

Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Report of the Standards Committee

For further information about this report please contact Matthew Cumberbatch, Deputy Monitoring Officer, on 01952 383255 or Sharon Lloyd, Corporate Services Manager, on 01743 260210.

1 Purpose of Report

This report advises of the work carried out by the Fire Authority's Standards Committee during the municipal year 2008 / 2009.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note the report.

3 Background

The Standards Committee (the Committee) has not previously provided an Annual Report but, when the Fire Authority agreed its 2009 / 2010 Work Plan, this action was included. Accordingly, this report sets out the work carried out by the Committee during the municipal year 2008 / 2009.

4 Constitution and Meetings

The constitution of the Committee was last reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in July 2009.

The Chair of the Committee is non-elected Independent Member, Mr Michael Tebbutt, and the Vice-Chair is non-elected Independent Member, Mr Paul Brereton.

During the municipal year 2008 / 2009 the Committee met three times: in June and October 2008 and March 2009.

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:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/docs/cfa/members-handbook/section-3-pdf/05-Standards-Committee.pdf>

For ease of reference this report splits the work carried out by the Committee into three main areas:

- Register of Members' Interests;
- Complaints, Investigations and Determinations; and
- Training and Promoting Standards.

6 Register of Members' Interests

Under the Code of Conduct adopted by the Fire Authority in August 2007, all Members are required to register their financial interests with the Fire Authority. Members are also required to provide written notification of any changes to those interests within 28 days of becoming aware of the changes.

Members are not required to complete a fresh Register of Interests annually but the Committee has taken the view that it is good practice for all Members, including non-elected, Independent Members of the Committee itself, to be prompted annually in an attempt to ensure that the Register of Interests is kept up-to-date.

An annual review of the Members' Register of Interests took place in July 2008, during which all Members were asked to review their register entry. As part of this exercise they are required either to confirm in writing that the details held are correct and that no amendments are required or to advise of any changes.

7 Complaints, Investigations and Determinations

On 8 May 2008 a new framework was set up for considering Code of Conduct complaints. From that date any such complaints made about Fire Authority Members were to be dealt with by the Fire Authority's Standards Committee, rather than by the Standards Board for England, as was the case previously.

During the municipal year 2008 / 2009 no complaints relating to Fire Authority Members were received. The Committee has, however, put in place processes and procedures to ensure that it is able to deal with any complaints, should they arise. It has set up a Referrals Sub-Committee to receive allegations and make an initial assessment of each complaint and a Review Sub-Committee to deal with cases where a decision of no further action by the Referrals Sub-Committee is challenged by the person making the complaint. The Committee has also made provision for a Hearing Sub-Committee to consider any matter, which proceeds to investigation.

Furthermore, in order to ensure a fair and consistent decision-making process the Committee has set out a protocol to be followed by the Monitoring Officer upon receipt of a Code of Conduct complaint. Assessment and review criteria have also been agreed so that the same considerations are given to each individual complaint.

Forms for registering a complaint about a breach of the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct are available to the public from the reception at Fire Service Headquarters and on Fire Authority website at:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/docs/managing-the-service/fra/Local%20Filter%20Complaint%20form.pdf>

8 Training and Promoting Standards

In November 2008 Telford & Wrekin Council conducted two training seminars on the Code of Conduct (one afternoon and one evening session) at the Civic Offices, Telford. The training was provided by an external trainer and consisted of a PowerPoint presentation, including Code of Conduct case scenarios, requiring audience participation. Detailed guidance notes were also provided. The training was attended by a total of 14 Fire Authority officers and Members, including non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee.

Members of the Standards Committee also received training in June and September 2008, which dealt with the background to, and role of, the Standards Committee. In addition local assessment for Code of Conduct complaints was covered to prepare Committee Members in undertaking assessments, reviews and hearings.

As well as the formal training conducted ethical standards bulletins were released to all Members regularly throughout 2008 and 2009. The bulletins contained a variety of information, including:

- Reminders to update Register of Interest forms;
- Standards Board fact sheets on different sections of the Code of Conduct; and
- Articles promoting Code of Conduct training.

In accordance with a request from the Committee the bulletins issued by the Standards Board for England in 2008 and 2009 were considered by the Committee and also forwarded to all Members of the Fire Authority.

In March 2009 at the request of the Committee the Service's Media Advisor attended its meeting to discuss how the Committee might raise its profile through publicity. As a result of those discussions a press release, outlining the work of the Committee and the fact that there had been no complaints received about Members under the new framework, was sent to the local media.

9 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

10 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

11 Equality Impact Assessment

This report is purely an update on the work of the Committee for the municipal year 2008 / 2009 and it, therefore, has no impact on people. Accordingly, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed.

12 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

13 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 Area 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	

