
NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM

Friday, 15th April, 2011 at 10.00 am
Bodlondeb, Conwy

PRESENT:	Howie Roberts	Chair - Conwy – In the Chair
	Barry Davies	Monitoring Officer - Flintshire
	Iwan Davies	Monitoring Officer - Conwy
	Rob Dawson	Chair - Wrexham
	Gwilym Ellis Evans	Vice-Chairman - Gwynedd
	Sion Hughes	Propriety Officer - Gwynedd
	Lisa Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Robyn Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Isle of Anglesey
	Jane Kennedy	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Sue Morris	Vice-Chairman - Isle of Anglesey
	John Pollard	Chair - Gwynedd
	Geraint F. Roberts	Vice-Chairman - Denbighshire
	Merfyn Roberts	Chair - Flintshire
	Kevin Sibbons	Vice-Chairman - Flintshire
	Paul Sturges	Vice-Chair - Conwy
	Gary Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Wrexham
Officers:	Sian Harland	Committee Services Officer

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Lynn Ball (Monitoring Officer – Isle of Anglesey), Clive Halliday (Chair – Denbighshire), Jeff Cotterell (Chairman – Isle of Anglesey), Ceri Nash (Vice-Chair – Wrexham), Trevor Coxon (Monitoring Officer – Wrexham) and Dilys Phillips (Monitoring Officer – Gwynedd).

2. **WELCOME FROM CHAIRMAN OF CONWY STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of Conwy Standards Committee welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees.

It was noted that every North Wales Local Authority was represented which demonstrated that the concept of a North Wales Standards Committee Forum was a good idea.

3. **INTRODUCTION BY VICE-CHAIRMAN OF CONWY STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Vice-Chairman of Conwy informed those present that he hoped a North Wales Standards Committee Forum could provide North Wales with a voice for national events and create efficiencies by sharing ideas/resources.

The format of the discussion would be informal and those present were invited to voice their thoughts on the way forward and what they thought could be achieved.

4. **THE WAY FORWARD**

All those present discussed various issues relating to Standards Committees in detail.

It was apparent that Standards Committees had similar issues and the following main points were raised:-

Setting up Workshops

- North Wales Workshops on various issues could be held similar to those held at the Standards Wales Conference

Establishing a Consistency of Approach

- It was apparent that a consistency of approach could be discussed in relation to dispensations for Councillors, and whether Independent Members should be invited to stay for exempt reports

Identifying Areas of Work for Standards

- Conwy had scheduled meetings on a bi-monthly basis and would be introducing a Forward Work Programme for each meeting for the whole year. Items for discussion would include the Ombudsman's Annual Report, Adjudication Panel for Wales Annual Report, Preparing for Training, Review of Gifts and Hospitality Register, Annual Review of Procedures, Annual Review of the Council's Constitution, Complaints not Pursued by the Ombudsman, Annual Review of Maladministration Complaints made against the Council, Standards Refresher Workshops for the Committee, Preparation for Code of Conduct Training
- Flintshire agreed that it was important to meet regularly in order for the Standards Committee Members to build a good working relationship in preparation for Standards Hearings
- Flintshire met quarterly and had a set workload, and were currently reviewing the Whistleblowing Policy

Training

- Every Local Authority provided training for County and Community Councillors but it was clear that the common problem was the need to attract those Councillors who required training
- Conwy had delivered Train the Trainer sessions on the Code of Conduct for Town and Community Clerks. Resources had been provided in paper and electronic formats to enable them to deliver training to their own Councillors
- A common framework approach across North Wales for the delivery of Code of Conduct training could be discussed at future Forums including shared resources
- Isle of Anglesey had delivered a number of training sessions for Councillors on the concept of being a 'Modern Councillor' and built in the need for respect for each other as well as officers. There had been reluctance for very experienced Members to change their perception of the role of a Councillor

- Conwy were planning on providing refresher training sessions for the Standards Committee, including case studies
- Gwynedd were planning to provide an electronic based training session on their Standards Committee website, which would include a question and answer session

Establishing Best Practice

- By working together Local Authorities could establish best practice guidelines for a variety of issues including dispensations, training and protocols

Working with the Community Councils

- There were concerns that Community Councils were not aware of the significance of the Code of Conduct and the importance of declaring interests
- Flintshire had established a forum with Town and Community Councils which met every six months

Promotion of Standards Committees

- In promoting the Standards Committee Conwy had submitted an article to the Team Brief and a presentation had been made to Staff Council
- The Chair of Denbighshire attended a variety of Council meetings including Scrutiny as an observer
- Conwy were encouraging their Independent Members to attend meetings in order to have a better understanding of democratic process

National Policy Responses and Representations

- Following the outcome of the Adjudication Panel in Cerrigydrudion, guidance was still being awaited from the Ombudsman in relation to whether non-exec Members had to declare a personal and prejudicial interest in an item if there was a conflict between their position as a Local Electoral Division Member and as a decision maker on a Committee; this especially related to Planning Committees
- At present the only way forward on a local level was for Councillors to request Dispensations from the Standards Committees
- The Ombudsman may have difficulty in offering guidance which sought to change the meaning of the Model Code set by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG): the better solution would be for the Model Code to be changed by WAG
- It was noted that the all Wales Monitoring Officer Group was looking at the issue for the whole of Wales
- However, in future a North Wales Standards Committee Forum could, collectively, put pressure on the Ombudsman to provide clear guidance in relation to such issues rather than each Local Authority being a lone voice
- It was further noted that the Forum could provide a collective response on national issues

Member / Member and Member / Officer Protocols

- Conwy had an informal contact process for staff to approach the Chair of Standards Committee to discuss their concerns relating to

the behaviour of a Councillor as a precursor to any formal complaints

- Gwynedd had adopted a Member / Member Protocol which gave guidance on being respectful and how Councillors should treat each other in meetings

Annual North Wales Standards Conference

- Speakers could be invited to an annual North Wales Standards Conference; including the Ombudsman to enable the North Wales Local Authorities to raise issues directly with him

Following discussion it was apparent that there was a great deal of work to be undertaken collectively and it was agreed that a number of sessions were required over the coming months.

It was suggested that the North Wales Fire and Rescue Standards Committee and the Snowdonia National Park Standards Committee be invited to the next meeting.

The above highlighted issues would be discussed in more detail at future meetings.

AGREED-

- (a) **That the main issues highlighted above be discussed in detail at future meetings of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.**
- (b) **That the Standards Committees of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the Snowdonia National Park be invited to attend future meetings.**

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

AGREED-

That the next meeting of the North Wales Standards Committee Forum be held on Friday, 10 June 2011 at 10.00 am.

(The meeting ended at 11.10 am)
