
NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM

Monday, 13 February 2012 at 2.00 pm
Bodlondeb, Conwy

PRESENT:	Howie Roberts (Cadeirydd/Chair)	Chair - Conwy
	Samuel Adams	Vice-Chair - Conwy
	Lynn Ball	Monitoring Officer - Isle of Anglesey
	Gwilym Ellis Evans	Vice-Chairman - Gwynedd
	Clive B. Halliday	Chair - Denbighshire
	Anwen Jones	Monitoring Officer - Flintshire
	Delyth E. Jones	Acting Monitoring Officer - Conwy
	Islwyn Jones	Vice-Chairman - Isle of Anglesey
	Lisa Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Geraint F. Roberts	Vice-Chairman - Denbighshire
	Peter Rowland	Chair - Snowdonia National Park
	Kevin Sibbons	Vice-Chairman - Flintshire
	Sian Walter-Browne	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Wrexham
	Ceri Williams	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Conwy
	Michael B. Wilson	Chairman - Isle of Anglesey
Officers:	Sian Harland	Committee Services Officer - Conwy

30. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Trevor Coxon (Wrexham), Rob Dawson (Wrexham), Jane Eyton-Jones (North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority), Sion Huws (Gwynedd), Robyn Jones (Isle of Anglesey), Ceri Nash (Wrexham), Dilys Ann Phillips (Gwynedd), John Pollard (Gwynedd), Merfyn Roberts (Flintshire) and Gary Williams (Denbighshire).

31. **MINUTES**

Geraint Roberts (Gwynedd) advised that he had given his apologies for the last meeting.

It was suggested that the word '*registering*' should appear before each reference to Gifts and Hospitality.

AGREED-

That, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committee Forum held on 1 November 2011 be approved as a correct record.

32. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This item had been deferred from the last meeting to ensure a greater number of attendees.

The Monitoring Officer (Conwy) advised that the purpose of the Group was to achieve consistency across the 6 Local Authorities in relation to the work of Standards Committees. At the Forum, Local Authorities could share good practice and seek solutions to problems they were experiencing. Although many decisions would have to be made by the individual Standards Committees, there maybe a time when the Forum would need to make a decision, such as whether to write to the Ombudsman collectively.

Members discussed Terms of Reference at length and agreed the following:-

- Membership – Chair, Vice-Chair and the Monitoring Officer with the Deputy Monitoring Officer or other Independent Members of Standards Committees attending as substitutes
- Voting – one vote per Local Authority with the Chair of the Forum having the casting vote
- Election of Chair and Vice Chair – every two years to provide consistency
- Administration – could move with the Chair, but would require succession planning. However, it was noted that Conwy was a central location for meetings of the Forum
- Frequency of Meetings – quarterly meetings with further meetings scheduled as and when required

AGREED-

That the North Wales Standards Committees Forum Terms of Reference be set as above.

33. **QUESTIONS FOR THE OMBUDSMAN**

As Members had agreed to invite the Ombudsman to the next meeting of the Forum it was suggested that any questions should be put to the Ombudsman before the meeting, to enable the Ombudsman to answer any queries in full.

The Monitoring Officer (Anglesey) advised that the Ombudsman had issued guidance on the procedure to deal with minor complaints and this would be circulated to all Monitoring Officers accordingly.

The following questions/requests for information were put forward:-

- Marginal or Low Level breaches – Standards Committee are keen to participate in what capacity could the Ombudsman envisage them being involved ?
- Was it possible to have local resolution for 'tit for tat' complaints between Councillors?
- Indemnity Regulations and Local Protocol – the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) had been requested to report back did the Ombudsman have a view on this?
- Further guidance on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct from the Ombudsman
- Code of Conduct Training – could Councils make it compulsory for County Councillors to receive training? It was understood Cardiff Council had made it compulsory for Councillors to attend Code of

Conduct Training was the Ombudsman aware of how had this been achieved? What obstacles may there be in relation to this?

- What did the Ombudsman know about any other Standards Forums in being or planned and if so what remit did they have?
- What was the Ombudsman's vision for Standards Committees in future?
- Delays in decisions by the Ombudsman and investigation of complaints what was the current position/actions being taken to address this?
- Wales' website for the Ombudsman did not appear to have details of breaches could this be considered?

Members were advised that the matters raised would be circulated and any other questions should be put forward before the next meeting.

AGREED-

That the questions/requests for information be circulated and any other questions should be put forward before the next meeting.

34. **ROLE OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN RELATION TO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

Members discussed the training needs of Town and Community Councils in relation to the Code of Conduct.

Conwy had provided Train the Trainer Sessions for Clerks of Town and Community Councils, and had provided training packs.

Denbighshire had a standing item on their Standards Committee relating to breaches by Town and Community Councils. The Committee found this a useful tool to monitor training need of Town and Community Councils and would target those Councils where breaches were occurring.

Members were advised that One Voice Wales had recruited 12 Trainers, and had offered the services of those Trainers to provide Code of Conduct training to Town and Community Councils, in conjunction with Local Authorities. One Voice Wales was an advice body to which Town and Community Councils paid a small subscription fee.

As the Ombudsman had been invited to the next meeting, it was suggested that the Director of One Voice Wales also be invited to attend to discuss Code of Conduct training issues relating to Town and Community Councils.

AGREED-

That the Director of One Voice Wales be invited to the next meeting of the Forum to discuss Code of Conduct training issues relating to Town and Community Councils.

35. **REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

Members discussed the various levels set by Councils, before Councillors needed to register a Gift or Hospitality received.

The Monitoring Officer (Denbighshire) advised that Denbighshire had increased the level from £0 to £20.

Members agreed that it would be useful to have a set level across the whole of the principality.

Following discussion of the various levels across the authorities it was agreed that there should be a uniform level of £25 for all six authorities and that this suggestion should be taken back to individual authorities to consider making the necessary changes under each respective constitutions.

AGREED-

That the North Wales Standards Forum support the adoption of a £25 limit for the registration of a Gift or Hospitality across all six member authorities and that members of the forum take this recommendation back to their respective authorities for consideration.

36. **STANDARDS CONFERENCE 2013**

The Standards Committee Chair (Gwynedd) proposed that the 6 North Wales Local Authorities organise and hold the next all Wales Standards Conference in North Wales during spring 2013.

Any costs would be shared between the 6 North Wales Authorities with the Conference either being held in Conwy or Llandudno.

The Monitoring Officer (Conwy) agreed to contact Powys County Council, which last organised the Conference, to ascertain the cost and how prospective host authorities were chosen.

Speakers could be invited from private or academic sectors, although it was hoped that any private speaker may give their time for free..

Members agreed with the idea, in principle, but would make the final decision at the next meeting, once costs had been ascertained. In the meantime their own respective Standards Committees could be consulted regarding the proposal and asked for their views.

AGREED-

That the proposal to hold an All Wales Standards Conference in the spring of 2013 at Llandudno be approved, in principle, with the final decision being made at the next meeting, once costs had been ascertained.

37. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was suggested that, for information purposes, any vacancies for Independent Members of Standards Committees could be placed on the agenda of future meetings of the Forum

(The meeting ended at 3.30 pm)