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## NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM

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Tuesday, 1 November 2011 at 10.00 am  
Bodlondeb, Conwy

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<b>PRESENT:</b>	Howie Roberts (Chair)	Chair – Conwy Standards Committee
	Lynn Ball	Monitoring Officer - Isle of Anglesey
	Jeff Cotterell	Chair - Isle of Anglesey Standards Committee
	Clive B. Halliday	Chair - Denbighshire Standards Committee
	Sion Huws	Propriety Officer - Gwynedd
	Delyth E. Jones	Monitoring Officer - Conwy
	Lisa Jones	Deputy Monitoring Officer - Denbighshire
	Peter Rowland	Chair – Snowdonia National Park Standards Committee
	Kevin Sibbons	Vice-Chairman – Flintshire Standards Committee
<b>In attendance:</b>	Paul White	Independent Member – Denbighshire Standards Committee
<b>Officers:</b>	Sian Harland	Committee Services Officer

### 20. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and seconded that Kevin Sibbons (Flintshire County Council) be nominated as Vice-Chairman of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.

#### **AGREED-**

**That Kevin Sibbons (Flintshire County Council) be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum for 2011/2012.**

### 21. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Trevor Coxon (Wrexham), Gwilym Ellis Evans (Gwynedd), Anwen Jones (Flintshire), Sue Morris (Isle of Anglesey), Ceri Nash (Wrexham), John Pollard (Gwynedd) and Ceri Williams (Conwy).

### 22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum held on 10 June 2011 were presented for approval.

Kevin Sibbons (Flintshire) stated that he had not been in attendance at the meeting.

Clive Halliday (Denbighshire) stated that he had been in attendance at the meeting.

**AGREED-**

**That, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committee Forum held on 10 June 2011 be approved as a correct record.**

23. **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Vice-Chairman agreed that there was a need for a Terms of Reference for the Forum to ensure consistency and to outline guidance for future Members of the Forum.

Discussion ensued on the following issues:-

- Administration – should move with the Chairman?
- Frequency of meetings – quarterly, monthly or twice a year?

As there were a low number of Members in attendance it was agreed to defer the issue to the next meeting of the Forum.

**AGREED-**

**That the matter be deferred until the next meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.**

24. **REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY**

The Chairman, Howie Roberts, advised that Conwy Standards Committee had been discussing the level set for Gifts and Hospitality and agreed that the levels set by other Councils could be discussed at the Forum.

At present other North Wales Councils set their level for Gifts and Hospitality as follows:-

- Denbighshire – £0
- Gwynedd – £25
- Snowdonia – £25
- Isle of Anglesey – £20
- Conwy – £25

The Isle of Anglesey's Monitoring Officer advised that they had written to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) requesting whether an all Wales level could be set for the recording of Gifts and Hospitality, to ensure consistency across the Principality. Despite reminders no response from the WLGA had been received to date. Members agreed that a letter should be sent from the Forum to the WLGA requesting that they consider the possibility of setting an all Wales level for Gifts and Hospitality.

A way forward could be for the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) to set the level for Members' Gifts and Hospitality, as they would be setting Members' Allowances from 2012.

Again, due to low attendance it was agreed to defer further discussion until the next meeting of the Forum.

**RESOLVED-**

**(a) That the matter be deferred until the next meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.**

**(b) That a letter be sent from the Forum requesting that the WLGA considers the possibility of setting a level for Gifts and Hospitality for Councillors for the whole of Wales.**

25. **FEEDBACK FROM THE STANDARDS CONFERENCE WALES**

Comments and feedback from the Standards Conference Wales was highlighted as follows:-

- Peter Swanson, the facilitator for the Conference had been very impressive
- Although the Electoral Boundaries in Wales would not be reviewed the, Isle of Anglesey Monitoring Officer advised that the boundaries on Anglesey would be changed to reduce the number of Members and introduce multi-member wards. However, Elections for the Isle of Anglesey would possibly be delayed until 2013
- If a Member appealed against a decision by the Ombudsman the Council could be faced with the legal bill for defending the Member in question if an indemnity had been given to that Member in respect of his costs. However, it was noted that the Ombudsman was in the process of capping the amount to which Members would be entitled in the case of an appeal. It was noted that Flintshire County Council was currently facing a very large legal bill of as a result of a Member's appeal against an Ombudsman decision
- The Chairman of the Snowdonia National Park Standards Committee gave an overview of the Standards Procedures in England
- Although the cost of organising the Standards Conference would be covered, there was a time element in organising such a large event

**AGREED-**

**That the information be noted.**

26. **RESPONSE FROM OMBUDSMAN REGARDING THE NORTH WALES STANDARDS COMMITTEES FORUM**

Members were pleased to note that the Ombudsman for Wales had responded positively to the establishment of a Forum and would be willing to attend a future meeting.

It was suggested that the Ombudsman be invited to attend the second meeting of 2012, which would ensure a full attendance.

**AGREED-**

**(a) That the response from the Ombudsman for Wales regarding the North Wales Standards Committees Forum be noted.**

**(b) That the Ombudsman be invited to attend the second meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum of 2012.**

## 27. **CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS**

Members were presented with copies of letters sent from Powys County Council's Standards Committee to the Chairs of Welsh Standards Committees and Welsh Assembly Members.

The letters referred to Powys' Standards Committee's concerns that the Ombudsman was declining to refer matters to the Standards Committee when he had found a breach had occurred, on the grounds that the Standards Committee would not impose a sanction. Powys' Standards Committee would wish to have an opportunity to consider cases where a breach had been found. Powys Standards Committee considered that censure was a sanction, whereas the Ombudsman appeared not to consider it so.

Comments were as follows:-

- The Isle of Anglesey's Monitoring Officer stated that arising from discussions at a Monitoring Officer's Network Meeting, a pilot had been established with Monitoring Officers, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Ombudsman for a local resolution of low level complaints
- Denbighshire had a Self Registering Protocol to deal with low level complaints between Members, which had not been referred to the Ombudsman. This Protocol would be presented to a future meeting of the Forum, as it could assist in healing relations between Members which had broken down
- Members agreed with the contents of the letter and supported Powys' Standards Committee
- It was further suggested that a letter could be sent to the Ombudsman from the Forum supporting the comments made by Powys' Standards Committee.

### **AGREED-**

- (a) That a letter of support from the Forum be sent to Powys County Council's Standards Committee.**
- (b) That a letter from the Forum be sent to the Ombudsman supporting the comments made by Powys' Standards Committee.**

## 28. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was agreed that in future Any Other Business be added as a Standing Item to the agenda of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.

Members requested that a future item for discussion could be the role of the Standards Committee in relation to Town and Community Councils.

**AGREED-**

- (a) That Any Other Business be added as a Standing Item on future Agendas of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.**
  
- (b) That the Role of Standards Committees in relation to Town and Community Councils be discussed at the next meeting of the North Wales Standards Committees Forum.**

29. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Forum would be held early in the New Year of 2012.

(The meeting ended at 11.20 am)

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