

Joint Standards Committee

Report of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report updates Members on the latest position regarding the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee, asks Members to decide upon the way forward, and, depending upon their decision, to proceed with the recruitment of two additional Non-Elected, Independent Members to the Standards Committee.

2 Recommendations

That the Standards Committee:

a) Note the latest position regarding the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee;

b) Decide upon the way forward; and,

if the Committee decides not to proceed with establishing a Joint Standards Committee,

c) Commence with the recruitment of two additional Non-Elected, Independent Members to the Committee.

3 Background

At its meeting in October 2009 the Standards Committee considered a report concerning the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee. Although generally supportive of a joint approach, Members did voice a number of concerns, particularly about the possible dilution of transparency to the public and the benefits to the Fire Authority in relation to the costs.

After a wide-ranging debate the Committee decided to recommend to the Fire Authority that it consider *in principle* establishing a Joint Standards Committee with Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council. The Fire Authority considered and agreed this recommendation at its December 2009 meeting. The Committee did not feel, however, that it had sufficient information in October, on which to make an informed decision about proceeding further. It, therefore, instructed the Monitoring Officer to prepare structures, procedures and costings for the further consideration by the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer has since reviewed the resources available and considered the significant amount of work involved, not only to prepare those draft structures but also to implement and run a Joint Committee, if the current respective Standards Committees were in agreement to proceed. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the appropriate level of resources are available in the short term for this work to be done and this also casts doubt upon the viability of the proposal on a long-term basis.

Furthermore, since October Shropshire Council has indicated that it does not wish, at this time, to be involved in the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee.

4 The Way Forward

In light of the above, Members are asked to consider whether to put the establishment of a Joint Standards Committee on hold for the time being. If they decide to do so, it will be necessary to start the recruitment process for an additional two Non-Elected, Independent Members to be appointed to the Standards Committee. Although two such Members resigned, it was agreed not to replace them, as it was unlikely that they would be required, if a Joint Standards Committee were to be established.

5 Financial Implications

Legislation requires the Fire Authority to place an advertisement in a local newspaper, when recruiting Non-Elected, Independent Members to its Standards Committee, the cost of which will be several hundred pounds. These Members, when appointed, will be entitled to a co-optee allowance of £273 per annum, plus £53 for up to 4 hours and £106 for over 4 hours spent considering locally allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. It is anticipated that all of these costs can be contained within existing budgets, unless a number of allegations were to be made, in which case the costs would have to be found from reserves.

6 Legal Comment

Establishing a Joint Standards Committee is a voluntary arrangement allowed under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) and The Standards Committee (Further Provisions)(England) Regulations 2009.

If the Standards Committee decides not to proceed with arrangements for a Joint Standards Committee at the moment, it can consider the matter again at a later date.

If the Standards Committee decides not to proceed with arrangements for a Joint Standards Committee (and retain the Committee's current terms of reference), it leaves two vacancies for Non-Elected, Independent Members of the Committee. The process set out in The Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008 will need to be following, when selecting candidates for those vacancies.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising specifically from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

8 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

9 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*