

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	28 April 2025
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Subject	Standards Committee Annual Report 2024/25



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present the annual report of the Standards Committee (the Committee) to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The Committee has produced an annual report since its inception, and since 2021 it has also been a statutory duty to produce such a report.
- 3 The Annual Report provides information about the work carried out by the Committee during the past 12 months and identifies any particular issues that have arisen.
- 4 As a matter of good governance, each year the annual report produced by the Committee is presented to the Authority for information.
- 5 This is the Committee's twentieth annual report which includes a summary of the work undertaken during the financial year 2024/25 (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6 It is recommended that Members:
 - i) **note the Annual Report.**

APPENDICES

- 7 The annual report of the Standards Committee for the year 2024/25, is at [Appendix 1](#).

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Considered not relevant
Budget for 2024/25	The annual report can be produced within budget. Any costs associated with meetings and events attended by members are reimbursed from the travel and subsistence budget.
Legal	The Committee has a duty under section 63 Local Government Act 2021 to produce an annual report, which must be considered by the fire authority within 3 months of receipt.
Staffing	Considered not relevant
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The report has been produced in bilingual format
Risks	The work of the Committee described within its annual report should help to reduce the risk of Authority Members behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with the code and thus with best practice.

Appendix 1 –Annual Report

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY 2024/25

Background

This is the Standards Committee (the Committee)'s twentieth annual report to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) and spans the period from April 2024 to March 2025. Legislation requires that standards committees meet at least once annually and that they prepare a report on their activity for consideration by the Authority.

The Terms of Reference of the 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

The Committee membership has not changed since new councillors were appointed after the elections in 2022. The Committee's membership is as follows:

Independent Members

- Sally Ellis 01/01/22 – 31/12/26 (serving for a second term) (Deputy Chair)
- Julia Hughes 01/01/22 – 31/12/26 (serving for a second term) (Chair)
- Gill Murgatroyd 01/09/23 – 31/08/27 (serving for a second term)
- Gareth Pritchard 01/09/23 – 31/08/27 (serving for a second term)

Fire and Rescue Authority Members

- Councillor Marion Bateman (20/06/2022 until the next council elections)
- Councillor John Brynmor Hughes (20/06/2022 until the next council elections)

Attendance

Meetings were held virtually on the following dates with the named members in attendance:

5 April 2024 - present: Julia Hughes (Chair), Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair), Gareth Pritchard, Gill Murgatroyd

2 October 2024 – present: Julia Hughes (Chair), Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair), Gareth Pritchard, Gill Murgatroyd

27 March 2025 – present: Julia Hughes (Chair), Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair), Gareth Pritchard, Gill Murgatroyd, Cllr John Brynmor Hughes

Issues Discussed

At its extraordinary meeting on 5 April 2025:

- The Committee considered and approved its nineteenth annual report to the Authority;
- The Committee finalised its rolling review of the members code of conduct and recommended that the Authority should voluntarily adopt changes to the Code which have been recommended by the Penn Review;
- Members' attendance at meetings was reported. Members asked that a column indicating whether attendance had improved or declined, and any mitigating circumstances be included in future reports;
- The Committee finalised its rolling review of the Protocol on Member / Employee relations recommending that the Authority should adopt changes to widen the scope of the protocol to include other relevant categories of worker whilst noting that there were no reported issues arising under the protocol;
- As a regular standing item, the Committee received a report on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's "Our Findings" informing Members about recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales; and
- The Chief Fire Officer attended the meeting to provide a verbal update on the Cultural Review

The Committee met again on 2 October 2024:

- The Committee received a report on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's Annual Report which provides statistical data on complaints about councillors at local councils, fire authorities and national park authorities over the year. Members noted that the majority of complaints relate to equality and respect and that there was an overall increase in complaints but there had been none relating to Members' conduct within fire authorities across Wales;
- The Committee received a report on the Adjudication Panel for Wales Annual Report. This provides statistical data on the number of hearings completed over the year;
- Feedback was provided by the Chair and Deputy Clerk from the Chairs' meeting which had taken place on 27 June 2024; and

- As a regular standing item, the Committee received a report on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's "Our Findings" informing Members about recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

The Committee met again on 27 March 2025:

- The Committee received verbal feedback from the Chair on the National Standards Committee Chairs' Forum;
- Members' attendance at meetings was reported and the Standards Committee noted that expected attendance rates have improved and are now being met but this will be kept under review;
- The Committee discussed and approved its Annual Report;
- As a regular standing item, the Committee received a report on the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's "Our Findings" informing Members about recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales; and
- The Committee undertook a rolling review of the Social Media Protocol and requested further consultation.

During the course of its meetings, the Committee has also considered feedback from the National Forum for Standards Committee Chairs. That forum is an opportunity to share good practice and build consensus around common areas of work. The views expressed there are taken into account when the Committee considers issues such as amendments to the code. The Committee also received a verbal update on the Audit Wales review of governance of Fire and Rescue Authorities.

During this period, representatives of the Committee attended a Cultural Review meetings in order to understand whether any issues around that fall within the remit of the Standards Committee.

Training

The Committee aims to undertake training at each of its meetings on matters pertinent to its terms of reference.

Forward Work Programme

The Committee has set itself an annual forward work programme to ensure that it fulfils its terms of reference and considers all items that it needs to cover within a year. Regular standing items include "Our Findings" from the Ombudsman's website, feedback from the National Forum, members' attendance as well as training on its roles and responsibilities.

The Committee also sets itself a multi-year programme to review the codes and protocols within its terms of reference. Each is considered at least once per Authority term. That programme has commenced again following the elections in 2022.

Complaints against Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority

There were no complaints about FRA Members during this period. Consequently, there were no referrals under the local resolution process or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales or the Committee to hold a hearing in respect of an alleged breach of the code.

Group Leaders' Duty to Promote Ethical Behaviour

The Authority does not divide its membership by political grouping. However, the Committee Chair and Vice Chair will meet with the Chairs of the Authority and Audit Committee to ensure the Committee adds value.

Financial Implications

The budget for the Committee is managed through a single budget heading for all Authority costs. Independent members of the Committee are entitled to claim remuneration based on meetings and events attended. For attending meetings in this financial year, a total of £1,206 has been claimed.

Conclusion

The Committee recommends that the Authority notes its Annual Report for 2024/25.