

**Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on
27 October 2025 via Zoom**

Present

Julia Hughes (Chair)	JH	Independent Member
Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair)	SE	Independent Member
Gill Murgatroyd	GM	Independent Member
Cllr John Brynmor Hughes	JBM	Gwynedd Council (left at 11:45)
Cllr Ian Hodge	IH	Flintshire County Council
Matthew Powell	MP	Deputy Clerk
Lisa Allington	LJA	Executive Assistant/Member Liaison
Ffion Evans	FE	Executive Assistant

Apologies

Gareth Pritchard	GP	Independent Member
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Absent

Meeting opened at 10:00

1 APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies were offered and accepted for Gareth Pritchard. Ffion Evans was welcomed to the meeting as an observer so that she could provide resilience should the dedicated Members Services liaison ever be unavailable for a meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interests to record.
- 2.2 Members of the Standards Committee who are also members of Flintshire County Council standards committee noted that the APW and PSOW updates included reference to findings that concern the other standards committee. This was noted but the Deputy Clerk was of the view that these reports are informative in nature and their purpose is for members to identify trends and messages and are not related to nor do they affect the functions of Flintshire County Council's standards committee meaning there is no requirement to declare an interest. If individual cases are specifically discussed, it may then be necessary to declare an interest.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 There were no notices of urgent matters.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

- 4.1 The minutes from 27 March 2025 were reviewed and it was noted that the reference in paragraph 2.1 that Gill Murgatroyd was a member of the Flintshire Planning Committee was incorrect and should read ‘... was a member of the Flintshire Standards Committee.’
- 4.2 Furthermore, paragraph 4.1 stated that a meeting had been held on 2 October 2025, and it was clarified that this should read 2 October 2024. As a result, the reference to the extraordinary meeting of 5 April in the second bullet point under that paragraph should also be 2024, not 2025.
- 4.3 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Approve the minutes from the meeting of 27 March 2025, with the above corrections.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 The Chair referred to paragraph 2.2 of the minutes in which Sally Ellis had queried whether she should declare a personal interest as she was a member of the Flintshire Governance and Audit Committee. The Deputy Clerk had agreed to investigate this requirement further and report back to members outside of the meeting.
- 5.2 The Chair queried whether this feedback had been given and the Deputy Clerk confirmed that it had not and confirmed that he would provide written guidance in relation to declarations of interest for members who sit on other committees for clarity.
- 5.3 It was further noted that Sally Ellis was no longer a member of the Flintshire Governance and Audit Committee.
- 5.4 It was confirmed that the Gifts and Hospitality Policy had now been published on North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority’s (the Authority) website.

6 CHAIR’S VERBAL FEEDBACK ON THE NATIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE CHAIR’S FORUM – WALES

- 6.1 The Chair provided verbal feedback on the National Standards Committee Chair’s Forum meeting which had taken place in June 2025.

- 6.2 The meeting was on Monday 23 June 2025 and had been both useful and constructive. Items discussed included future engagement with the local Government and Policy Division of the Welsh Government with some Chairs confirming that they were prepared to participate in consultation and feedback sessions.
- 6.3 A discussion on remuneration had taken place and it had been noted that there had been changes in responsibilities for remuneration which had now transferred from the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) which had been disbanded and had now moved to the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (DBCC).
- 6.4 Feedback had been received from Michelle Morris, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). A discussion around complaints made against members of staff and feedback received had taken place. Feedback had also been received on caseloads, conduct complaints, the main area of which involved accusations of a lack of equality and respect. Forty-nine cases had been received during the previous year, fifteen of which had been referred. A total of 85% of breaches had been upheld, a positive indicator both for them and their investigation work.
- 6.5 The PSOW advised that a review of the Resolution Protocol had taken place by her, more specifically the wording and stages within it which might cause complications when referring matters to the PSOW. Local Resolution Protocols (LRPs) were also being reviewed, and it was noted that the Authority LRP was on the agenda for discussion at this meeting.
- 6.6 There had been discussions and observations from the Chair of the forum in relation to the frequently expressed concern around the length of time it took for some cases to be considered. This could be a very stressful process both for the subject of the complaint and the complainant and when cases took so long to be considered it added to the stress levels. The PSOW acknowledged this and confirmed that she was hoping to reduce the number of cases that took more than a year to resolve. However, when cases that required police involvement were heard, these had to be suspended until legal matters had been completed.
- 6.7 Amongst other matters raised by Chairs at the forum was how various committees undertook dispensations and the individual approaches across Wales and whether there was any written guidance on this for members. This had been an interesting discussion which might well arise in other standards committees meetings.

6.8 Recent cases of interest from the Adjudication Panel for Wales (the APW) were examined and discussed at length. There had also been an interesting item on charring meetings and the difficulties that could be experienced in carrying out hearings for various standards committees.

6.10 The next meeting would take place in January 2026.

6.11 **RESOLVED to:**

i) note the content of the verbal update provided.

7 CHAIRS VERBAL OVERVIEW OF TOPICS DISCUSSED AT THE ETHICAL LIAISON MEETING WITH CHAIRS/VICE CHAIRS

7.1 The Chair provided high level feedback on the topics discussed at the ethical liaison meeting which had been held with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Authority/Executive Panel and Audit Committee. This Ethical Liaison meeting met annually. The meeting had been held on 25 September 2025.

7.2 **RESOLVED to:**

i) note the content of the verbal update provided.

8 STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERS TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

8.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the paper in relation to the terms of appointment for Committee members which provided Members with an update on the Committee's current appointments and Members' terms of office.

8.2 It was reported that the Chair and Deputy Chair's terms of office as members of the Standards Committee were both due to come to an end on 31 December 2025 and a recruitment process would be commenced to replace them with a view to appointments taking place prior to the next full Authority meeting in January 2026 so that they could be ratified at that meeting.

8.3 It was noted that the appointed Independent Members whose terms were coming to an end were the current Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee and so a nomination process would need to take place to nominate and appoint a Chair and Deputy Chair at next meeting of the Standards Committee.

8.4 A Member noted that this would make this the last meeting for both Julia Hughes and Sally Ellis and asked that thanks for the significant and valuable contribution from both members be recorded.

- 8.5 One of the two remaining independent members stated that whilst it may seem logical that they step in as Chair and Deputy Chair, both of their terms were also due to end in August 2027 and so it may make sense for at least one of the newly appointed members to be nominated into one of those roles for succession planning purposes.
- 8.6 The Chair asked for it to be recorded that there had been some confusion in relation to the end dates for their terms and so succession planning had not been as smooth as it might have been.
- 8.7 It was asked whether the terms for Julia Hughes and Sally Ellis could be extended to six-year terms, and the Deputy Clerk confirmed that they could not as the decision around the length of the term of appointment had been determined by the Authority and was the second and final term so therefore could not be extended.
- 8.8 It was queried whether there was any scope to reduce the recruitment costs by considering alternative methods of advertisement such as social media. The Deputy Clerk advised that it was a legal requirement to advertise for Independent Members of the Standards Committee in two local newspapers, so those costs cannot be avoided. The cost referred to in the report were understood to be the cost from the last recruitment process.
- 8.9 It was noted that the year referred to within the Implications section of the report in relation to budget should refer to 2025/26, not 2024/25.
- 8.10 As Gareth Pritchard was not in attendance at this meeting, the Deputy Clerk agreed to contact him and brief him on this item for his awareness.
- 8.11 A Member asked whether this recruitment process might be impacted by the current governance review and any potential changes to governance arrangements that may arise as a result. The Deputy Clerk advised that the Authority must work within the current framework and that it remained a legal requirement for the Authority to have a Standards Committee and therefore, it was necessary for the recruitment to take place.
- 8.12 The Deputy Clerk advised that any changes to governance arising from the consultation would likely have to be via primary legislation through the Senedd which would take time. The consultation had only just closed, and the results had not yet been released and so it remained difficult to comment on timescales, although it was not felt to be imminent.

8.13 The Chair thanked all members for their valuable contributions over the period of her tenure.

8.14 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Note the content of the report.

9 ROLLING REVIEW OF THE LOCAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE (LRP) FOR COMPLAINTS ABOUT BEHAVIOUR

9.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the rolling review of the local resolution procedure (LRP) for complaints about behaviour.

9.2 It was noted that the Committee had last reviewed the Authority's LRP in 2019 and that this was one of the protocols that the Committee reviewed on a rolling basis each Authority term.

9.3 The Deputy Clerk summarised the recommendations and advised that upon reviewing the protocol, he was unable to locate "The Fire Authority Standard" referred to in the LRP which would include a list of behaviours, therefore those have been captured and included in the LRP itself which was also in line with the recommendations.

9.4 The Chair noted that the reason the third stage of the LRP was recorded to be removed is because it muddied the waters around where responsibility for making certain decisions sits. This is a complicated but its felt the current process requires updating to remove this issue.

9.5 There was a question from a Member around the proposal to allow officers to use the LRP, and how this integrates with North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) own internal HR procedures. The Deputy Clerk advised that the protocol already allowed officers to use it and it says that officers wishing to make a complaint should first consult with their Line Manager who would be able to advise if any other process is available.

9.6 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Recommend that the Authority accept the proposed amendments and adopt the revised LRP.

10 ROLLING REVIEW OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

10.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the rolling review of the Social Media Protocol to ensure that it remained up to date and pertinent.

- 10.2 A member suggested that the existing social media provisions were adequate but suggested renaming them as 'Social Media within Meetings Protocol', with an added link to the WLGA guidance.
- 10.3 The Chair noted that, having reviewed Powys' comprehensive protocol, it was likely unnecessary for the Authority to adopt something as detailed. The Chair agreed with Members' comments and considered the current protocol sufficient, subject to the inclusion of a link to the WLGA guidance.
- 10.4 **RESOLVED that:**
- i) The Social Media Protocol include a link to Welsh Local Government Association's social media guidance for councillors;**

11 **PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES "Our Findings"**

- 11.1 The Deputy Clerk delivered the paper on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales "Our Findings" to see if there were any messages that would be helpful to share with North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) members.
- 11.2 Members considered that this data should be provided on an annual basis, rather than on a bi-annual basis and because the data in this report duplicates to a degree the PSOWs Annual Report as such members felt that the "Our Findings" report should not be reported on at the same meeting.
- 11.3 The Deputy Clerk noted that the complaints did not relate to any fire authorities, including this Authority. Most findings relate to respect and considerations but noted an increase in complaints around declarations of interest.
- 11.4 Members requested that the Deputy Clerk liaise with the PSOW to obtain up to date data and for this to be shared with the Chair of the Fire Authority.
- 11.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) Review the findings and the data to identify any trends or helpful messages that could be communicated to members of the Authority aside from information to be shared with the Chair;**
- ii) The Committee considered whether this information should continue to be provided biannually or annually and resolved that it should be provided annually.**

12 **PUBLIC SERVICE OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES'S (PSOW) ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2024 / 2025**

12.1 The Deputy Clerk delivered the report to Members on the content of the PSOW Annual Report for 2024–2025, who receive complaints concerning councillors at local councils, fire authorities, and national park authorities. It was noted that the PSOW publishes an Annual Report covering all its responsibilities, including complaints.

12.2 It was noted that the number of complaints had reduced slightly this year, having increased over the previous four years. As in previous years, the majority of complaints relate to failing to show respect and consideration to others. A total of fifteen complaints were referred to the Adjudication Panel for Wales or local standards committees for hearings over the period. There were no complaints relating to members' conduct within fire authorities.

12.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Consider the matters relating to Code of Conduct Complaints reported in the PSOW's Annual Report and it was determined that no further action was required.**

13 **ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES (APW) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024/25.**

13.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) Annual Report for 2024/25.

13.2 Members noted that the APW is an independent tribunal that determines alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct and members considered the findings of the Annual Report.

13.2 The Deputy Clerk noted that the APW sets a targets to determine 75% of referrals within 12 months and had achieved that target.

13.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Consider and note the report; and**
- ii) **It was determined that there were no important messages to communicate to Members of the Authority from the cases determined by the APW.**

14 **MEMBER ATTENDANCE AT FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS**

14.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the statistics relating to Member attendance at Authority meetings. The committee were informed that the purpose of the report was to consider and address any poor attendance at Fire Authority meetings.

14.2 It was noted that the Standards Committee had resolved that it was reasonable to expect at least a 50% attendance rate by Members of the Authority at meetings. If it identifies any attendance falling below 50% within a three-month period, the committee will arrange write to any such member and their head of democratic services to raise the issue. Members noted that this was not required as attendance met the expected levels.

14.3 Members commended the table in Appendix One, highlighting its effectiveness in presenting the data and the clarity provided by the traffic light system.

14.6 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) consider the rates of attendance at meetings of this Authority since March 2025; and**
- ii) If attendance falls below 50%, correspondence may be sent to constituent authorities and Members of the Authority. It was agreed that no such communication was currently required.**

15 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (FWP)**

15.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the Forward Work Plan (FWP), and Members reviewed its content.

15.2 The Committee resolved, as noted in item 13.1, to move the PSOW "Our Findings Report" to an annual agenda item to be included in the February/March meetings.

15.3 It was noted that, to reflect the committee's decision made under item 10.1, the reference to the social media protocol could be removed.

15.4 The Committee agreed to remove February/March 2023 and September 2023 from the Forward Work Plan.

15.5 The item Terms of Appointment is to be added to the FWP for February/March 2027.

- 15.6 The Deputy Clerk was asked to review where the Standards Committee have reached in its rolling reviews of policies and protocols and should there be any left to review, to add these to the Forward Work Plan.
- 15.7 The item Appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair to be included on the Forward Work Plan for February/ March 2026.
- 15.8 Governance Review update should be added to the Forward Work Plan for September 2026.
- 15.9 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) Approve the content of the Forward Work Plan with above amendments made.**

The Standards Committee expressed its gratitude for the hard work and support of the Chair and Deputy Chair during their tenure, noting that this was their final meeting, and extended best wishes to them.

The Chair gave thanks to attendees and advised that a date for the February /March meeting would be confirmed in due course.

Meeting closed at 12.25hrs