

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

Present

Julia Hughes (Chair)	JH	Independent Member
Sally Ellis (Deputy Chair)	SE	Independent Member
Gareth Pritchard	GP	Independent Member
Gill Murgatroyd	GM	Independent Member
Cllr John Brynmor Hughes	JBM	Gwynedd Council
Matthew Powell	MP	Deputy Monitoring Officer/Clerk
Lisa Allington	LJA	Executive Assistant/Member Liaison
Ffion Evans	FE	Executive Assistant

Apologies

Cllr Marion Bateman	MB	Flintshire County Council
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Absent

Meeting opened at 10:00

A half hour training session on the Code of Ethics was delivered to Members at 09:30 and prior to the meeting.

1 APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies were offered and accepted for Cllr Marion Bateman. Ffion Evans was welcomed to the meeting as an observer to provide resilience if the Members Services liaison was unavailable for a meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 Gill Murgatroyd declared a personal interest in Item 9 due to her membership on the Flintshire Planning Committee.
- 2.2 Sally Ellis queried whether she should also declare a personal interest as she was a member of the Flintshire Governance and Audit Committee. The Deputy Clerk agreed to investigate this requirement further and report back to members outside of the meeting.
- 2.3 Julia Hughes declared a personal interest in Item 9, PSOW Our Findings as she was a member of the Flintshire Standards Committee.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 It was clarified that Item 7 could be discussed within the business meeting and it was not necessary to move to Part II, unless the discussion moved into personal detail on the reasons for Member absence.

4 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

- 4.1 Members were advised that the minutes from the meeting held on 2 October 2025 were not completed due to staff absence and the below was therefore agreed as a summary of matters discussed:

- Cllr Bateman and John Brynmor Hughes were not in attendance and apologies were noted.
- Members approved the minutes from the extraordinary meeting of 5 April 2025 and enquired whether the Gifts and Hospitality Policy had been published on the Fire Authority website. It was agreed that this would be checked and if not, the Head of Finance would be asked to ensure that it be published.
- Verbal feedback was given by the Chair and the Deputy Chair on the meeting held with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the full Fire Authority and the Audit Committee on 27 June 2024.
- The Committee received a report on the Public Service Ombudsman 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 most 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 Wales Annual Report This provides statistical data on the number of hearings completed over the year.
- As a regular standing item, the Committee received a report on the Public Service Ombudsman Wales's "Our Findings" informing Members about recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- The Committee received a verbal update on the Audit Wales review of governance of fire and rescue authorities and the Chair also provided feedback from the June National Standards Committee Chairs forum.
- The forward work plan was discussed and updated.

5 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 It was asked that some preparation between the Chair and Deputy Clerk take place prior to the meeting with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the full Authority and Audit Committee in advance of the meeting being held, and that an agenda be put in place.

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

- 6.1 The Chair reminded Members that there had always been a North Wales Forum, a meeting of Chairs of Standards Committees, to look at common themes and shared practices which Mid and West Wales attended. When the Penn Review came out, it was recommended that an All-Wales Forum be established.
- 6.2 The All-Wales meeting is attended by Chairs of the Standards Committee, or the Deputy Chair should the Chair be unavailable, and the Welsh Monitoring Officers attend on a rotating basis. The agendas were compiled based on suggestions from the Chairs and Monitoring Officers and so Members are encouraged to request agenda items should they feel it appropriate.
- 6.3 The Chair provided feedback from the meeting. Presentations with questions and answers were received from Pam Lucas, Welsh Government (WG), Local Government Policy Division, Climate Change and Rural Affairs and Michelle Morris, the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).
- 6.4 The next meetings will take place on Monday 23 June 2025 and Monday 26 January 2026, both via Teams.
- 6.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the content of the update provided.**

7 MEMBER ATTENDANCE AT FIRE AUTHORITY MEETINGS

- 7.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the paper on Member attendance at Fire Authority meetings which asked Members to consider and address any poor attendance at meetings of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).
- 7.2 It was noted that the context of any deterioration in attendance should be considered, and that no Member fell below the 50% attendance threshold. Members were pleased with current attendance and felt that the improvement in general attendance was positive.

- 7.3 One Member highlighted that there had been an increased requirement for Members to attend meetings this year and so the improvement in attendance was even more significant.
- 7.4 Members agreed that this area would continue to be monitored and that writing to constituent authorities to note improved attendance would be considered, providing that this continued to show improvement.
- 7.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the rates of attendance at meetings of this Authority since 5 April 2024; and**
 - ii) that there was no requirement to write to constituent authorities as there were no Members of the Authority where attendance was below 50%;**
- 8 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**
- 8.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the paper in relation to the twelfth Standards Committee Annual Report 2024/25.
- 8.2 Some amendments to spelling, grammar and layout were made and the meeting with Chairs and Deputy Chairs held on 27 June 2024 was added in.
- 8.3 It was agreed to add in that it had been noted under the meeting for 27 March 2025 that no Member's attendance was below 50%, to ensure that outcomes were recorded.
- 8.4 A discussion was held around a change in the format and approach of the report to be considered for next time in order to make it more outcome focused, and it was agreed that this should be looked at further.
- 8.5 It was also agreed that attendance of Standards members at the NWFRS culture seminar on 18 February 2025 should be included within the report to reflect their broader commitment to their role.
- 8.6 Members felt that the section on training should be reworded to read that "It was aimed to deliver training at the beginning of each meeting."
- 8.7 Attendance at the meeting of 2 October should show that Cllr Brynmor Hughes was not present.

8.8 RESOLVED to:

- i) approve the Annual Report for submission to the Authority.**

9 PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES “OUR FINDINGS”

9.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales “Our Findings” paper which informed Members about recent findings made by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) to see if there were any messages that could be shared with councillors of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).

9.2 It was noted that none of the complaints within the report related to members of fire authorities.

9.3 It was agreed that the data in future reports would also be presented in graph form to make it easier to identify any trends that might require attention.

9.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) Identify any trends or messages in the Our Findings report which may be of benefit to councillors on the Authority.**

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 One Member felt that the current policy might be pertinent but was not up to date and that it should be expanded to cover people in their personal capacity. They further felt that it should be updated to reflect the issues appearing in the PSOW “Our Findings” report, and no doubt local authorities, and needed significantly more examples than those currently included.

10.3 It was agreed that more research should be carried out to identify policies and their content within the six local authorities and the WLGA before any significant amendments were made to this policy; however, this research was necessary to ensure that the policy within this Authority was fit for purpose.

10.4 **RESOLVED that:**

- i) **the Social Media Protocol remained pertinent but because it is limited in the main to the reporting of Council meetings, it is not considered to be up to date and to ask the Deputy Clerk to carry out research/consultation around social media protocols within the six local constituent authorities, the WLGA and the Wales Monitoring Officers group to report to the next Standards Committee on the outcome of that consultation;**

11 **FORWARD WORK PLAN**

11.1 The Forward Work Plan was discussed, and it was agreed that feedback from research on the Social Media Protocol be added to the meeting for September/October 2025.

11.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Accept the content of the Forward Work Plan, with the above amendment.**

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

Meeting closed at 11:53