

## **Independent Review Of The Ethical Standards Framework – provided by Richard Penn**

At a meeting of the Partnership Council for Wales on 1 March the Minister for Housing and Local Government discussed a range of issues connected to the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. One of the issues discussed was her intention to commission an independent review of the ethical standards framework. Leaders agreed this was timely in light of the changes to the framework set out in the Act and the time which has elapsed since the framework was first established.

The ethical standards framework in Wales was established in 2000, more than 20 years ago, and has remained largely unchanged, though there have been a number of small modifications to improve the operation of the framework over this period. The subordinate legislation underpinning the framework was last reviewed and amended in 2016. The model code of conduct, first introduced in 2001, was significantly recast in 2008 and further amended in 2016.

The review will take place in two phases.

- The first phase will involve engagement with partners to establish views about the process and operation of the framework including details of where the framework works well and whether there are areas which could be improved. The outcome of this first phase will be a roadmap for building on the positive elements of the framework while strengthening those areas where it is considered improvements could be made. Options to bring the requirements of the register of interests provisions in the Model Code of Conduct Order in line with the policy of the Act to stop councillors' addresses being published will also be explored as part of this work.
- Phase two will focus on working with partners and stakeholders to deliver the necessary changes.

I am a former Chief Executive of two major local authorities in England, and amongst the other posts that I have held since returning home to Wales I was the first NAW Commissioner for Standards from 2000 to 2012. I have been commissioned to undertake this review, with the aim to report to Ministers by the end of June. The intention is for any changes to be made ahead of the local government elections in May 2022.

I welcome the opportunity to meet with Chairs of Standards Committees. Generally I am interested in:

- what they consider are the strengths and weakness of the current Framework,
- how it might be improved and
- how the requirements of the recent legislation will be managed.
- The big question is how can ethical standards in local government in Wales be enhanced, and on a practical point how can the number of complaints be reduced?