

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	17 April 2023
Lead Officer	Gareth Owens, Clerk to the Authority
Contact Officer	Matt Georgiou, Deputy Clerk 01745 535286
Subject	The Standards Committee's Annual Report



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present the Standards Committee's Annual Report to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) as required by legislation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 As a matter of good corporate governance, the Standards Committee provides the Authority with an annual report on its activities during each financial year. It is now a statutory duty for the Standards Committee to do so.
- 2 Consequently, the Committee's eighteenth report is attached for Members' consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3 That Members:
 - i) note the Standards Committee's annual report for 2022/23.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Not relevant.
Budget	Any costs associated with meetings and events attended by members are reimbursed from the travel and subsistence budget.
Legal	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Staffing	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Risks	No specific risks arise from approving the recommendation.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY 2022/23

Background

This is the Standards Committee's eighteenth annual report to the Fire and Rescue Authority and spans the period from April 2022 to March 2023. Legislation requires that Standards Committees meet at least annually.

The Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee provide a remit to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority. Also, where statute permits, to receive reports and complaints about Members and to conduct or oversee investigations and make recommendations to the Authority.

Membership

There has been no change to membership during the year. The Standards Committee's membership is as follows:

Independent Members

Sally Ellis 01/01/22 – 31/12/25 (second term)
Julia Hughes 01/01/22 – 31/12/25 (second term)
Gill Murgatroyd 01/09/19 – 31/08/23 (first term)
Gareth Pritchard 01/09/19 – 31/08/23 (first term)

Fire and Rescue Authority Members

Councillor Marion Bateman (09/6/22 until the next council elections)
Councillor John Brynmor Hughes (07/06/22 until the next council elections)

Attendance

A meeting was held on the 14 of October 2022 via Zoom and again on 9 February 2023. Julia Hughes, Sally Ellis, Gill Murgatroyd and Gareth Pritchard were in attendance at the meeting on the 14 of October 2022 and all members, with the exception of Gill Murgatroyd, were present at the meeting on the 9 February 2023.

Issues Discussed

At its meeting on 14 October 2022 the Committee considered and discussed:

- Visits by independent members of the Committee to observe meetings of the Authority and provide feedback to the Committee
- Feedback on the Member inductions to the Authority
- The creation of a national standards forum

- The Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales for the year 2021/22
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' Annual Report 2021/22
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' "Our findings" publication
- Forward work plan.

Those members of the Committee who had attended the induction found the experience extremely valuable, as it allowed them to gain an insight into how the Service worked and to be able to meet key personnel. Confirmation that all Fire Authority Members had completed their Code of Conduct (the Code) training with their respective Councils was also provided by the Monitoring Officer. The Committee did note that 6 members of the Authority did not attend the inductions.

The Committee welcomed the establishment of a national standards forum for Chairs of standards committees and resolved to provide feedback from those forums to future meetings of the Committee.

The Committee resolved to send a communication to Members of the Authority setting out the key themes arising from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' "Our findings" publication. This was sent to all Members of the Authority together with a link to the publication.

The Committee resolved that the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee should meet with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Authority and of the Audit Committee to discuss the role of the Committee and the role of independent members in observing meetings of the Authority.

The Committee met again on 9 February 2023. At this meeting, Members considered the following matters:

- Member attendance at Authority meetings
- Feedback on attendance at meetings by independent members
- Reappointment of independent members
- Forward work programme for reviewing relevant policies and protocols of the Authority's Constitution
- PSOW – 'Our Findings' Publication
- Feedback on Liaison with Chairs/Vice Chairs of Authority meetings
- The Terms of reference for the National Standards Committee Forum
- Feedback on the National Standards Committee Forum
- The Forward Work Plan for 2023/24

Issues discussed

The meeting between the Chair of the Committee and Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Authority and Audit Committee was summarised. In addition to an overview of the remit of the Committee, the Penn Review, Independent Members' visits to observe Authority meetings, Member Attendance and the Standards Committee's Annual Report were all discussed. It was agreed that a further meeting of the Chairs and Deputy Chairs would take place in order to discuss the Standards Committee's Annual Report.

A schedule was set for the Committee to review the following codes and protocols as part of its rolling review of those protocols during the full term of the Authority:

- Members' Code of Conduct
- Protocol on Member/Employee relations
- Local Resolution Procedure on complaints about Members
- Social Media Protocol
- Protocol on Members and Employees' Gifts and Hospitality
- Process for managing Standards complaints

A schedule was agreed for Independent members of the Committee to attend, observe and feed back to the Committee on their observations of Authority meetings.

A verbal report was received in respect of investigations by the PSOW into breaches of the Code by members of Fire Authorities in Wales. This involved a review of the PSOW's Annual Reports dating back to 2006/7. No such matters were investigated, and there had been just three complaints made to the PSOW about Fire Authority members during this time.

The Terms of Reference for the National Standards Committee Forum were received and approved. The Chair provided feedback to the Committee on the first meeting of the forum.

Training

The Committee has agreed that it will undertake training at each of its meetings on matters pertinent to its terms of reference. In this period the Committee received training on when the Code applies and Respect and Equality under the Code. Training will continue to be provided on the constituent parts of the Code.

Forward Work Plan

The Committee has set itself a forward programme to ensure that it fulfils its terms of reference and considers all items that it needs to cover within a year. Forthcoming items include, amongst others: the regular training slot (referred to above); Annual reports and case reports from the PSOW and the Adjudication Panel for Wales; feedback from Independent Members' observations of meetings; and the continued review of member attendance at Authority meetings.

The Committee conducts a rolling review of the codes and protocols within its terms of reference so that each is considered at least once per Authority term. For 2023/24 there will be a review of Gifts and Hospitality and Member/Employee relations Protocols and the Members' Code of Conduct.

Complaints against Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority

There were no complaints about FRA Members during this period.

Financial Implications

The budget for the Standards Committee is managed through a single budget heading for all Authority costs. Since 2012, independent members of the Standards Committee are entitled to claim remuneration based on meetings and events attended. For attending meetings in this financial year, a total of £898.00 has been claimed.

Conclusion

The Standards Committee recommends that the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority notes its annual report 2022/23.