

National Standards Forum Committee

Friday, 27th January 2022

1. Election of Chair

- Clive Wolfendale elected as Chair.

2. Election of Vice Chair

- Jason Bartlett elected as Vice Chair.

3. Role and Terms of Reference

- The forum consists of all local government organisations in Wales. There will be 4 MO's at any one meeting from principle councils, 1 MO from Fire and 1 from NPAs – these have been taken from the CJC regions.
- Secretariat by WLGA.
- Frequency of meetings 2 per year.
- MOs will suggest agenda items at Lawyers in Local Government meetings.
- The forum is essentially a voluntary members association, any work undertaken by MOs will be done on a voluntary basis. The forum may benefit from having a dedicated MO resource.
- Cardiff deputy MO will be able to support the forum if needed.

Comments

- The idea of having a MO is sensible, Chair of BBNPA Pam Hibbard supports this decision.
- Point of clarification – on the occasion when a Chair is not available to attend a meeting, can a Vice Chair stand in as substitute?
 - Yes, Vice Chair is welcome as a sub.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate the ToR.

4. Discussion on implementation of the new duty on Group Leaders and how this will be reported as part of the Standards Committee Annual Report

- The new duty was introduced under LG & Elections Wales Act 2021, came into effect in May 2022. Will impact at the end of this municipal year when preparing the Annual Report. There has been statutory guidance produced by WG, expectations on Group Leaders to promote standards rather than be responsible.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate Annual Report pro-forma

Comments

- Standards committee met with Group Leaders in Newport before Christmas. Issued the stencil to the Group Leaders, will be going through the document with the Leaders individually at the next Standards Committee meeting.
- MTCBC have had the introductory meeting with Group Leaders, a very positive meeting. Agreed on regular meetings with Group Leaders for continuity. Have been invited to the next Council meeting to give an update.
- Duty in the Act is new, in Swansea there has been a similar process for a number of years. Have been meeting with Group Leaders on a formal basis. In discussions about meeting informally with the Group Leaders to see if that will bring out any other issues which can be raised informally.
- WLGA have received requests from Councils around providing group leader support/training around the new duty. Can be organised online or in person.

ACTION: WLGA to circulate training offers.

- Pembrokeshire Standards Committee Chair and Vice Chair are planning on meeting with Group Leaders. 35 independent Councillors in Pembrokeshire, 22 consider themselves to be their own groups, with 13 identifying as one group. Will have to ask each individual for their own report.

ACTION: WLGA to give thought to how communication is made via Chairs.

- Ethical Liaison meetings in Flintshire – a few councils have said they are doing something similar.
- Denbighshire have adopted a similar system to Flintshire, have had a useful meeting with Group Leaders, helped and amended the template.

5. Guest Speaker: Michelle Morris, Public Service Ombudsman for Wales

- Investigating complaints that service users and members of the public make, also a key role in driving improvement in public services in Wales and ethical standards in public life.
- In terms of current work – April 21-March 22 was a busy year, more complaints than in the last decade, just under 300 complaints, 240 complaints were not taken forward to investigations.
- A lot of breaches are about lack of respect for others, about behaviours, over 50% of the complaints.
- Helpful for the forum to be a sounding board for advice and guidance.

Comments

- Ovw have not had additional funding to help support Town and Community Councils, is there something that this forum can do?
- Ceredigion did undergo some training, detailed process.

- Quarterly reports have been changed into a search engine, the reports were very useful to analyse trends across Wales, will you revert to the reports or upgrade the search engine?
 - Useful feedback, planning to do some work on the website and how information is provided.

6. Penn Report, Lisa James, Welsh Government

- The Minister has not made any further announcements or decisions since thanking Richard for the report.
- The next stage will be a 12 week consultation seeking views on the recommendations of the report. Some things have moved on like the publication of Members addresses which was resolved prior to the elections.
- In terms of membership of Standards Committees, ban on those who have been a Member of a Council or an employee of the Council – worth asking questions around this again.
- Powers of standards committees to summon witnesses.

Comments

- Have started to implement things from the Penn Report.

7. AOB

- Members Annual Reports – it is not a statutory requirement to do them but encourage Members to do so in Anglesey. What is the practice for other Standards Committees across Wales?

ACTION: Secretariat to establish baseline figures for 2021/22 Councillor Annual Reports via the Heads of Democratic Services Network

- Chairing Skills for Chairs and Vice Chairs of Standards Committees.

ACTION: WLGA to work with Chair and Vice Chair to develop training for Chairs of Standards Committees

ACTION: Secretariat to scheduled next meeting for late June / early July