

**Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on
30 September 2021 via Zoom**

Present

Julia Hughes (Chair)

Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair)

Gill Murgatroyd

Gareth Pritchard

Cllr Owen Thomas, Flintshire County Council

Cllr Michael Dixon, Wrexham County Borough Council

Matt Georgiou, deputising for Gareth Owens

Alwen Davies, Member Liaison Officer

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

2.1 Julia Hughes declared she had been involved in a Denbighshire County Council case reported in the PSOW casebook.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 None.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

7 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

7.1 Members received an update about the attendance of councillors at FRA meetings. A report provided to the Committee in November 2019 had been attached as an aide memoire.

7.2 It was noted that generally the attendance at FRA meetings had improved since the Standards Committee had been overseeing the matter. However, there were a few Members who had attended under 50% of meetings since November 2020.

7.3 It was noted that Members receive an annual remuneration and there was a general feeling of unfairness that those Members who had a low level of attendance were entitled to the same amount as those Members that had a high level of attendance.

7.4 Having discussed the matter at length and recognising that there would be a new Authority in place by June due to the local authority elections being held in May 2022, it was **RESOLVED that Matt Georgiou and Gareth Owens write to local authorities to:**

- **ascertain views on increasing minimum expectation of attendance at FRA meetings to a minimum of 50% with effect from June 2022;**
- **include in the letter anonymised information about Members' attendance and make reference to the fact that attendance is generally good and that hopefully virtual meetings will help increase the attendance.**

8 REAPPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

8.1 Members were informed that Julia Hughes and Sally Ellis' terms of office were due to end on 31 December. The FRA at its meeting in September 2021 had approved the re-appointment of both as independent members for a second term of four years from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025.

8.2 It was noted that succession planning should be added to the Committee's forward work plan in order to ensure that experienced members' terms of office would not all come to an end at once.

8.3 **RESOLVED to note the information.**

9 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' OBSERVATIONS OF FRA MEETINGS

9.1 It was noted that all independent members had observed at least one meeting of the FRA. It was agreed that the Deputy Clerk collate all feedback into one document for the Chair to consider general themes for implementation/discussion at the next meeting. In addition, the terms of reference for the Committees would be circulated.

9.2 **RESOLVED to discuss this matter at the next meeting.**

10 JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE

10.1 The Deputy Clerk confirmed that Gareth Owens had tried to contact the national park authority to discuss the concept of a joint standards committee, however, there had been no response to date. Members agreed that there may be more pressure to move forward with this as a result of constituency reviews.

- 10.2 **RESOLVED to keep a watching brief and add it to the forward work programme.**
- 11 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW) CASEBOOK ISSUE 24
- 11.1 The report provided Members with an overview of the latest edition (issue 24) of the PSOW's casebook.
- 11.2 Members were of the view that in order to avoid such complaints, it was essential to have the best training available in order to mitigate risk as much as possible.
- 11.3 **RESOLVED to note the information provided and members were satisfied that no action needed to be taken at North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to avoid similar complaints.**
- 12 REVIEW OF THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK
- 12.1 The report to the Committee provided information on the Review of the Ethical Standards Framework in Wales.
- 12.2 The Deputy Clerk explained the background to the framework and it was noted that the current Ethical Standards Framework was created by the Local Government Act 2000. The legislation has been amended slightly in the interim but has not been fundamentally reviewed since its inception. The Welsh Government had appointed Richard Penn to review the entire framework and make recommendations and his report has now been submitted. Once the report has been considered, WG will pass any legislation needed in response to the review before the end of this local government term.
- 12.3 **RESOLVED to note the report and await the outcome of the review.**
- 13 PAN WALES STANDARDS CONFERENCE
- 13.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the report which explain the purpose of, and the preparations for, the conference and to seek any ideas for useful topics of discussion for the conference.
- 13.2 It was noted that every two years a standards conference for all Standards Committees is held in order to share good practice and deliver training. It is arranged regionally and the next conference is to be arranged by the North Wales region.
- 13.3 It was noted that the review of the Ethical Standards Framework is of such importance that it will form the basis for all/most discussion at the conference.

13.4 The Chair commented that she had previously attended a similar conference and would encourage all members to attend. As it is to be held online it should be easier for more people to be invited.

13.5 **RESOLVED to note the preparations for the conference.**

14 FORWARD WORK PLAN

14.1 It had been agreed that the Committee would have a forward work plan and it was suggested that a plan be in place for at least three meetings ahead. Therefore, Members agreed the following forward work plan for the Committee:

10 February 2022

Training – when does the Code of Conduct apply?

Ethical Standards Framework - Review Outcomes

Feedback on attendance at meetings

Debrief of the 2021 Standards Forum (if taking place)

Debrief of the Pan Wales Standards Conference

Annual Report and casebook of the PSOW

Review of constitution – feedback from the review group

The following meetings to look at starting to review the schedule of policies and keep in mind succession planning of independent members.

Also need to maintain a watching brief of the following issues

Succession planning for the Standards Committee

Joint Standards Committee

14.2 **RESOLVED to note the forward work plan.**

15 URGENT MATTERS

15.1 No urgent matters to be considered.