

**Report To:** Standards Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 2nd December 2016

**Lead Member / Officer:** Gary Williams, Monitoring Officer

**Report Author:** Gary Williams, Monitoring Officer

**Title:** North Wales Standards Committee Forum

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**1. What is the report about?**

The report is about the meeting of the North Wales Standards Committee Forum (the Forum) which took place in Llangefni on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2016 and was attended by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the Ombudsman).

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To inform the Committee of the matters discussed at the meeting of the Forum.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That members of the Committee note the information contained within the report.

**4. Report details.**

- 4.1 The Forum was delighted to have in attendance the Ombudsman, Mr. Nick Bennett who gave a presentation and then answered questions of which he had been given notice prior to the meeting. The questions together with notes of the answers given are contained in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 During his presentation, the Ombudsman reiterated his support for the local resolution of complaints made by elected members about each other and expressed his opinion that it would be useful to extend the process to Town, City and Community Councils. He stressed that he was not issuing any sort of edict in this regard and that it would be a matter for local standards committees and the Town, City and Community Councils in their areas. He did say that he was aware that One Voice Wales had done some work with some town and community councils on this topic.
- 4.3 The Ombudsman welcomed the decrease in the number of complaints received in respect of County Councillors across Wales that he had been able to report in his annual report. He did make reference to the increase in the number of complaints relating to town and community councillors and explained that three town and community councils were responsible for the increase, having between them accounted for fifty of the complaints received during that period. These were Glyn Neath, Abertillery and Holyhead.

- 4.4 The Ombudsman pointed out that most complaints were closed after initial consideration and that the numbers referred to Standards Committees or the Adjudication Panel were very low which was in his view a matter for celebration.
- 4.5 The issue of managing his resources across the various fields in which he investigates complaints remains a matter that is most important to the Ombudsman. There has been a change in the draw on the resources of his office. Ten years ago, complaints from the health sector accounted for 15% of the total number of complaints referred to his office. The figure now is 35%. The Ombudsman stated that 76% of his resources are now used for the consideration of health complaints. In this context the Ombudsman repeated the message that he has given previously, that he will not use his powers to investigate low level or “silly” matters of complaint in respect of elected members but will instead hold resources to deal with the most serious breaches. The Ombudsman will always investigate matters involving the abuse of power, bullying and corruption.
- 4.6 The Ombudsman also reflected on the operation of his public interest test a year after its introduction. He confirmed that the factors to be taken into account in applying this test are, the seriousness of the alleged breach, whether personal gain had been deliberately sought, the misuse of a position of trust causing harm, discrimination and any previous similar behaviour on behalf of the relevant member.
- 4.7 Following the Ombudsman’s item, the Forum went on to consider the future operation of the Forum. There had not been a meeting of the Forum for some time and it was agreed that remained a useful tool for learning and the sharing of practice. It was agreed that in future the Forum would meet twice each year. The Forum will meet at a different authority each time in rotation. The host authority will chair the meeting and make all the necessary administrative arrangements. The Monitoring Officer of the host authority will always be in attendance. Denbighshire will host the next meeting in the spring of 2017.
- 4.8 The Forum then considered an issue regarding the bilingual completion of the register of interests by members and technological issues that have arisen in some areas. It was agreed that each authority would check the situation in their own authorities. There was also a discussion on the availability of mediation training for members of standards committees who may be involved in local resolution procedures

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

The report has no direct impact on the corporate priorities.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

There are no costs directly associated with the report.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment?**

This report does not require a wellbeing impact assessment.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

This matter has not been reported or consulted upon elsewhere.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report.

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

There are no risks directly associated with this report

**11. Power to make the Decision**

There is no decision required.