

Committee:	The Standards Committee
Date:	13 February 2023
Title:	National Forum for Standards Committees
Author:	Hywel Eifion Jones, Vice-chair of The Standards Committee
Purpose:	For information

Background

The inaugural meeting took place on 27/1/23 by way of Zoom. Chairs or Vice Chairs of all Welsh Standards Committees were present with a number of Monitoring Officers, Welsh Government (WG) and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) officials. Full minutes of the meeting will follow in due course but in summary the agenda was as follows:-

1. Clive Wolfendale was elected Chair (Chair of Conwy SC).
2. Previously circulated Terms of Reference were approved.
3. Liza James (WG) provided a brief update on the Penn report. A 12 week consultation will start shortly on the recommendations in the report. It was hoped all Standards Committees would have an opportunity to consider these and provide feedback.
4. The implementation of the new duty on group leaders was subject to considerable discussion. It seemed that many SC's were gradually finding their way in its introduction and responsibilities. One suggestion was made by Gareth Owens (MO - Flintshire), of group leaders being requested to complete an annual report for confidential individual discussion with SC's before publication in our annual report. A sample template is available, perhaps we could consider this? Additionally, WLGA are considering providing training and development for group leaders on their new duties.
5. Main item was presentation by Michelle Morris the new Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. She provided an brief overview of the last year, which was a record in regards to Councillor referrals, around 300 (only 1/3 from County Councils). About 240 had not passed the public interest and eventually 20 referrals went to Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales. This year referrals are still running at high levels with the majority of complaints featuring "lack of respect for others". Also, failure to attend standards training is recurring feature. They will continue to provide regular feedback to MO's on their cases which will hopefully assist identifying issues which may be addressed locally, perhaps involving group leaders.

6. AOB - One SC raised the issue of County Councillors annual reports. It appears their production is very patchy and they felt they should be mandatory. This will be discussed in more detail at next meeting. It was also suggested the question of training for standards committee Chair/Vice should be considered by WLGA.
7. The next meeting of the forum will take place in six months time.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the information