

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Standards Committee  
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury  
on Tuesday, 24 January 2006 at 5.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Morgan and Mrs Holyoak and non-elected Independent Members, Mr Tebbutt (Chair) and Mr Webb

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

***Committee Clerk's note***

*At the time of the meeting no apologies for absence had been received, however, Councillor Mellings had sent apologies via e-mail on the morning of the meeting, which due to an IT problem were not received until the following day.*

## **2 Minutes**

**Resolved:** *that the minutes of the last meeting of the Standards Committee, held on 12 October 2005, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.*

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **4 Public Questions**

No questions had been received from members of the public.

## **5 Procedure for Local Investigation of Referred Complaints**

Members received the draft procedure for Local Investigation of Referred Complaints, which had been amended following the decision of the Fire Authority at its meeting on 14 December 2005, to take out Code of Conduct insurance for all of its Members and Independent Members of the Standards Committee. The wording in paragraph 5.4 was, therefore, amended together with the reference to indemnities, which the Fire Authority had agreed should be deleted.

**Resolved:** *that Members recommend to the Fire Authority the following amendments shown struck through and in italics at paragraph 5.4 of the procedure:*

*“Any person, who is interviewed or contacted for information as part of the investigation, may arrange for representation by a solicitor or friend at his/her own expense. Any Member, against whom an allegation of breach of the Code of Conduct has been made, ~~person, who is involved in the investigation,~~ may apply for*



an indemnity in respect of their representation costs. *If, however, that Member is ultimately found to be in breach of the Code, then he/she is legally required to reimburse to the Fire Authority or its insurer the sums claimed under the indemnity.*"

A letter from the Standards Board for England headed *Going local: Investigations and hearings*, was tabled, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. The letter introduced a guidance DVD, which the Board recommended the Committee watch and then discuss as a learning tool. The Chair informed Members that this would be shown following the meeting.

## **6 Dispersations**

This report provided the Committee with information regarding the granting of dispensations to Members of the Fire Authority. It also suggested the format for a form to be completed by all Members, when submitting their request for a dispensation to the Fire Authority's Standards Committee.

Members agreed that a guidance note on the dispensation process should be produced to accompany the form. The form should also include the name of the officer, to whom it should be returned following completion. There was also concern regarding the urgency of the applications and that Members might require a decision, by the Committee, within a matter of days. The Solicitor agreed to produce a procedure, by which the applications could be considered at short notice.

**Resolved:** *that, subject to the foregoing, Members:*

- a) *Note the contents of the report; and*
- b) *Approve the application form, attached as an appendix, to be used by Members of the Fire Authority, when applying to this Committee for a dispensation.*

## **7 Update on Changes to the Code of Conduct and the Processing of Complaints**

This report informed the Committee of the contents of the report "Standards of Conduct in English Local Government: The Future", recently published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. That report set out changes to be made both to the Code of Conduct for Members and the procedures for dealing with complaints that Members had breached the Code. A letter from the Standards Board for England, dated 9 January 2006 and headed "Proposed changes to the framework governing standards of conduct", was tabled, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

The Solicitor informed the Committee that the Standards Board for England had indicated that the new legislation and changes to the Code, following the consultation, would be implemented by 2008. The Board said that it hoped that the changes to the Code would be accepted in full and enacted from May 2006. The Committee felt that this timescale was optimistic and was disappointed that the legislation would take so long to implement.

**Resolved:** *that the Committee:*

- a) *Note the report; and*
- b) *Receive further updates from the Clerk with regard to further developments.*

## 8 Update on Code of Conduct Training for Members

This report provided and update on further Code of Conduct 'refresher' training, which had recently taken place. The report sought views from the Committee in respect of training for the next municipal year.

The Committee felt that it was important for Members to receive refresher training at least once per year. Councillor Morgan agreed to highlight the recommendation of the Standards Committee at the next Fire Authority meeting.

**Resolved:** *that the Committee:*

- a) *Note the contents of the report; and*
- b) *Ask the Monitoring Officer to prepare a schedule for Code of Conduct training for Members for the next municipal year and obtain details of external training providers.*

## 9 West Mercia Independent Members' Forum

This report informed the Committee of the outcome of the most recent West Mercia Independent Members' Forum meeting, held on 17 August 2005 at the Council of the City of Worcester. It also asked for agreement that both Independent Members of the Committee and/or the Clerk (or an Officer nominated by the Clerk) continue to attend future meetings of the Forum.

The Committee discussed attendance at future Forum meetings and agreed that it was useful for both Members and officers to attend.

Members requested that the Chair of the Standards Committee inform the Forum that Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority would be prepared to host a future meeting.

**Resolved:** *that the Committee:*

- a) *Note the contents of the report;*
- b) *Request that the Clerk provide updates on the outcome of future meetings of the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum; and*
- c) *Agree that both Independent Members of this Committee and the Clerk (or an officer nominated by the Clerk) continue to attend future meetings of the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum.*

The meeting closed at 5.55 pm.

Following the meeting, Members watched the Standard Board for England's DVD entitled Going Local, Investigations and Hearings. Mr Webb did not stay but requested to loan the DVD at a future time.

**CHAIR:**.....

**DATE:**.....