sessions be recorded in the future. This recording could then be viewed by Members as and when required.

6.6 **RESOLVED to:**

**i) check if any plans were in place to organise a further Induction Day to cover those six Councillors who had not attended either date (LJA)**

## **7 UPDATE ON THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL STANDARDS FORUM**

7.1 This item related to a recommendation from the Penn Review and it was confirmed that this had been progressed, and that the Welsh Local Government Authority (WLGA) had agreed to act as Secretariat at the meetings. The membership would consist of Chairs of Standards Committees, or Vice Chairs as substitutes, and Terms of Reference had been circulated to Monitoring Officers following a recent Monitoring Officer Group meeting.

7.2 **RESOLVED to**

**i) welcome the support for a National Standards Forum**

**ii) provide update on this item at the next meeting, specifically with regards to Terms of Reference (MG)**

**iii) circulate feedback from meetings of the forum to Independent members of the Standards Committee following those meetings (MG)**

## **8 ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 (VERBAL)**

8.1 A brief overview of the report was given.

- 8.2 It was asked what was expected by this Committee with regards to these matters, as there was a very low level of activity in respect of members of the Fire Authorities, and the Deputy Monitoring Officer MG responded that, as the Standards Committee, an awareness of the content of this report was relevant.
- 8.3 It was confirmed that any matters that related to the Fire Authority would be highlighted in future reports.
- 8.4 Any issues specifically relating to Members of the Fire Authority, and behaviour that impacted the Fire Authority directly, would only be notified to the Standards Committee if the Ombudsman felt that it was appropriate to do so.

- 8.3 **RESOLVED to:**  
**i) check whether the Ombudsman would be advised if a Councillor was also a Member of a Fire Authority when complaints were made, and circulate the response to the Committee once clarified (MG)**

## 9 **PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

- 9.1 The written report was discussed in brief and the statistics highlighted. It was noted that 20% of those matters investigated had been referred either to the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW), or to Standards Committees; 11 cases to Standards Committees and 9 cases to the APW, the highest since 2012/13.
- 9.2 A Member asked whether the increase may be related to a lack of appropriate training on the Code of Conduct. It was responded that it was felt that this was not the case, and that Councillors should have received, or been offered, training on the Code by their relevant Local Authority and be fully aware of the expectations that accompanied their role and obligations under the Code.

- 9.3 **RESOLVED to:**  
**i) Note the report**  
**ii) that the Deputy Clerk look for examples of complaints that relate to members of Fire Authorities to report to the Committee (MG)**

## 10 **PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES – OUR FINDINGS PUBLICATION**

- 10.1 It was felt that this report was far more useful to Members of the Standards Committee than the Quarterly Casebooks had been. There was also a tool on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) website which allowed members of the public to search for specific cases.

- 10.2 The report consisted of themes that the Deputy Clerk had felt were key and relevant to the Committee.
- 10.3 It was discussed whether these findings should be circulated to the wider membership of the Fire Authority, along with the links to the PSOW website.
- 10.4 The Deputy Clerk was thanked for compiling such a comprehensive document and that the summarisation of themes was very helpful.
- 10.5 **RESOLVED to:**  
**i) that the Deputy Clerk arrange for a communication to be sent to all Members of the Authority, setting out the themes identified in this report, together with a link to 'Our Findings', so that members can access the summary of cases for their information.**

## 11 FORWARD WORK PLAN

- 11.1 An in-depth discussion was held with regards to the content of the Forward Work Plan.
- 11.2 In accordance with the plan, the next meeting would take place in February/March 2023. It was unknown if there would be a meeting of the National Standards Forum prior to that meeting. It was stressed to those present that this plan must reflect the wishes of the Committee, and so anything that they felt to be superfluous should be removed.
- 11.3 The importance of: feedback to the Fire Authority on observations of meetings that had taken place; other feedback; a reference to Members' attendance; and contact with other Standards Committees was stressed.
- 11.4 The format of the meetings that were planned between the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Standards Committee, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Executive Panel and Audit Committees was discussed. It was agreed that one meeting to include all Chairs and Deputy Chairs would be appropriate, and attendance by the Deputy Clerk and Members' Liaison Officer would be required. This meeting should take place in November, if possible.
- 11.5 It was suggested that during this meeting, it be proposed that the Independent Members of the Standards Committee observe one full cycle of meetings of the Full Authority, the Executive Panel and the Audit Committee.

- 11.6 Clarity was sought on whether remuneration was applicable for the observation of meetings.
- 11.7 In order to keep the cost down with regards to remuneration, if this were applicable, it was agreed that only one Independent Member of the Standards Committee would observe each meeting, and that who was to observe which meeting would be established following the meeting of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs in November.
- 11.8 It was discussed whether the FRA meeting on 17 October should be observed, as this would be prior to having the conversation with the Chairs. It was agreed that the recording of the meeting could be observed following approval of the Chairs.
- 11.9 The policies that had previously been reviewed were - Members and Employees Gifts and Hospitality Protocol; Member Employee Relations Policy; Social Media Policy; Complaints Procedure in respect of Councillors; Whistleblowing Policy. It was agreed that these policies be built into the Forward Work Plan in line with when they were previously reviewed (last to be reviewed to be reviewed first etc.) subject to the Deputy Clerk clarifying whether the Gifts and Hospitality protocol was now within the remit of Audit Committee.
- 11.10 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) add feedback from the National Standards Forum to the Forward Work Plan (MG)**
  - ii) add 'Review of the Draft Annual Report' to the Forward Work Plan for February/March (MG)**
  - iii) arrange a meeting for the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee to meet all Chairs and Deputy Chairs of committees at the same time (MG/LJA)**
  - iv) clarify the position in terms of remuneration for observations at meetings (MG)**
  - v) give a summary of feedback on the observations of authority meetings by Independent Members at the Spring meeting of the Standards Committee (All)**
  - vi) build the review of policies/procedures into the Forward Work Plan (MG)**

## 12 **URGENT MATTERS**

- 12.1 There were no urgent matters to be raised.
- 12.2 **There were no resolutions relating to this item.**
- 13 The date of the next meeting was yet to be confirmed, but would take

Place in February/March. It was agreed that the September/October 2023 date would also be set at the earliest.

- 13.1 **RESOLVED to:**
  - i) set dates for February/March and October 2023 meetings and circulate to Members (MG/LJA)**
- 14.0 Members were thanked for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

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