
FFORWM PWYLLGOR SAFONAU GOGLEDD CYMRU

NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM

17th October 2016 at 11am

Committee Room 1, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Llangefni

PRESENT: Please see attached list of names

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

Michael Wilson, Chair of the Isle of Anglesey County Council's Standards Committee

It was decided that the Chair of the hosting Authority would Chair the meeting on each occasion.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence received.

3. PRESENTATION BY THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

The Chair welcomed Mr Nick Bennett, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

A copy of the Ombudsman's presentation is attached to these Minutes, as Appendix 1.

The Ombudsman explained in relation to Local Resolution that this was something he would welcome as being extended to Town and Community Councils – but said he would not dictate on this. He said this was very much up to each Standards Committee. He also confirmed that One Voice Wales is doing work on this with the Community Councils and said he welcomed this.

In terms of complaints, the Ombudsman explained the number of county council complaints had reduced but the number of town and community council complaints had increased (the situation has swapped between these two since last year). 3 community councils were responsible for about a third of all town and community council complaints – Glyn Neath, Artillery and Holyhead Town Council.

The two stage test continues to be utilised and its aim is to continue to rid any vexatious complaints. However, the Ombudsman's office continues to see a rise in the number of complaints (10% per annum) with the Office taking 4,000 enquiries and 2,000 complaints last year. The Ombudsman says 76% of his resources go into health investigations. Although, he made it clear that where there are issues of

bullying, corruption or abuse of power he takes complaints of the breach of the Code of Conduct for elected members very seriously.

The Ombudsman office's budget is £4m and there are 58 members of staff.

The Ombudsman complimented on the Forum and believed it was a very beneficial thing to have between the North Wales Authorities. He explained he would be happy to meet with the Forum on a more regular basis should this be deemed useful.

4. QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

A copy of the Ombudsman's Questions and Answers is attached to these Minutes, as Appendix 2.

The Chair thanked the Ombudsman for his attendance.

Break: 12-12.10. Ombudsman leaves.

5. FREQUENCY OF FORUM MEETINGS

The Chair raised an issue regarding the frequency of Forum Meetings. The Chair suggested 2 per year would be beneficial. This was considered a good average, particularly in light of the Ombudsman's comments of support for the Forum. It was also mentioned that it is important for useful items to be added to the Agenda; it was noted there was a good turnout for this meeting, probably because the Ombudsman was in attendance. It is important for the agenda to entice people to want to attend. There was also discussion in terms of who should make the arrangements; the host authority to be responsible for the agenda and room arrangements etc.

Resolved: A meeting of the Forum will be held twice per annum, on a rota basis for each authority, with the host authority making the relevant arrangements on each occasion.

The next meeting will be held in March/April 2017 by Denbighshire County Council, and the following meeting in November 2017 by Wrexham County Borough Council.

6. REGISTERS OF INTERESTS

The issue was raised by the Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee in relation to the standard register of interests for its members. It was explained that the software from modgov will not show a welsh option for members to be able to complete their online standard register – what goes online eventually is bilingual, and the member can input his / her details in Welsh or English, but the form is only available in English. Modgov has said it would be willing to update the software in order to allow

a welsh page, but at a cost of £10,000. The question was raised whether the other Authorities were having this problem and whether all Authorities would be willing to contribute toward the cost in rectifying the matter for all, at a fraction of the price.

This was not something which other Authorities had been concerned with and so were unsure whether monies could be promised in order to rectify a problem that they may not actually have.

The modgov system is utilised by the majority of Authorities on the Forum (not Snowdonia National Park), so if this is an issue, it could be a possibility to act together as a Forum to ratify it. But each Authority has entered into its own contract with modgov and so, although likely to be similar, there may be differences in terms of the specification agreed under the contract. Each Authority must therefore check its own contract and then a collective view can be taken. If it is an issue for all, it was agreed that some correspondence from the Forum i.e. all Authorities jointly acting, would be a stronger message.

Resolved: For all Authorities to make the necessary enquiries in terms of their contract with modgov and report back to the Forum so that any steps, if necessary, can be taken collectively rather than as individual Authorities.

7. MEDIATION TRAINING

In light of the Ombudsman's comment that he would be supportive of mediation training although he had no budget to be able to offer financial support for such idea, a question was raised as to whether the Forum members wanted such training, and if so, whether there were any ideas in terms of where to seek financial assistance.

There was some appetite for this but the cost of such training needed to be balanced against the fact that only a few, if any, that may actually need to use it. Perhaps alternative funding channels could be considered.

Resolved: For enquiries to be made for the next meeting of the Forum to be hosted by Denbighshire County Council.

8. NEXT MEETING

In March/April 2017 – to be hosted by Denbighshire County Council

End of meeting 12.45