

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Friday, 8 March 2013 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Bennett (Chair), Carter, Dr Jones and Mellings (Vice-Chair)

Officers

Chief Fire Officer, Monitoring Officer and Executive Support Officer

1 Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Councillor Dr Jones

That Councillor Bennett be elected Chair of the Standards Committee to hold office for the ensuing year.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Bennett was duly elected Chair.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones and seconded by Councillor Bennett

That Councillor Mellings be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee to hold office for the ensuing year.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Mellings was duly appointed Vice-Chair.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Minnery.

4 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The Chair reminded Members that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter, in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and that they should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

No Pecuniary Interests were disclosed.

5 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 16 January 2012. Of those Members, who had attended that meeting, only Councillors Bennett and Mellings remained on the Committee. Councillor Kiernan, who did attend, had signed a copy of the minutes to confirm that they represented a correct record of the meeting. Members were, therefore, asked to agree that they be signed by the Chair accordingly.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 16 January 2012, be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record

6 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received, from members of the public.

7 Standards Committee Constitution

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members in order to carry out a review and make recommendations regarding any amendments required to the Fire Authority. The report also asked the Committee to decide on the frequency of its meetings and when they should take place.

The Monitoring Officer (MO) suggested that the Committee consider amending the Terms of Reference to include reviewing the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations. The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

Councillor Mellings referred to the first bullet point of the Terms of Reference and how the Committee should ensure that a high standard of conduct is maintained by Members. The MO explained that this is an issue of proportionality, with proper behaviour being encouraged and any issues being addressed as and when they arise. Any new Members should also be made aware of the Authority's expected standard of conduct.

Whilst the Committee agreed that there should be a minimum of two meetings per year, there was some debate as to when they should take place. As a consensus could not be reached, it was agreed that the meeting dates be agreed between the Chair of the Committee and officers.

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

Resolved that the Committee agree:

- a) To recommend to the Fire Authority the proposed amendments to the constitution of the Standards Committee, attached as an appendix to the report, including the responsibility to review both the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations; and
- b) That there should be a minimum of two meetings per annum with the dates to be agreed between the Chair of the Committee and officers

8 Review of Role Descriptions and Skills and Competencies

This report brought to the notice of the Committee, the Role Descriptions for its Chair and Vice-Chair and the Role Description and Skills and Competencies for the Fire Authority's Independent Person in order for the Committee to make recommendations to the Fire Authority regarding any amendments required.

The MO presented this report and suggested that the Committee consider amending the first bullet point under Main Responsibilities in both the Chair and Vice-Chair Role Descriptions to read as follows:

'To work closely with the Chief Fire Officer, the Chair of the Fire Authority and the Monitoring Officer in order to promote and maintain a high standard of conduct by Members'.

The Committee agreed with this suggestion.

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones, and

Resolved that the Committee agreed to recommend to the Fire Authority:

- a) The Role Descriptions for the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee (attached at Appendices A and B respectively), subject to including reference to the Monitoring Officer in the first bullet point under Main Responsibilities;
- b) To delete the Role Description and Person Specification for Independent, Non-Elected Member of the Standards Committee; and
- c) The Role Description and Skills and Competencies for the Fire Authority's Independent Person (attached at Appendices C1 and C2 respectively).

9 Standards Committee Work Plan 2013/14

This report put forward a 2013/14 Work Plan for the Standards Committee for consideration and approval by Members.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones, and

Resolved that the Committee approve the 2013/14 Work Plan, attached as an appendix to the report, without any amendment

10 Update on Implementation of the New Standards Regime

This report provided the Committee with an update on implementation of the new standards regime.

The Committee requested that in light of recommendation b) on this report, Mr Humphries be invited to attend a Fire Authority meeting. The MO undertook to arrange this with Mr Humphries.

Councillor Mellings referred to the last bullet point in section 4 of the report, which stated that Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd had been appointed to provide independent support and advice to Independent Persons. Councillor Mellings asked what the nature of the support was and what fees were being charged.

The MO confirmed that a flat fee of £300 had been charged for the service, which had been paid by Telford & Wrekin Council. Paul Hoey, a co-director of Hoey Ainscough Associates, had held a senior role at Standards for England. The support offered by the company was primarily a website, which included a forum for Independent Persons. The MO reported that Mr Humphries has been using the forum and has already raised some issues with the MO as a result.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones, and

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the work undertaken to implement the new standards regime;
- b) Agree to recommend to the Fire Authority that it confirm that on 1 July 2013 Mr Christopher Humphries be appointed as the sole Independent Person (as set out in section 28 of the Localism Act 2011) and that Mr Michael Tebbutt be removed from his Independent Person responsibilities in accordance with statutory requirements; and
- c) Note that no complaints had been received since the implementation of the new standards regime

11 Review of Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality

This report asked the Standards Committee to review the Fire Authority's Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality and to make recommendations to the Authority regarding any changes to be made.

The MO presented this report and asked the Committee to consider if it was appropriate for the Protocol to apply to an Independent Person, appointed by the Fire Authority, as stated in the introduction to the Protocol. The Committee did not think that it was appropriate and agreed with the Chief Fire Officer's suggestion that the introduction be amended to read 'This Protocol applies to Members of the Fire Authority and acts as guidance to Independent Persons, appointed by the Fire Authority'.

It was proposed by Councillor Dr Jones, seconded by Councillor Mellings, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority the Draft Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality, attached as an appendix to the report, subject to amending the introduction to read:

'...applies to Members of the Fire Authority and acts as guidance to Independent Persons, appointed by the Fire Authority'.

12 Review of Protocol on Member / Officer Relations

This report asked the Standards Committee to review the Fire Authority's Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and to make recommendations to the Authority regarding any changes to be made.

It was proposed by Councillor Carter, seconded by Councillor Dr Jones, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend the draft Protocol, attached as an appendix to the report, to the Fire Authority for agreement

The meeting closed at 2.28 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....