

NOTICE OF MEETING



Eryri National Park Authority

*Jonathan Cawley
Chief Executive
Snowdonia National Park Authority
Penrhyndeudraeth
Gwynedd LL48 6LF
Phone: (01766) 770274
E.mail: parc@eryri.llyw.cymru*

Meeting: Standards Committee

Date: Friday 2 October 2026

Time: 2.00 p.m.

Location: Eryri National Park Authority Office,
Penrhyndeudraeth and via Zoom

Members are asked to join the meeting 15 minutes before the designated start time

Councillors :
*Elfed Roberts, Nia Owen;

Naomi Luhde-Thompson.*

Independent Members
Mr. Mark Jones, Mr Robert Gwilym Lewis, Mr. Hywel Eifion Jones.

**This Agenda is also available in Welsh*



A G E N D A

Standards Committee

		Page Number
1.	Apologies for absence and Chairman's Announcements	
2.	Declarations of Interest To receive any disclosure of interest by members or officers in respect of any item of business.	
3.	Minutes The Chairman shall propose that the minutes of the Standards Committee held on 27 March 2026 be signed as a true record (copy herewith) and receive matters arising, for information.	3 - 5
4.	Nomination of Members for the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel To submit a report by the Director of Corporate Services. (Copy herewith)	6
5.	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales To submit a report by the Director of Corporate Services. (Copy herewith)	7
6.	Grant of Dispensations To submit a report by the Director of Corporate Services. (Copy herewith)	8 - 11
7.	Complaints Monitoring Report To submit a report by the Head of Administration and Customer Care. (Copy herewith)	12 - 14
8.	National Standards Forum Committee – Monday 29 June 2026 To receive minutes of the meeting, for information.	15 - 19



MINUTES
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
FRIDAY 27 MARCH 2026
National Park Office

PRESENT:

Members appointed by Gwynedd Council

Councillors Elfed Powell Roberts, Edgar Wyn Owen (*ex officio*);

Members appointed by Conwy County Borough Council

Members appointed by the Welsh Government

Ms Naomi Luhde-Thompson

Independent Members

Mr Mark Jones (Chairman), Mr Robert Gwilym Lewis;

Officers

Iwan Jones, Bethan Hughes, Eifion Jones.

The Director of Corporate Services announced that the meeting would be recorded to assist in the verification of the minutes.

1. Apologies for absence and Chair's Statements

Noted - as the Committee lacked one Independent Member, Councillor Nia Owen had withdrawn from attending the meeting to ensure the necessary balance of members.

2. Declaration of Interest

None.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 19 September 2025 were *submitted*.

The minutes were *adopted*, and the Chairman signed them as a true record.

Matters arising from the minutes:

- *Item 1: Election of Chair and Vice-Chair* -The Director of Corporate Services was informed that the Committee was still short of one independent member; that the post had been advertised but that only one application had been received and that person was not eligible for the post (as he was a member of a community council); - the post was about to be advertised again and the democratic services officers of Gwynedd county councils, Conwy and Anglesey had been notified about the post so that they can pass the advertisement on to their Independent Members.

- *Item 5: Nomination of Members for the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel* – The Chair thanked those Members who attended the Job Appraisal training day on 8 October and the session on conducting an Appraisal Appeal held on 15 October;
- *Item 6: Public Services Ombudsman for Wales* – Confirmed that information about the case brought before the Ombudsman had been sent to Members of the Authority, together with an offer of further training on the Code of Conduct;
- *Item 9: Standards Committee Chairs' Forum*
He confirmed that the Standards Committee Chairs' Forum had been informed of the appointment of Mr Mark Jones as the new Chair of the Standards Committee.

4. **Annual Report to the Authority's Annual General Meeting**

Submitted: Report by the Director of Corporate Services.

Reported:

- the background to the statutory duty and what was intended to be presented at the Authority's Annual General Meeting.

Noted:

- the Chair was willing to submit the report to the AGM;
- committee members' attendance at the training on Single Status Grading Appeals should be added to the report.

Recommendation:–

1. To discuss the contents of the report.
2. Agree the contents of the Annual Report to be submitted to the Authority as set out in Section 4 above subject to any additions/amendments that the Standards Committee may wish to make to it.

Resolved: to **accept** the Recommendation

5. **Declarations of Members' Interests**

Submitted: A report by the Director of Corporate Services.

Reported:

- that the number of declarations of interest is lower than usual and that this is possibly due to a decrease in the number of planning applications.

Recommendation:– to note the report, for information

Resolved: to **accept** the Recommendation

6. **Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy Review**

Submitted: A report by the Head of Administration and Customer Care.

Reported:

- the background to the creation of the policy and the need to review it

Noted:

- the draft policy was easy to read, and the examples contained in the report were particularly useful.

Recommendation:—

1. To discuss and review the attached updated draft policy.
2. To approve the revised draft Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy for submission to the National Park Authority for adoption.

Resolved: to **accept** the Recommendation

7. **Review of Confidential Disclosure Policy (Whistleblowing)**

Submitted: A report by the Head of Administration and Customer Care.

Reported:

- this report is related to the previous one;
- examples have been added to the original report in points 3.3 and 3.4 to further clarify the terms;
- some names and terms have been standardized in the update.

Noted:

- The Head of Administration and Customer Care or the Director of Corporate Services could be contacted should anyone have a concern about any aspect of the policy.

Recommendation:—

1. To discuss and review the attached updated draft policy
2. To approve the revised draft Confidential Disclosure Policy (Whistleblowing) for submission to the National Park Authority for adoption.

Resolved: to **accept** the Recommendation

8. **Standards Committee Chairs Forum – Monday 26 January 2026**

Submitted – Report on the meeting of the Standards Committee Chairs' Forum held on 26 January 2026 by the Chair.

Reported:

- Mr Mark Jones, chairman of the Standards Committee, attended the meeting;
- the minutes of the meeting had not yet been circulated but will be shared among the members once they have been received;
- it was a productive meeting, but not everything discussed was relevant to the Authority.

Recommendation:— to note the report for information.

Resolved:— to **accept** the Recommendation

9. **Any Other Business**

The Chair thanked the Director of Corporate Services and the Democratic Services Officer for meeting with him to introduce him to the position of Chair of the Standards Committee.

He also *noted* that this would be the last meeting of the Standards Committee for Iwan Jones, the Director of Corporate Services. She thanked him for all his work over the years and wished him well during his retirement.

The meeting ended at 14:25

MEETING	Standards Committee
DATE	2 October 2026
TITLE	Nomination of Members for the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel
REPORT BY	Director of Corporate Services
PURPOSE	To appoint three members and two substitute members to the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel

1. BACKGROUND

On 15th June 2011 the Authority adopted a revised Scheme of delegation that included changes to the terms of reference of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel. The revised arrangements provide that membership should comprise of three members plus two substitute members, all to be drawn from and chosen by the members of the Standards Committee. The terms of reference also provide that in appointing members to the Panel the Standards Committee shall have regard to the need for appropriate gender representation.

The role of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel is to consider appeals from the decision of the job evaluation panel which is usually conducted internally at officer level. The calling of a meeting of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel is a very infrequent occurrence. Historically, whilst the Authority was undertaking the job evaluation process, it is true to say that this Panel was at that time active. However, there is still a need for such a panel as an appeal could be lodged at any time by a member of staff who disagrees with the decision of the job evaluation panel.

When the Standards Committee last considered this matter on 19th September 2025 it resolved to appoint Mr Mark Jones, Councillor Elfed Roberts and Councillor Nia Owen as Members of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel, with Mr Robert Gwilym Lewis and Ms Naomi Luhde-Thompson appointed as substitute members.

The Standards Committee needs to consider the membership of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel annually following the AGM of the Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

To appoint three members and two substitute members from the membership of the Standards Committee to sit as members of the Single Status Grading Appeals Panel.

MEETING	Standards Committee
DATE	2 October 2026
TITLE	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
REPORT BY	Director of Corporate Services
PURPOSE	To advise the Committee on developments applicable to this Authority

1. BACKGROUND

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales publishes an Annual Report and Accounts.

The full report can be found on the Ombudsman's website (www.ombudsman.wales) under Publications and then Annual Report and Accounts.

Normally, only a very small minority of the total complaints received by the Ombudsman relates to the National Parks and I am pleased to report that the situation remains unchanged for 2025/26.

During this time, the number of Code of Conduct complaints referred to the Ombudsman was 324, a 3% increase from the previous year. Of these, 187 (58%) were complaints about town and community councillors and 136 (42%) about local authority councillors, with 1 further complaint concerning a national park councillor.

The Ombudsman closed 351 complaints about the Code of Conduct during 2025/26, of which only 85 (about 24%) were investigated. The Ombudsman referred 15 complaints to the Standards Committees of the relevant local authorities or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales – the same number as last year. Standards Committees of the relevant local authorities and the Adjudication Panel for Wales upheld 81% of the suggested breaches that were referred.

No public information is available regarding the complaint made about the national park councillor.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To note the contents of the report.

MEETING	Standards Committee
DATE	2 October 2026
TITLE	Grant of Dispensations
REPORT BY	Director of Corporate Services
PURPOSE	To grant dispensations to the Members of Gwynedd Council and Conwy County Borough Council

1. BACKGROUND

The Standards Committee has previously granted dispensations on a number of occasions. On 19th September 2025, the Standards Committee resolved to grant a dispensation for Members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd to enable them to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Cyngor Gwynedd for a period up to 31st December 2026 unless further extended by resolution of this Committee prior to 31st December 2026. The Standards Committee also resolved to grant a dispensation for Members appointed by Conwy County Borough Council to enable them to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Conwy County Borough Council for a period up to 31st December 2026 unless further extended by resolution of this Committee prior to 31st December 2026. As this period is due to expire before the Standards Committee is next scheduled to meet it is time to consider the matter further.

Prior to the grant of the dispensations referred to above and preceding grants of dispensation the adoption of the new Code of Conduct caused difficulties both in relation to quorum on the Authority and Planning and Access Committee and also from a loss of local knowledge as members had to withdraw from the meeting. Under the previous Code of Conduct members had been allowed to take part in the discussion and had often been a valuable source of information on various aspects of such applications.

When the Standards committee last considered this matter, it had regard to the Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001 as amended by the Local Government (Standards Committees, Investigations, Dispensations and Referral) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 which allowed the Standards Committee of this Authority to grant a dispensation where:

- “2 (a) *no fewer than half of the members of the relevant authority or of a committee of the authority (as the case may be) by which the business is to be considered has an interest which relates to that business;*
- (b) *no fewer than half of the members of a leader and cabinet executive of the relevant authority by which the business is to be considered has an interest which relates to that business and either paragraph (d) or (e) also applies;*
- (c) *in the case of a county or county borough council, the inability of the member to participate would upset the political balance of the relevant authority or of the committee of the authority by which the business is to be considered to such an extent that the outcome would be likely to be affected;*

(d) the nature of the member's interest is such that the member's participation in the business to which the interest relates would not damage public confidence in the conduct of the relevant authority's business;

(e) the interest is common to the member and a significant proportion of the general public;

(f) the participation of the member in the business to which the interest relates is justified by the member's particular role or expertise;

(g) the business to which the interest relates is to be considered by an overview and scrutiny committee of the relevant authority and the member's interest is not a pecuniary interest;

(h) the business which is to be considered relates to the finances or property of a voluntary organisation of whose management committee or board the member is a member otherwise than as a representative of the relevant authority and the member has no other interest in that business provided that any dispensation shall not extend to participation in any vote with respect to that business; or

(i) it appears to the committee to be in the interests of the inhabitants of the area of the relevant authority that the disability should be removed provided that written notification of the grant of the dispensation is given to the National Assembly for Wales within seven days in such manner as it may specify.

(j) it appears to the committee to be otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

- 3 (1) *A dispensation granted by the standards committee of a relevant authority under section 81(4) of the Act on the grounds set out in regulation 2(j) and which remains in effect, must be reviewed by the standards committee once in every 12 month period from the date on which the dispensation is first granted.*
- (2) *When conducting a review under paragraph (1) the standards committee must determine whether the dispensation should continue to have effect."*

It was satisfied that that both paragraph (a) and (d) above provide sufficient justification for the granting of a dispensation to members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Cyngor Gwynedd.

In relation to those members appointed by Conwy County Borough Council, it found that they are in a slightly different position as there are generally no issues relating to quorum. It found however that paragraph (d) above was equally applicable to both members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd and Conwy County Borough Council appointed members and on that basis granted a dispensation to members appointed by Conwy County Borough Council to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Conwy County Borough Council.

It can be confirmed that the dispensations previously granted by the Standards Committee have worked well in practise with the Authority and Planning and Access Committee in particular benefitting from the same both in relation to ensuring a quorum and no loss of local knowledge in the determining of applications. During the operation of a previous dispensation between 2010 and 2012 there have been planning applications that were particularly contentious. One example involved an application for sheltered housing in the Llan Ffestiniog area on land in the ownership of Cyngor Gwynedd. Members of Cyngor Gwynedd took a full part in proceedings. Officer recommendation was for approval. There were strong local objections to the proposed scheme and the previous Director of Corporate Services received correspondence from members of the public voicing concern that members of Cyngor Gwynedd were allowed to take part in the matter. However, on that occasion, following a site visit, the Planning and Access committee's decision was to refuse the application. This decision was the subject of an appeal which did not succeed and so members' views were exonerated.

Another contentious planning application involved an application by Cyngor Gwynedd for a new area school. Once again officer recommendation was for approval and once again there was strong local opposition to the scheme. Part of that opposition centred on the fact that members

of Cyngor Gwynedd would be allowed to take part in the decision making process. Concerns were raised that some of those members had voted on the issue as part of Cyngor Gwynedd's approval of its strategy. The previous Director of Corporate Services took the view that no decision had been taken by Cyngor Gwynedd on the actual planning application as this Authority is the Planning Authority for the area. The application was to decide on the planning merits of the application and the discussion at committee broadly followed the planning merits or otherwise of the application with the exception of a public speaker on behalf of the Applicant who referred to non-planning matters. On this occasion members decided to follow officer recommendation and planning permission was granted. The majority of members of Cyngor Gwynedd voted in favour of the application but there were also abstentions and some also voted against the application. Even if all members of Cyngor Gwynedd had declared and withdrawn from the meeting, on the assumption that the voting members remaining would not have voted differently, the application would still have been successful albeit on a reduced majority down from a majority of 9 in favour with 4 against to 5 in favour with 2 against.

Whilst there was undoubted concern in connection with this application, the previous Director of Corporate Services saw no evidence of irregularity by members of Cyngor Gwynedd. Such applications are by their very nature generally contentious applications with a wide range of views, but the final decision was one of approval in accordance with officer recommendation.

In September 2018 the Planning and Access Committee dealt with another contentious issue namely the application for planning permission for the Llanbedr relief road. In this matter members of Cyngor Gwynedd declared an interest but relied on the dispensation granted by the Standards Committee and took a full part in deciding the application.

A complaint was subsequently received alleging a breach of the Members Code of Conduct by members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd in their consideration of the planning application.

The complainant raised concerns that members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd who were present at the meeting, despite having signed declarations of interest, were allowed to fully participate in the decision making process which culminated in the application being granted planning permission.

The complaint was not upheld as the Standards Committee, in their meeting of the 7th of July 2017 had granted a general dispensation to Members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd and Conwy County Borough Council in such circumstances, to enable the Authority to continue to conduct its business effectively. A full explanation was given to the complainant.

The complainant referred the matter to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, and also referred to the fact that only 10 members out of the possible 18 were present in the Planning and Access Committee on the day.

The Ombudsman explained to the complainant how the law regarding the granting of dispensations worked, as well as the quorate numbers required by law for a planning committee to proceed. Both had complied with legal requirements in this instance. The ombudsman therefore declined to investigate the matter further on the grounds that it was a properly made decision that a public body is entitled to make.

The Planning and Access Committee once more considered the Llanbedr Relief Road but on this occasion there were no complaints regarding the use of the grant of dispensation by members of Cyngor Gwynedd.

In 2021 the dispensation was used again. The application was a contentious one for the demolition of a former school building and for the erection of five supported living units at Dolgellau. On this occasion the committee resolved contrary to officer recommendation to refuse permission on the grounds that the development would result in the loss of a traditional building and negatively impact on the wider historic environment of Dolgellau. A second reason was also given namely that insufficient information had been submitted in relation for the need for the proposal in order for the local planning authority to make an informed decision on the impact of the development.

The last time the dispensation was used was in relation to a planning application for Sappers Bridge at Betws-y-coed. The application was heard by the Planning and Access Committee on 5th March 2025. As reported previously to the Standards Committee on this occasion, whilst it was unfortunately not possible to notify members in sufficient time to enable them to attend the Planning Committee in person, notification was given thereafter so that members could look through the recording of the same to assess how the dispensation worked in practice and Councillor Nia Owen indicated that she had found the grant of the dispensation to be useful.

If the Standards committee is minded to grant a further dispensation it must be stressed that, as before, the granting of dispensations in such terms would not preclude the operation of any other part of the Code of Conduct so, for example, if a member appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd was also the owner of land adjacent to the application land owned by Cyngor Gwynedd then notwithstanding the fact that he/she had the benefit of a dispensation on his/her membership with Gwynedd he/she would of course still have to declare a prejudicial interest. The reason for this is that the decision would affect land in the Authority's area in which he/she has a beneficial interest and a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard the personal interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice his/her judgement of the public interest.

Having considered the issues, I consider that it would be in the interests of the Authority to grant dispensations to both members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd (Grounds 2 (a) and (d)) and Conwy County Borough Council (Ground 2 (d)) for a set period so that the Standards Committee can then revisit the matter and assess the situation once more.

2. RECOMMENDATION

1. To grant a dispensation for Members appointed by Cyngor Gwynedd to enable them to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Cyngor Gwynedd for a period up to 31st December 2027 unless further extended by resolution of this Committee prior to 31st December 2027.
2. To grant a dispensation for Members appointed by Conwy County Borough Council to enable them to take a full part in the determination of issues relating to Conwy County Borough Council for a period up to 31st December 2027 unless further extended by resolution of this Committee prior to 31st December 2027.

3. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Standards Committees (Grant of Dispensations) (Wales) Regulations 2001

The Local Government (Standards Committees, Investigations, Dispensations and Referral) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016

MEETING	Standards Committee
DATE	2 October 2026
TITLE	Complaints Monitoring Report
REPORT BY	Head of Administration and Customer Care & Director of Corporate Services
PURPOSE	To report on the written complaints received by the Authority

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. All formal complaints are registered and monitored centrally, as part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring excellent customer care in our service provision. The Authority received 13 formal complaints directly relating to the Authority during the 2025/26 financial year.
- 1.2. Of the 13 complaints received, 7 related to the planning service, 2 regarding the Conservation, Trees and Agriculture Service, 1 related to GDPR concerns, 1 regarding the Warden Service, 1 regarding the Property Service and 1 related to rubbish on road verges.
- 1.3. All complaints were thoroughly investigated, and all received a response within the target of 15 working days. Of the complaints investigated, 5 were upheld or partially upheld. One complaint was subsequently referred to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales for investigation. However, the Ombudsman declined to investigate the matter further.
- 1.4. Where the Authority's standard of service has fallen short, we have duly apologised and taken steps to address the problems immediately.
- 1.5. A summary of the complaints upheld or partially upheld are set out in the appendix.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. That the Committee note the content of the report**

Summary of Complaints Upheld or Partially Upheld

Planning Service

Incorrect advice and lack of response from Staff (April 2025)

During a visit to the office to look at a planning application, the complainant was advised to submit an objection online. However, the complainant didn't have the required skills or confidence to submit an online objection. They should have been advised by the member of the planning staff that they had the option to submit an objection via e-mail, hand delivery or through the post as well as online.

In addition, the complaint had subsequently asked the Planning Officer to inform them of the planning application outcome. When no response was received the matter was chased up by phone calls and e-mails, but no response was received.

An apology was issued to the complainant on both these issues, which fell below expected service standards.

Complaint about a Member of Staff (July 2025)

A complaint was received regarding the behaviour of a member of staff who was felt to be abrupt and unhelpful by the complainant during two telephone conversations in which they requested clarity on a planning application fee.

The matter was investigated and an apology given to the complainant. The matter was addressed with the member of staff in question, which included a discussion on the appropriate level of service and customer care required when dealing with members of the public.

Complaint about Planning Application Process (February 2026)

A complaint was received by both the planning applicant and the agent regarding how a planning application was processed and the general level of communication by the Planning Officer.

The applicants were unwilling to enter into a Section 106 agreement which was required to accompany their application for a new dwelling, and were aware that this meant that the application would be refused as it did not conform to policy. The agent informed the Planning Officer that an Authority Member had agreed to 'call' in the application to the Planning and Access Committee. The Planning Officer did not inform the agent that he had not received a written request from the Member to 'call in' the application within the required timeframe. He should also have made it clear that without this request, the application would be decided under Delegated Powers. The application was subsequently refused under Delegated Powers.

The lack of communication on this application fell short of the expected service standards required, and for this an apology was duly given along with advice on the best way forward in terms of re-submitting the planning application.

Conservation, Trees and Agriculture Service

Concern of Chemical Runoff during Rhododendron Eradication (November 2025)

A concern was received regarding the possibility of chemical run-off from work carried out to eradicate rhododendron through stem injection from a landowner with particular sensitivities from the adjacent land. Work was suspended whilst the concern was reviewed and a professional opinion sought.

The matter is ongoing as the viability of alternative no-chemical eradication methods is investigated, taking advantage whilst work has to be suspended over the bird nesting season.

Property Service

Complaint regarding Staff Member (February 2026)

A complaint was received from an Authority tenant regarding how a member of staff had dealt with their tenancy over the years.

A thorough investigation was conducted into the long and protracted history, and some aspects of the complaint were not upheld. However, it was found that other issues were valid and were upheld. In conclusion it was found that the level of service received from the Authority in the overall management of their tenancy had fallen well short of expected standards, and for that an apology was given.

The complainant subsequently referred the matter to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales who declined to investigate the matter further. The Ombudsman stated in her response that she was satisfied that the Authority had identified and taken appropriate actions to address the acknowledged failings to prevent future recurrences.

**National Standards Committee Chairs Forum -
Monday 29 June 2026, 14.00 – 16.00 (Online)**

Draft - Agenda

1. Welcome – Chair Julia Hughes (JH).
2. Notes of Previous meeting 26 January 2026 (*attached*) and any matters arising – All.

Notes of meetings will be circulated after each meeting to Chairs and may be shared with their Standards Committees and Monitoring Officers.
3. President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales Judge Meleri Tudur
4. Items highlighted by the Monitoring Officers & Governance Group
5. Local Government Elections 2027 - Induction materials on ethics and standards – Cerith Thomas
6. Panel Performance Assessments (PPA) – Cerith Thomas
7. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) update – Michelle Morris (MM).
8. Forum discussion on:
 - a) Recent cases of interest - Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) and Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in previous 6 months – Justine Cass (JC).
 - b) Hearings - Opportunity to share experiences in a safe learning environment – All.
9. Any other business – All.
10. Date of next meeting – Monday 25 January 2027, 14.00 – 16.00, online (TBC).

Standards Committees Chairs Forum - Wales

Monday, 29 June 2026 @ 2pm, via Teams

Notes

1. Welcome and Purpose

Julia Hughes (JH), Chair, welcomed attendees and noted the strong attendance at the meeting. The Forum was reaffirmed as a safe space for sharing practice, learning from experience and reflecting collectively on standards matters across Wales. It was noted that the meeting notes would be circulated to Standards Committee Chairs and Monitoring Officers.

2. Updates and Matters Arising

2.1 Local Resolution Protocol (LRP)

The Chair advised that a follow-up workshop on the Local Resolution Protocol had been scheduled for 2 July 2026. The purpose of the workshop is to test stakeholder feedback and help inform advice to Welsh Government. Chairs were invited to submit any views in advance.

2.2 Civility and Respect Pledge

Chairs also noted that a Wales-specific version of the Civility and Respect Pledge had been launched in April 2026.

3. Notes of Previous Meeting

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. Members highlighted key learning from the previous discussion, including changes in some authorities regarding Group Leader involvement in standards processes and the continuing value of shared practice across Standards Committees.

4. Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) Update

4.1 Functions of APW

The Forum received an update from Judge Meleri Tudur, President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales, on its role and functions. This included reference to Case Tribunals, which consider first instance decisions, and Appeal Tribunals, which consider appeals against Standards Committee decisions.

4.2 Key Processes

Members were reminded that applications for permission to appeal standards committee decisions must be submitted within 21 days and that permission is granted where there is a reasonable prospect of success.

4.3 Key Messages

The APW reported that caseload remains low, although issues relating to social media misuse are increasing. Members also noted that interim case tribunals, including suspension, remain available but are not widely used at present.

4.4 Forward Look

Looking ahead, tribunal reform and digitalisation are anticipated, and recruitment is underway to increase the number of tribunal members and strengthen the Panel's capacity. The Forum also noted that greater formality in hearings is likely in future, reflecting a wider sense that tribunals are encountering growing instances of a lack of respect. The APW President also mentioned that the Panel had recently been brought within the Welsh Language Standards framework and expected to be fully compliant with the standards by the end of the year.

4.5 Engagement with Standards Committees

It was noted that the Adjudication Panel for Wales is now routinely informed by the Ombudsman's office when Standards Committee decisions are issued, improving visibility of potential appeals. Standards Committees were encouraged to also notify the APW directly when decisions are made, to assist the Panel in anticipating and managing appeal activity within statutory timeframes. The APW President indicated that the Panel is open to receiving comments, suggestions, criticisms and compliments through its generic email address, which is available on its website, although it may not be appropriate or possible to respond to every comment or act on every suggestion. It was also noted that APW hearings are public, and that members of the public may attend in person or, where a public hearing is held by video, observe online by arrangement.

5. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Update

5.1 Performance and Caseload

Michelle Morris, Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, provided an update on performance and caseload. Members noted that additional temporary staff resources had been invested in the Code Team, alongside procedural changes to improve timeliness and reduce aged cases. This had contributed to a significant reduction in aged investigations over 12 months, from 27 at the end of May 2025 to 6 at the end of May 2026.

For 2025/26, new Code complaints were 3% higher than the previous year (351 total). Around 85% of Code complaints were closed at assessment stage, with an average closure time of 27 days against a target of 42 days. The proportion of complaints progressing to investigation remained at 15%, in line with previous years.

Members noted that 85 Code investigations were closed during 2025/26, compared with 50 in the previous year, and that 15 referrals were made to the Adjudication Panel for Wales or Standards Committees, the same figure as the previous year.

Measure	31 May 2025	31 May 2026
Number of open investigations	75	50
Number of open aged investigations over 12 months	27	6

5.2 Current Trends

For 2026/27, the Forum noted that, as at 31 May 2026, 64 new Code complaints had been received, representing a 156% increase compared with the same period the previous year. No clear themes had yet been identified from that increase.

The average age for closure at assessment stage was 33 days, against a target of 42 days, compared with 27 days at the same point the previous year. The average age for closure at investigation stage was 190 days, compared with 418 days at the same point the previous year.

Members also noted that seven referrals to Standards Committees were awaiting hearing dates. Four hearings had already taken place and breaches had been upheld in each case.

5.3 Priorities

The Ombudsman's priorities for the year include embedding the procedural changes already made, using additional funding to make Code Team posts permanent, preventing cases from becoming aged and reducing aged cases to zero.

5.4 Key Themes

Equality and respect remains the dominant category, accounting for approximately 50% of complaints, and will continue to be prioritised by the Ombudsman's office.

6. Training and Development (Hearings)

6.1 Key Discussion Points

The Forum discussed training and development needs relating to hearings. There was strong support for practical training on chairing hearings, including mock or simulated hearings and opportunities to share experience between authorities.

6.2 Suggestions

Suggestions included exploring mentoring arrangements, while recognising the need to protect independence, and considering whether Chairs could observe hearings where appropriate. Members also suggested that training should become a standing agenda item for the Forum.

6.3 Actions / Opportunities

The APW President offered to provide a training session on hearings. Further discussion will be needed on how this could be delivered and what capacity may be available.

7. Cases of Interest

A summary paper covering cases from the previous six months had been circulated by Justine Cass, Panel Advisor. Members noted key themes relating to equality and respect, alongside conduct issues arising from email and social media use.

7.1 Key Issue Raised

A key issue raised was the balance between providing early support and training to councils, while maintaining independence where matters may later proceed to a hearing.

8. Items raised by the Chairs. Hearings – Experience Sharing

Mel Jehu, Chair of Merthyr Tydfil Standards Committee, highlighted how demanding and unfamiliar chairing hearings can be, particularly for new Chairs. Members noted that both parties, including the respondent and the Ombudsman's representative, may be legally represented, often by KCs. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales commented that the Ombudsman's office is usually represented by a KC in such proceedings, and that this reflects the nature and formality of the process.

There was stronger support for a mock hearing than for mentoring arrangements as a way of helping Chairs prepare for the practical demands, complexity and formality of hearings. It was also suggested that a list could be developed showing which Chairs had previous experience of hearings, together with the nature of the appeal, to support peer learning and signposting.

9. Local Government Elections 2027 – Induction

Cerith Thomas, WLGA Improvement Team, made the Forum aware that national induction materials are being developed ahead of the 2027 local government elections. The materials are expected to include content on the Code of Conduct, AI, misinformation and digital behaviour, and social media awareness. It was noted that the materials would be delivered locally by authorities.

10. Any Other Business

Members gave positive feedback on the value of the Forum as a space for sharing practice and learning from experience across Wales. A suggestion was made that training should be included as a regular agenda item.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 25 January 2027, 14:00 – 16:30 online via Teams