

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Monday, 12 July 2010 at 5.15 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Davies, Mason and Mellings and non-elected Independent Members, Mr Brereton (Vice-Chair) (from 5.45 pm) and Mr Tebbutt (Chair)

Officers

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Management Support Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members that they should declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests at this point and that they should leave the meeting room before any item, in which they had a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the last meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 1 March 2010.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Mason and

Resolved that the Committee agree the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 1 March 2010, and that they be signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

There were no questions, statements or petitions from members of the public.

5 Update on Standards for England

The Deputy Monitoring Officer briefed Members of the Committee on the Government's intention to abolish the Standards Board regime and the implications of that decision.

He explained that although it had been proposed to abolish the regime, the Committee should continue to deal with their business as usual. He confirmed the Annual Assembly has been cancelled for this year, and Standards for England have advised that they no longer wish to receive a quarterly return report on complaints.

A discussion took place regarding how abolition of the Standards Board regime will affect the Authority, including, whether any savings would be made.

Resolved that the Committee note the verbal update provided by the Deputy Monitoring Officer

6 Update on Recruitment of Independent Members

At the last meeting of the Standards Committee, Members agreed that the recruitment process for two additional Non-Elected, Independent Members commence. Accordingly, officers prepared an information pack and placed an advertisement (as required by legislation) in the local press. There were five expressions of interest and three applications were received. The intention was to hold interviews prior to the July meeting of the Fire Authority with a view to taking a recommendation regarding appointment to that meeting for consideration. In the meantime, however, the Government had announced its intention to 'abolish the Standards Board regime'. Under the circumstances the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority had instructed officers to discontinue the recruitment process, until such time as the Government's intentions were known. The three applicants had been notified of this development.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the applications for Independent Member had been kept on file and would be revisited, if required.

Resolved that the Committee note the update provided on the agenda

7 Review of Standards Committee Procedures

This report provided the Committee with proposed amendments to a number of procedures in relation to the processing and investigation of complaints that a Member of the Authority has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained that in order to maintain consistency and transparency the procedures need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

Councillor Mellings requested that all references to Town and Parish Councillors be removed from Appendix B – Assessment and Review Criteria.

Mr Brereton joined the meeting at this point (5.45 pm).

Councillor Davies suggested that extra wording be added to the delegation to the Monitoring Officer in Appendix D on Page 1, to provide further clarification on when the delegation could be made permanent, and if changes could be made in individual circumstances. The Deputy Monitoring Officer suggested an additional paragraph to the effect:

‘The Monitoring Officer has delegated authority to amend this procedure, if the individual circumstances of a case require it. However, any permanent change to the procedure (such as an alteration required due to a change in legislation) must be subject to approval by the Standards Committee at the next scheduled Standards Committee meeting.’

Members confirmed they were happy with the proposed amendment.

Subject to the above it was proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Mellings and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Approve the Monitoring Officer Protocol and Assessment and Review Criteria (Appendices A and B);
- b) Approve the revised Local Investigation and Local Hearing Procedures (Appendices C and D); and
- c) Agree that the Monitoring Officer has delegated authority to amend the procedures, if he considers it necessary to do so

8 Standards Bulletin

Members received the latest Bulletin no. 47, issued by Standards for England, copies of which had been emailed to all Members (including the Independent Members of the Standards Committee). It was noted that some of the information, particularly that relating to the Annual Assembly (which has now been cancelled), was out-of-date.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer brought Members’ attention to the section on ‘New Online Guides’ on page 7 of the Bulletin, which provided a lot of useful information for Members, including the ‘Blogging quick guide’.

Resolved that Bulletin no. 47, issued by Standards for England, be noted

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm.