

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 10 January 2022
Report Subject	National Forum for Standards Committee Chairs
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Penn Report on the Review of the Ethical Regime in Wales (“the Penn Report”) commented on the variety of practice across Wales in how Standards Committees discharge their duties. It recommended that a national forum for the Chairs of Standards Committees should be established modelled on the forum that exists in North and Mid Wales.

The administration for the current Mid and Wales forum is supplied in turn by each Council, and this could continue with a more formalised rota. At present it is unlikely that meetings would take place in person but should physical meetings resume then a central venue would need to be found.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee supports the creation of an all Wales forum for Standards Committee Chairs
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE NATIONAL FORUM FOR STANDARDS COMMITTEE CHAIRS
1.01	The Penn report commented on the variety of practice across Wales in how Standards Committees discharge their duties. At paragraph 4.4.1 the report says: “I was struck by the variation in the way that Standards Committees in Wales see their remit and at the role played by the Independent Chairs of

	<p>Standards Committees. At the one extreme Standards Committees and their Independent Chairs seem to have either been given or have adopted a very limited role, meeting infrequently and only really active when there is a Hearing of a case referred by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. At the other extreme there are Standards Committees and Chairs that see their remit much wider than this, and as leading the development and maintenance of the ethical standards framework in that local authority.”</p>
1.02	<p>Richard Penn then went on to comment positively upon the work of the forum for Chairs of Standards Committees in North and Mid Wales. Whilst acknowledging the place for local decision making, he recommends that a national forum be established along the same lines - see paragraph 4.4.5</p> <p>“I attended a meeting of this Forum and had a very useful exchange with the Chairs and Monitoring Officers who attended. Although a Forum for the Chairs of Standards Committees in South Wales no doubt would serve a similar purpose in the facilitation of exchange of information and experiences about the work of Standards Committees in that part of Wales, I suggest that there should be an all-Wales Forum ... would encourage consistency of approach and the adoption of best practice across Wales.”</p>
1.03	<p>As agreed at the last Committee meeting, the Monitoring Officer has consulted other Councils on whether they would wish to support the creation of a national forum. The Monitoring Officers in other authorities have agreed to consult their Standards Committees on the issue.</p>
1.04	<p>There are a number of issues to consider with the creation of such a national forum. These are outlined below but none seem to pose an insurmountable problem:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Resources – in order to manage within the existing level of resources the national forum should replace rather than sit alongside the current Mid and North Wales forum; 2) Meeting format and location - previously the forum would meet in person on a peripatetic basis being hosted by each authority in turn. For the time being meetings are likely to be held remotely (which would save travel) but if they resumed meeting in person then a central location would need to be found. Typically, this would mean meeting in or near Llandrindod Wells. Perhaps more significantly venues in that area tend to be small and so would limit the number of attendees to 2 per authority; 3) Administration and advice – meetings of the Mid and North Wales forum are currently arranged and advised by the Monitoring Officer with each member authority taking a turn. If the forum was to span the whole of Wales then a formal rota would be advisable to ensure the fair distribution of duties; 4) Agendas – at present items for the agenda are suggested by all the member authorities. There is already a mail group for all the Monitoring Officers in Wales and this could be used to invite agenda items; 5) Meeting dates and frequencies – the current forum should meet every 6 months though this cycle has been disrupted by the response to the pandemic. In order to allow for Standards Committees to be consulted

	<p>on possible agenda items (and to include this within their own work programmes) it would be better if meetings took place at regular scheduled intervals.</p> <p>The Committee might perceive other issues that would also need to be addressed for such a forum to be successful.</p>
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	A national forum would not, of itself, require significantly more resources than the current Mid and North Wales forum. Indeed, if more authorities take part in arranging the meetings then this could reduce the current demand. Physical meetings would entail small cost for venue hire and travel which can be accommodated within the Committee's small budget.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	All authorities in Wales are being consulted.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	There are no issues arising from this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: Gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None