
NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM

Monday, 7 January 2013 at 2.00 pm
Bodlondeb, Conwy

PRESENT:	Howie Roberts (Chair)	Chair - Conwy Standards Committee
	Lynn Ball	Monitoring Officer - Isle of Anglesey
	David Clay (In place of Sam W. Soysa)	Independent Member - Gwynedd Standards Committee
	Trevor Coxon	Monitoring Officer - Wrexham
	Gwilym Ellis Evans	Chair - Gwynedd Standards Committee
	Jane Eyton-Jones	Vice-Chair - North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Standards Committee
	Sion Huws	Propriety Officer - Gwynedd
	Iwan Jones	Monitoring Officer - Snowdonia National Park
	Delyth E. Jones	Monitoring Officer - Conwy
	Islwyn Jones	Vice-Chair - Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee
	Lisa Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Pat Jones	Vice-Chair - Flintshire Standards Committee
	Robyn Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Isle of Anglesey
	Gareth Owens	Monitoring Officer - Flintshire
	Dilys Ann Phillips	Monitoring Officer - Gwynedd
	Rev. Wayne Roberts	Vice-Chair - Denbighshire Standards Committee
	Peter Rowland	Chair - Snowdonia National Park Standards Committee
	Ian Trigger	Chair - Denbighshire Standards Committee
	Gary Williams	Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Michael B. Wilson	Chair - Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee
In attendance:	Sian Harland	Committee Services Officer

57. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Gary Williams (Denbighshire), Ceri Nash (Wrexham), Sam Soysa (Gwynedd), Ceri Williams (Conwy), Rob Dawson (Wrexham) and Sioned Wyn Davies (Wrexham).

58. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum held on 4 October 2012 were submitted for approval.

Gwilym Ellis Evans (Gwynedd) advised that he was in attendance and that Sam Soysa was a representative of Gwynedd and not Wrexham.

RESOLVED-

That, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum held on 4 October 2012 be approved as a correct record.

59. GOVERNANCE AND ETHICAL ADVICE TO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Members were advised that the item had been included on the agenda in order to discuss what provision each Local Authority provided in terms of governance and ethical advice to Town and Community Councils, and how this was communicated and promoted.

The Forum was further advised that the topic would be covered at the Standards Conference 2013.

Wrexham

- Training sessions held centrally and in other areas of the County Borough
- Framework for training was the same guidance as used for County Borough Councillors
- Examples based on Ombudsman's cases were used within the training
- Queries were still received from Town and Community Councils, but this was better than having to deal with an investigation
- Attendance was at 40-50%
- Quarterly meetings had been held with Clerks to Town and Community Councils, but were not well attended
- The knowledge of Clerks in relation to the Code of Conduct was variable

Denbighshire

- Quarterly meetings were held with Town and Community Clerks
- Training had been held for Clerks
- A training roadshow was held with training sessions throughout the County
- There was a 30% attendance rate at meetings
- All training had been positively received
- It was important that lines of communication were kept open between the County and Town and Community Councils

Anglesey

- Very few complaints emanated from Town and Community Councils in relation to the Code of Conduct
- Training sessions were held centrally with the Clerk and Chair of Town and Community Councils, with the understanding that Clerks would cascade the training down to their Councillors

60. **OMBUDSMAN'S REVISED GUIDANCE ON THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

Following the request at the last meeting the Monitoring Officer (Gwynedd), who is also the Chair of ACSeS Wales, provided the following update:-

- The Ombudsman's revised guidance was as a result of the Calver v The Adjudication Panel for Wales High Court case, which had ruled that the Councillor involved had been exercising his Freedom of Expression under the Human Rights Act and had therefore not breached the Code of Conduct as the comments were of a political nature
- Members of the Forum and Monitoring Officers were concerned that the threshold of the revised guidance was set too high, and could give Councillors too much leeway
- Following the above reservations being made to the Ombudsman, he had agreed to review the revised guidance to advise Councillors what was not acceptable behaviour, rather than what was acceptable behaviour
- Monitoring Officers had received a draft copy of the revised guidance, but were concerned it did not go far enough in terms of unacceptable behaviour
- As a way forward a sub-group of ACSeS members were currently producing a form of words for the guidance, which they would discuss with the Ombudsman in March 2013
- It was hoped that the revised guidance would be in place by April 2013

Discussion ensued as follows:-

- Members were advised that it would not change the threshold at which the Ombudsman would investigate a complaint
- It would be a decision of individual Councils to adopt protocol for Local Resolution in relation to complaints, which the Ombudsman would not investigate
- It was noted that the Ombudsman would not pursue an appeal in relation to the Calver case

AGREED-

That the information in relation the Ombudsman's revised guidance be noted.

61. **STANDARDS CONFERENCE 2013**

The draft itinerary for the Standards Conference 2013 was presented to the Forum.

Members were advised of the following changes:-

- The Monitoring Officer (Gwynedd), as the Chair of ACSeS, would open the Conference
- There would be space for 130 attendees

- In order to enable attendees to attend sessions it was agreed that the 2 morning sessions on Town and Community Council Relationships and Promoting Standards Proactively would be repeated in the afternoon
- Conducting Hearings and Sanctions would be facilitated by Denbighshire and Conwy
- Register of Interests would be facilitated by Flintshire and Anglesey
- Issues for Single Purpose Authorities would be facilitated by the Snowdonia National Park

Discussion ensued as follows:-

- Although only certain sessions would be facilitated bilingually, all attendees could contribute in either English or Welsh
- Anglesey had requested that, following the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) criticisms of their Standards Committee, a representative from the WAO and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) be invited to take part for the session; Promoting Standards Proactively
- In relation to the attendance of the Welsh Assembly Members to the Conference, it was suggested that, as there was limited space, the Minister for Local Government and Communities be invited to attend as an observer
- It was suggested that as Conwy were hosting the event, the Chair of the Conwy Standards Committee be invited to give the closing remarks

AGREED-

- (a) That the itinerary for the Standards Conference 2013 be approved, subject to such further amendments as were reasonably required by the North Wales Monitoring Officers.**
- (b) That the Chair for the Conwy Standards Committee give the closing remarks.**
- (c) That the Minister for Local Government and Communities, Carl Sergeant AM, be invited to attend the conference as an observer.**
- (d) That the Wales Audit Office and Welsh Local Government Association be invited to send a representative to participate in the Promoting Standards Proactively Workshop.**

62. **ANY OTHER ITEM**

None.

(The meeting ended at 3.00 pm)
