

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Standards Committee
held on Wednesday, 4 September 2013, at 3.30 pm
in the Sycamore Room at Service Headquarters, Shrewsbury**

Present

Members

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

Officers

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Services), Deputy Monitoring Officer and Corporate Support Manager

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Cherrington.

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

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

Councillor Mellings declared a disclosable pecuniary interests in item 6 on the agenda, in that he was a co-signatory to the request for a dispensation.

3 Minutes

Members were asked to agree the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 8 March 2013, and that they be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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

Resolved that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 8 March 2013, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

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

5 Committee Constitution

This report brought the latest version of the Committee's constitution to the notice of its Members.

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

Resolved that Members note the constitution of the Standards Committee

6 Dispensation Request from Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin, Kiernan, Mellings and Minnery

This report presented an application for a dispensation from Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin, Kiernan, Mellings and Minnery.

Having declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in this item previously in the meeting, Councillor Mellings left the room at this point (3.35 pm) prior to the consideration of this matter.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Deputy Monitoring Officer advised that a disclosable pecuniary interest existed in this case, because these Members had disclosed on their Register of Interests form that they were directors of a company.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that a dispensation, if granted, would cover situations where, for instance, Members, who sat on the Board, wished to provide reports on the company or where some factual detail about the company appeared in a report.

However there would be circumstances where there would be a conflict of interests or bias, which could affect the integrity of the decision-making process if members who were directors in the fire authority company remained to take part in the decision-making process. An example would be, if the company were to apply to the Fire Authority for a loan. In such a situation the Board members should not participate in, or vote on, the matter and they would have to leave the meeting room during the debate and voting on the issue.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer, therefore, suggested that the Board members should seek specific advice from the Monitoring Officer, whenever issues relating to the company came before the Fire Authority for consideration.

Councillor Dr Jones felt that the request for a dispensation should be granted, because, if it were not, it could interfere with the smooth running of the Fire Authority and Service. The Committee agreed, however, that the dispensation should contain a caveat to the effect that there would be certain situations when, irrespective of the dispensation, it would not be appropriate for the relevant members to take part in a meeting.

Members then discussed the duration of the dispensation, which could be up to four years, and agreed that it be granted for a period of eighteen months.

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

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Agree to grant the dispensation application made by Councillors Mrs Barrow, Hartin, Kiernan, Mellings and Minnery for the reason given above for a period of 18 months with the caveat that there would be certain circumstances, when it would be inappropriate for members to take part in Fire Authority business and that legal advice should be taken accordingly; and
- b) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to confirm the outcome of the application in writing to each individual applicant.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer undertook to draft an appropriate letter to go to each of the Board members, which he would send first to the Chair of the Committee for approval.

Councillor Mellings returned to the meeting room at this point (3.45 pm).

7 Ethical Framework Issues: Update and Review

This report updated the Committee on matters relating to the ethical framework. It also asked Members to review the following procedures and documents:

- Members' Code of Conduct
- Code of Conduct complaints procedure and publicity
- Disclosable pecuniary interest form
- Dispensations procedure

In addition, the report asked the Committee to consider and approve the proposed complaints form and to consider training requirements.

The Committee considered the various documents put forward within the report and agreed with the amendments proposed. It then went on to discuss whether any further training was required. The consensus was that sufficient training in the Code of Conduct had already been provided, particularly as the constituent authorities had also offered such training. Furthermore, the Committee felt that its members did not require any further training to carry out their role effectively. The Deputy Monitoring Officer added that, should a breach of the Code of Conduct case come before the Committee for consideration, he would ensure that Members received the necessary briefing to deal with that process.

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

Resolved that the Committee:

- a) Note the update on matters relating to the ethical framework;
- b) Approve the proposed complaints form (attached at Appendix B2); and
- c) Make recommendations to the Fire Authority, regarding amendments required to the Code of Conduct.

8 Annual Report of the Standards Committee

This report presented a draft of the Annual Report of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee for consideration and approval by Members.

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

Resolved that the Committee approve the draft Annual Report of the Standards Committee without amendment

9 Merger of Standards and Human Resources Committees

This report asked Members to consider the feasibility of merging the Standards and Human Resources Committees.

The Corporate Support Manager pointed out that the report incorrectly stated that Shropshire Council had merged its Standards and Audit Committees and apologised for this error.

In response to a question from Councillor Carter, the Corporate Support Manager advised that there was currently only one Member, who sat on both committees, and that all principal committees of the Fire Authority had seven members, with the exception of Standards, which had five. If both the Standards and Human Resources Committees agreed to a merger, a report would be taken to the Fire Authority for consideration. At this stage proposals would be put forward regarding the number of seats on such a merged Committee, taking into account the allocation of seats to political groups.

Councillor Mellings commented that, as there was strong synergy between the two Committees, it made sense to merge them. All members agreed that it was reasonable to bring the two Committees together.

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

Resolved that the Committee recommend to the Fire Authority a merger of the Standards Committee and Human Resources Committee as a more effective means of dealing with business

The meeting closed at 3.55 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....