

**Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on  
5 April 2024 via Zoom**

**Present**

Julia Hughes (Chair)	JH	Independent Member
Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair)	SE	Independent Member
Gareth Pritchard	GP	Independent Member
Gill Murgatroyd	GM	Independent Member
Gareth Owens	GO	Monitoring Officer/Clerk
Matthew Powell	MP	Deputy Monitoring Officer/Clerk
Lisa Allington	LJA	Executive Assistant/Member Liaison

**Apologies**

Cllr John Brynmor Hughes	JBM	Gwynedd Council
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**Absent**

Cllr Marion Bateman	MB	Flintshire County Council
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Meeting opened at 14:30.

**1 APOLOGIES**

- 1.1 Apologies were offered and accepted for Cllr John Brynmor Hughes. It was noted that Cllr Marion Bateman was absent without apology.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS**

- 3.1 It was requested that a discussion take place under urgent matters in relation to an issue with a member of staff at the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales' Office.
- 3.2 It was further noted that the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) would be addressing the Committee under AOB.

**4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

- 4.1 It was noted that at Item 7, SE had drawn the protected characteristics to the attention of those present and that this had not been noted in the minutes.
- 4.2 It was further noted that there was a lack of consistency in the title of the Code of Conduct. It was agreed that it should be referred to in the future as the Members' Code of Conduct.

- 4.3 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024 were approved as an accurate record, pending the above amendments.

## **5 MATTERS ARISING**

- 5.1 Members of the Committee confirmed that they had received the minutes from the National Standards Forum for Chairs of Standards Committees.
- 5.2 The Clerk confirmed that the dates of future meetings had been provided to Wrexham Members.
- 5.3 Members were advised that the Gifts and Hospitality Policy would be published on the website at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.4 It was noted that training was not being delivered at this meeting due to it being an extraordinary meeting; however, training on disrepute would be delivered at the next meeting.

## **6 STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24**

- 6.1 The Clerk presented the paper on the Standards Committee Annual Report which aimed to provide Members with the detail required to approve the annual report for submission to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).
- 6.2 It was noted that the end of term dates would require insertion prior to approval.
- 6.3 A Member queried a line at the bottom of page 10 of the pack which referenced the financial year. The Clerk confirmed that the report related to the municipal year and so this should be amended, along with the bullet point at the bottom of page 11 of the pack.
- 6.4 It was noted that with regards to the forward work plan, the very last sentence of the second paragraph required amendment to the wording in order to make it relevant to this year.
- 6.5 Under the item of issues discussed, Members felt that reference should be made to follow up enquiries being carried out for Members whose attendance had previously dropped below 50%, and that mitigating circumstances were taken into account.
- 6.5 Members asked that the final point on page 11 of the pack be changed to reflect a more positive stance, i.e. positive examples of full compliance of adherence to the code of conduct could be seen.

- 6.6 It was asked if any further meetings with the Chair of the Authority were planned, and agreed that a meeting of the Chairs of all the Committees would be arranged in the near future.
- 6.7 A Member asked that attendance of the Independent Members at the Culture Seminar be included within the report in order to demonstrate commitment to their ongoing training.
- 6.8 With regards to 'issues discussed' on page 11 of the pack, it was noted that when contacting Members in writing for poor attendance, a copy of the letter was also sent to the Head of Democratic Service within their constituent authority. It was agreed that this should be included in the report.
- 6.9 It was noted that on page 12 with regards to the Forward Work Programme, the first sentence should refer to the Forward Work Programme, not the Forward Works Programme. The date of the elections was also noted as being incorrect and should read 2027.
- 6.10 In relation to Appendix 06ii, whereby paragraph 18 stated that it was good practice for Standards Committees to share their Annual Reports with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, Members asked that this year's report be shared with her.
- 6.11 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) approve the annual report for submission to the Authority, pending the above amendments.

## **7 ROLLING REVIEW OF THE MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT**

- 7.1 The Clerk presented the paper on the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code) which was being provided to Members to ensure that it remain pertinent and up to date, especially in light of recommendations made within the Penn Review.
- 7.2 It was noted that there had been two points picked up at the last meeting. No other councils in Wales has done anything with regards to the Penn Review.
- 7.3 Members were advised that safeguarding, to some extent, was dependent on the operation of the safeguarding panels and boards and their engagement and involvement with the Monitoring Officer.
- 7.4 It was asked if there would be an automatic check carried out in terms of the different roles of a Councillor being investigated, and that those bodies would then be notified. The Clerk confirmed that this would be considered in the light of the allegations. However, there was less

contact with the public in terms of Authority Members and so the risk would be far less, in relation to their work within the ward.

- 7.5 It was noted that the need for an interim suspension order had been flagged as part of the Penn review and would require legislation, which wouldn't take place until at least 2026.
- 7.6 It was asked if the wording for paragraph 4a could be amended to include pregnancy and maternity as one of the ten protected characteristics.
- 7.7 It was further requested that paragraph 4a be amended to say gender reassignment rather than realignment, in order to align with the Act.
- 7.8 In relation to voluntary reporting of offences, it was noted that Members were only being asked to report to the PSOW. It was agreed that this be reworded to include the Monitoring Officer.
- 7.9 Members felt that the proposed changes appeared to be clear improvements and as such, it was agreed that they be accepted.
- 7.10 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) Review the wording of the Members' Code of Conduct to ensure it remains up to date and pertinent; and
  - ii) Recommend that the Authority should voluntarily adopt changes to the Code which have been recommended by the Penn Review, pending the above amendments.

## 8 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE

- 8.1 The Clerk presented the paper on Members' attendance in order for the Committee to consider and address any poor attendance at meetings of the Authority.
- 8.2 It was noted that there was one Member currently at a percentage attendance of below 50%. However, this was due to a clash of meetings with her constituent authority and she planned to address this.
- 8.3 It was asked that a column indicating whether attendance had improved or declined and any mitigating circumstances be included in future reports.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the rates of attendance at meetings of this Authority since October 2023; and

- ii) ask the Clerk to contact that Member whose attendance is below 50% and discuss a way forward.

## **9 ROLLING REVIEWS OF THE PROTOCOL ON MEMBER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS**

9.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the paper in relation to the rolling review of the protocol on Member/Employee relations (the Protocol), which was being reviewed in order to consider amendments to ensure that it expressly applies to other categories of worker, as well as employees.

9.2 It was asked that a definition of 'staff' be included in section 1.2 of the protocol.

9.3 It was noted that there had been no feedback from senior managers with regards to difficulties implementing the protocol.

### **9.4 RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the proposed amendments to the Protocol and recommend that the Authority formally adopts the Protocol, pending the further amendments requested in this meeting.

## **10 PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES 'OUR FINDINGS'**

10.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales 'Our Findings' paper which aimed to report on recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) to see if there were any messages that need to be shared with Members of the Authority.

10.2 Members were advised that the reporting period referred to in paragraph 8 of the report should read 30 September 2023 to 20 March 2024.

### **10.3 RESOLVED to:**

- i) Note that there were no trends or messages in the Our Findings report which may be of benefit to councillors on the Authority;

## **11 URGENT MATTERS**

11.1 Members were advised that there had been an issue relating to a member of staff at the PSOW. It had been discovered that a Team Leader for the Investigations Team had been using various pseudonyms to post biased comments on blogs on the internet. This had raised questions about the decisions that had been taken by her.

- 11.2 A meeting had been arranged with all monitoring officers and the PSOW on 17 April, during which the decision to investigate would be discussed.
- 11.3 The CFO was welcomed to the meeting and she updated Members on the situation in regards to culture within the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service). It was confirmed that Cllr Sharon Doleman had been appointed as the new Member EDI Champion.
- 11.4 The CFO advised that it had also been confirmed that the new Minister for Fire in Wales would be Julie James.
- 11.5 It had been proposed by the Service, alongside MAWWFRS, that an independent culture review be conducted of both services and this was being progressed. The expectation was that the contract would be let within the next month with the review being conducted over a two-month period. This would then be brought to the Authority at their October meeting. The review would be used as an opportunity to identify any trends indicating if there were areas that required further development with regards to culture.
- 11.6 One Member asked what impact the adverse press speculation had had on staff, and it was responded that some staff were experiencing some poor behaviours from members of the public. Support mechanisms had been put in place for staff, should they feel they needed to take advantage of that.
- 11.7 Members offered their support and requested that they be kept up to date with future developments.

Next meeting 2 October 2024 at 10:00.

Meeting closed at 16:32