

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEE  
FORUM HELD IN MEETING ROOM 1, GUILDHALL, WREXHAM ON  
FRIDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2017**

**PRESENT**

Wrexham County Borough Council – Michael Pugh, Neil Benson, Claire Blanchard and Councillor I David Bithell, MBE  
Ceredigion County Council – Eddie Ffoulkes-Jones  
Conwy County Borough Council – Iain Moore  
Denbighshire County Council – Ian Trigger  
Flintshire County Council – Robert Dewey  
Isle of Anglesey County Council – Mike Wilson, Islwyn Jones and Anwen Jones  
Powys County Council – Debby Jones  
Snowdonia National Park Authority – Sharon Warnes

**ALSO PRESENT**

Wrexham County Borough Council, Deputy Monitoring Officer – Sioned Wyn Davies  
Committee Officer – Jane Johnson

**1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

Michael Pugh, Chair of Wrexham County Borough Council's Standards Committee was appointed Chair, in accordance with the decision of the Forum in October, 2016 that the hosting authority chair the meeting.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Iwan Jones (Snowdonia National Park), Helen Rhydderch Roberts (Powys) and Steve Cripps (Ceredigion).

**3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 APRIL 2017**

The minutes of the North Wales Standards Committee Forum held in Ruthin on 10 April 2017 were presented.

Corrections –

Amend the spelling of John Roberts and Sharon Warnes.

Apologies – add Robert Dewey

**RESOLVED – That, subject to the above corrections, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2017 be accepted as a true record.**

#### **4 NEW MEMBER INDUCTION AND TRAINING ON ETHICAL ISSUES**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that the item had been included on the Agenda to enable members in attendance to feedback on how training had been delivered within County Councils and also how the training had been rolled out to Community Councils.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Some based training on the material provided by WLGA whilst others produced their own material.
- The length of sessions varied but it was thought that shorter more focused interactive sessions held attendees interest.
- Separate sessions for new Councillors, more in depth, and refresher sessions for returned Councillors.
- Venues – some held in one location others at different locations.
- Community Councils – in some areas it had proved useful to take the training out to the Communities and in one authority the Standards Committee had scheduled visits to Community Councils.
- Difficulties experienced with online training in some areas due to poor broadband coverage.

#### **5 WLGA - 5 YEARS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Michael Wilson, Chair Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee, provided feedback on a recent regional event '5 Years to Make a Difference' held at the Conwy Business Centre for new Councillors.

Presentations on the day were as follows –

Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government - The shape of things to come: A message from the Welsh Government for new councillors

Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner - 5 years in office but a lifetime's legacy.

Steve Thomas CBE, WLGA Chief Executive - State of the Nation: 5 Years of Challenge and Change for Councils?

Ian Bottrill, Former council leader, researcher and national trainer - Secrets of success: What works for councillors?

Mel Doel, former BBC Wales journalist, national trainer and National Park Authority chair 2016-17 - Social Media: Friend or Foe?

Michael Wilson said it was very disappointing that there had been very few new councillors in attendance at the event.

The Forum then discussed what each Council considered as essential/core training for Councillors and how Member attendance at training sessions was recorded/monitored.

In relation to Code of Conduct training there was an expectation that all Councillors should attend as the first question asked by the Ombudsman, in undertaking an investigation against a Member in relation to a breach of the Code, would be whether the Member had attended training and when had training been offered.

The need for all Councillors to have attended Social Media was emphasised.

## **6 PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH CLAIMS AGAINST MEMBERS**

Michael Wilson, Chair Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee, had requested this item be included on the Agenda to discuss what Councils had in place by way of procedures to deal with Sexual Harassment claims against Members by officers and for information about the level of support provided for victims and perpetrators.

Reference was made to various Member/officer protocols and the Code of Conduct but it was felt that clarification/guidance should be sought from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in relation to the following should a complaint of a serious nature be made against a Member e.g of Sexual Harassment of an officer of the Council. This was based on the assumption that it was not a Police matter.

- What powers did the Ombudsman have to act should such a complaint be received?
- It was understood that a suspension could be imposed by the Adjudication Panel for Wales based on an interim report and recommendation from the Ombudsman. What were the anticipated timescales for such action to be taken?
- Could guidance be provided on practical arrangements for Members accused of such Conduct given their elected status in relation to:
  - i) preventing the Member from representing their electorate
  - ii) carrying out their normal Council duties
  - iii) attending Council premises.
  - iv) conflict which may arise with a Council's duty of care to officers.
  - v) whether pastoral care should be offered to the Member as they would for officers under a duty of care?
- guidance in relation to a complaint against an Executive Member rather than an ordinary Member and particularly the remit of the following to act or otherwise in this situation
  - Leader of the Council
  - Monitoring Officer
  - Standards Committee
  - Group Leaders

**RESOLVED - That the Monitoring Officer, Isle of Anglesey County Council, be requested to draft a letter to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for circulation amongst Monitoring Officers for each authority to submit should**

**they so wish.**

**7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Ceredigion County Council would be hosting the Standards Conference Wales 2018 in Aberystwyth on a date, yet to be agreed, in September.

There was no further information available regarding the mediation training.

The matter of forming Joint Standards Committee was raised particularly as some authorities were experiencing problems recruiting independent members to Standards Committees and also appointing a lay member to the Appointments Committee. There did not appear to be a big appetite for Joint Committees and it was suggested that ex Chairs/retired independent members of Standards Committees could provide a pool of potential candidates to act as the lay member on an Appointments Committee.

**8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

That the next meeting be held in May/June 2018 – to be hosted by Gwynedd County Council

**The meeting concluded at 11.20 a.m.**