

Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact John Redmond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260203 or Sharon Lloyd, Corporate Support Manager, on 01743 260210.

1 Purpose of Report

This report advises of the work carried out by the Fire Authority's Standards Committee during 2012/13.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note the Annual Report of the Standards Committee.

3 Background

The Standards Committee Work Plan 2013/14 lists preparation of an Annual Report on the work of the Committee for submission to the Fire Authority as one of the activities to be completed by October 2013. Accordingly, this report sets out the work carried out by the Committee during 2012/13.

4 Constitution, Meetings and Training

The constitution of the Committee was last reviewed by its Members in March 2013, when it recommended minor changes, which were subsequently agreed by the Fire Authority. The constitution was also reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2013.

The Chair of the Committee is Councillor Bennett and the Vice-Chair is Councillor Mellings. Mr Christopher Humphries is the Authority's Independent Person (as set out in section 28 of the Localism Act), appointed by the Fire Authority at its meeting in July 2013. Mr Humphries is not a member of the Standards Committee or the Fire Authority but can be approached to give an independent view about standards issues, either by the Monitoring Officer or the Member, about whom a complaint has been made.

During 2012/13 the Committee has met three times: in January 2012 and March and September 2013.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided Fire Authority Members with Code of Conduct training on 13 February 2013.

5 Role of the Committee

The principal role of the Committee is to promote and maintain a high standard of conduct by Members, to oversee the Register of Members' Interests and to oversee the effectiveness of the Authority's procedures for investigating and responding to complaints about Members.

The full terms of reference of the Committee can be found in Section 3 of the Members' Handbook or on the Fire Authority's website at:

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/fra/membershandbook/section-3-v1.0-august-2013.pdf>

6 Code of Conduct

In July 2012 the Fire Authority adopted a new Code of Conduct to reflect the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. The Standards Committee has since reviewed the new Code and has recommended a minor change, namely in the web link provided and the addition of the words 'and will leave the room during debate and voting on the issue' on page two to provide greater clarity.

The proposed link will provide direct access to the appropriate web page, rather than access merely to the website. The Code has been incorporated into the Members' Handbook and is available to view on the Fire Authority website via the following link:

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/fra/membershandbook/section-12-v1.0-august-2013.pdf>

All Fire Authority Members have signed a new undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct.

7 Register of Members' Interests

Under the Localism Act 2011, all Members are required to register their disclosable pecuniary interests and those of their partner, if known. Members are also required to provide written notification, within 28 days, of any disclosure of a disclosable pecuniary interest, made at a meeting, which is not included in their Register of Interests.

In July 2012 a new Disclosable Pecuniary Interests form was drawn up and sent to all Members for completion. Members joining the Fire Authority since then have also completed the form. Completed Disclosable Pecuniary Interest forms are available to view at Fire Headquarters and on the Fire Service website via the following link:

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-the-service/fra/members>

Although Members are not required to complete a form each year, the Standards Committee has taken the view that it is good practice for all Members to be prompted annually in an attempt to ensure that the forms are up-to-date. Accordingly, each Member will be sent a copy of their form in September 2013, requesting that they sign to confirm that the details are still correct or that they complete a fresh form to include all current details.

8 Protocols

The Standards Committee has reviewed the Fire Authority's Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and recommended a number of changes in order to bring it into line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and subsequent regulations. In addition, the Committee has reviewed the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and proposed some minor amendments. All of these recommendations have been agreed by the Fire Authority.

9 Complaints and Complaints Procedure

During the year 2012/13 no complaints have been made relating to breach of the Code of Conduct by Fire Authority Members.

The Committee has recommended a new structure for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints, which has been adopted by the Fire Authority. It is far less bureaucratic and formal than that required under the previous standards regime and is considered to be more proportionate.

Code of Conduct complaint forms are available to the public from the reception at Fire Service Headquarters and on Fire Authority website at:

<https://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-the-service/fra/complaints/complaint-form>

10 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

11 Legal Comment

The new ethical framework for Fire Authority Members is governed by the Localism Act 2011. The work undertaken by the Standards Committee, outlined in this report, is compliant with the relevant statutory requirements.

12 Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has not been completed, as this report provides only factual information relating to the work of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee.

13 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

14 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.