

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Standards Committee  
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury  
on Monday, 18 February 2008 at 5.15 pm**

## **Present**

### **Members**

Councillors Groom, Mason and Mellings (Vice-Chair) and non-elected Independent Members, Mr Tebbutt (Chair) and Mr Webb

### **Officers**

Lynn Ince, Committee Clerk, Sue Kembrey, Clerk and Monitoring Officer, Sharon Lloyd, Corporate Services Manager, and Paul Raymond, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Holyoak.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3 Minutes**

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 29 October 2007.

The Corporate Services Manager reported that all Members had now confirmed that their Register of Interest complies with the new Code of Conduct.

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 29 October 2007, 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 Update on New Provisions in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007**

This report updated the Committee with regard to the latest developments in ethical standards matters, which will be brought about by the implementation of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the provisions outlined in the Act are still due to come into force in April 2008, however there are doubts about this, as there is a need for regulations and guidance to be provided before the provisions can be implemented.

Councillor Groom commented that he felt that the Authority and Officers were doing all that they could to prepare for the implementation.

Councillor Mellings endorsed Councillor Groom's comments. He suggested that some of the training, which will be provided for new Independent Members, may be relevant to other Members of the Committee. Councillor Mellings also suggested that the sub-committees be allowed to alternate between dealing with initial assessment decisions and taking decisions on reviews. This idea was well received by the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that it may also be beneficial for Members of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee to observe Telford & Wrekin Council's Standards Committee conducting a hearing.

**Resolved** that Members:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Provide no further comments and suggestions in respect of the proposed changes to the structure of the Committee as a result of the implementation of the new legislation

## **6 Consultation on Orders and Regulations relating to the Code of Local Authority Members in England**

The Department for Communities and Local Government is currently consulting in respect of the new regulations and orders, which will flow from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Many of the regulations and orders relate to new provisions, which will be dealt with by Standards Committee. This report set out the Fire Authority's consultation response (attached as an appendix) for information.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the consultation response had been submitted to Communities and Local Government (CLG) by the deadline given. The Monitoring Officer explained that she was happy to email, to CLG, any further comments that the Committee may wish to make or that Members could email comments themselves.

Councillor Groom commented that it had been wise to request a three-month gap between the release of the Regulations and commencement of the new regime, as this would allow time to ensure all necessary arrangements were in place.

Councillor Mason asked about the proposal to increase the maximum sanction that Standards Committee can impose to six months. He was concerned, as councillors face sanctions if they do not attend meetings for a period of six months. The Monitoring Officer explained that this is a legislative requirement for local authorities and that the issue is being investigated with the Standards Board for England. There are usually conditions attached to suspensions, which enable Members to continue with their constituency work, even though they may not be able to attend meetings.

Councillor Mason asked for clarification of the Fire Authority's rules in relation to non-attendance of meetings. The Corporate Services Manager explained that, if a Member failed to attend meetings for six months, the issue would be raised with their Political Group Leader.

Mr Tebbutt commented that the proposed changes showed 'common sense' and thanked the Group Solicitor for his work on the consultation response.

**Resolved** that the Standards Committee note the response to the consultation, attached as an appendix to the report

## **7 Recruitment of Independent Members**

This report gave an update on the progress on increasing the number of non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee from two to four. It also sought agreement to the proposed recruitment process and asked the Committee to nominate which Members should sit on the recruitment panel.

Councillor Mellings confirmed that he was happy with the increase in the number of non-elected, Independent Members, despite having concerns about it at the last Standards Committee meeting.

Mr Tebbutt suggested that the interview panel should consist of the three Members outlined in paragraph 4 of the report, together with a nominated reserve. The Committee agreed that this was a sensible proposal and Councillor Mellings volunteered as the reserve Member.

The Committee then discussed the draft advertisement and made several suggestions for improvement, including making the advert briefer by reducing it to two paragraphs and referring people to visit the Service's website or to telephone for further information about the role.

Mr Webb suggested that, in addition to approaching the Independent Members of the Standards Committees detailed in the report, the Members of the Standards Committees of the District Councils, who will be affected by the move to unitary status, should be approached.

Councillor Groom felt that the proposed interview questions needed reviewing, as some of them were 'closed' questions, which would lead to one word answers. He felt that some of the questions should be on the application form and that a list of supplementary questions should be drawn up to enable the interview panel to probe further into candidates' responses.

Subject to the foregoing it was

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the progress on increasing the number of non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee from two to four;
- b) Nominate Councillor West, Councillor Mrs Holyoak and Mr Tebbutt to sit on the recruitment panel, with Councillor Mellings as a reserve; and
- c) Agree the proposed recruitment process

## **8 Update on Code of Conduct Training 2007/08**

This report provided an update to the Standards Committee on further developments regarding Member Code of Conduct training.

The Corporate Services Manager reported that there is still one Member of the Fire Authority, who has not provided any evidence of having received training in the Code of Conduct, and the Chair of the Committee has written to this Member. The Committee agreed that there was nothing more that could be done with regard to the situation.

Councillor Mellings commented that the Standards Board DVD is excellent and Members agreed that a group training session, at which the DVD would be shown to all Members of the Fire Authority, would be beneficial. It would also be useful if the Monitoring Officer could attend to answer any questions that arose. It was suggested that this could, perhaps, be arranged for the same day as a Fire Authority meeting.

**Resolved** that the Standards Board latest training DVD be disseminated to all Members of the Fire Authority via a group training session to be held before or after a Fire Authority meeting

## **9 Standards Board Bulletin**

The latest Bulletin (no. 36 – December 2007), issued by the Standards Board for England, was brought to Members for discussion, as previously agreed by the Committee. A copy of the Bulletin had been emailed to all Members (including the two non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee).

The Bulletin refers to the Standards Board's Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, which will take place in Birmingham on 13 to 14 October 2008. The Corporate Services Manager confirmed that the Chair of the Committee and one Officer normally attend this event.

**Resolved** that Members note the contents of the Bulletin

## 10 Ethical Standards Bulletin

The spring 2008 edition of the Ethical Standards Bulletin, published by Telford & Wrekin Council, was brought to Members for discussion, as previously agreed by the Committee. A copy of the Bulletin had been emailed to all Members (including the two non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee).

The Monitoring Officer asked Members for any suggestions for issues that could be covered in future editions of the Bulletin.

**Resolved** that Members note the contents of the Bulletin

Before the meeting closed, Councillor Mellings thanked the Monitoring Officer, who will soon be leaving to take up a new post, for all her help and support to the Fire Authority over the years. This sentiment was echoed by the Chair and the rest of the Committee.

The Chair also thanked Officers for producing the Committee documents and for providing the Chair's Briefing.

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....