

**Minutes of the Meeting of  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Standards Committee  
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury  
on Monday, 29 October 2007 at 5.15 pm**

**Present**

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

**1 Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence had been received from Members.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 Minutes**

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 1 August 2007.

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 1 August 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.

Councillor Holyoak arrived at this point (5.20 pm)

**5 Update on Issues relating to the  
New Code of Conduct for Members**

A revised Model Code of Conduct for elected Members was adopted by the Fire Authority on 1 August 2007. This report addressed some of the current issues that relate to the new Code.

The Group Solicitor informed the Committee that the protocol for dealing with confidential information is still being worked on. The Group Solicitor also advised Members about inadvertent omissions from the version of the Code



agreed at the last meeting and referred to the appendix to the report with the appropriate sections included.

Councillor Groom asked for an explanation of the phrase 'qua Councillor', which was included in a response from the Standards Board for England. The Corporate Services Manager explained that 'qua' means 'in the capacity of'. Members then discussed the distinction between acting in an official and personal capacity and the implications of the new Code with regard to this.

Councillor Mellings asked if all Members are compliant with regard to the Register of Interests. The Corporate Services Manager was unable to answer this question at the meeting but undertook to investigate it.

### **Committee Clerk's Note**

All Members, with the exception of one, have confirmed that their Register of Interests complies with the new Code of Conduct.

**Resolved** that Members:

- a) Note the contents of this report; and
- b) Confirm, on behalf of the Fire Authority, that the adoption of the Model Code of Conduct, as per the decision of the Standards Committee on 1 August 2007, relates to the version of the Code, as it appears at the appendix to this report

## **6 Code of Conduct Training 2007/08**

This report provided details of the outcome of the Code of Conduct training, which took place on 19 July 2007, and advised Members of forthcoming training.

The Corporate Services Manager reported that the Chair of the Fire Authority has asked for the names of those Members, who have not attended any Code of Conduct training.

Mr Tebbutt felt strongly that, as the Committee has not heard any cases, some mock cases should be undertaken in order for the Committee to gain experience. Mr Tebbutt also felt that, should the Standards Committee be enlarged, any new Members would need to be trained quickly.

The Corporate Services Manager reported that the 2008/09 budget is being set and it is possible that increased provision for training could be made within this. Provision for training has already been made in the 2007/08 budget but it is possible that underspends in other areas could be vired to cover any further training required within this financial year.

Members then debated if general training in the Code of Conduct should be provided indefinitely. There were arguments for and against but there was general concern that there were still some Members, who have not received any training. The Committee felt that the Chair of the Standards Committee



should write to those individuals, emphasising the Committee's concerns and the importance of ethical standards.

Mr Webb asked if there was any legal requirement for Members to undertake Code of Conduct training every 12 months. The Group Solicitor confirmed that there is no specific requirement within the new Code of Conduct nor is it written in statute. It is, however, considered best practice for both Members and the Authority that training is undertaken on a regular basis.

As Members were keen not to discount further training in 2007/08, Mr Webb proposed that the training being held on 20 November 2007 should be promoted to Fire Authority Members and any further training for 2007/08 kept under review. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Mason and it was

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Decide that the training being held on 20 November 2007 be promoted to Fire Authority Members and any further training for 2007/08 be kept under review

## **7 Amended Procedures in relation to Local Determinations, Investigations and Hearings**

This report sought to address issues raised by the Committee following their initial consideration of the amended procedures in relation to local determinations, investigations and hearings.

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Agree the wording of the change to the local Standards Hearing Procedure at paragraph 3; and
- b) Having considered the additional information provided in response to the queries raised at the meetings on 1 August 2007, agree the further changes as set out in draft in the Local Investigation Procedure, as it appears at Appendix 2 of the report.

## **8 Sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees**

This report advised Members of the main issues discussed at the Sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. It also asked Members to review the constitution of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee in light of developments.

Mr Tebbutt reported that he was impressed with this year's Assembly, as it appears to have found a purpose and way forward.

Mr Tebbutt suggested that another three non-elected Independent Members should be recruited to the Standards Committee. Councillor Mellings expressed unease with this, as there has only been one complaint since the



inception of the Standards Committee. Councillor Mellings would prefer that the number of non-elected Independent Members be increased to three in total rather than by three.

There then followed a debate about the implications of increasing non-elected independent membership of the Standards Committee and the effects on the Fire Authority, should no increase in membership occur.

Mr Webb proposed that permission should be sought by the Fire Authority to increase non-elected independent membership of the Standards Committee and commence recruitment, with the Fire Authority setting a limit for membership, if required. This was seconded by Councillor Holyoak and it was

**Resolved** that the Committee:

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Having considered whether an increase in size and independent membership of the Standards Committee is required in light of the additional work, which is likely to fall to the Committee following the introduction of the local filter, make recommendations to the Fire Authority that the non-elected independent membership of the Standards Committee should be increased and recruitment commenced, with the Fire Authority setting a limit for membership, if required

## **9 Standards Board Bulletin**

The latest Bulletin (no. 35 – September 2007), issued by the Standards Board for England, was brought to Members for discussion, as previously agreed by the Committee. Copies of the Bulletin had been emailed to all Members (including the two non-elected, Independent Members of the Standards Committee).

The Group Solicitor informed Members that there were two versions of the Bulletin on the Standards Board website, one of which had different, more up-to-date statistics for the number of complaints received by the Board. A copy of this more up-to-date page was tabled at the meeting and is attached to the signed minutes.

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

## **10 Ethical Standards Toolkit – Self Assessment Survey**

The Corporate Services Manager provided a verbal update on this issue.

**Resolved** that Members note the verbal update

Mr Tebbutt thanked officers for the work that is done in preparation for the Standards Committee meetings.



Mr Webb left the meeting at this point (6.35 pm)

## 11 The Code Uncovered

As part of its continued support the Standards Board for England has produced a DVD, which uses a fictional planning application dispute to illustrate the key changes to the revised Model Code of Conduct. The DVD examines the rules about declaring interests, disclosing confidential information and bullying. The Board has recommended that standards committees and officers watch this DVD and use it as a tool for discussion.

Unfortunately, because of a technical fault, the Committee was unable to watch the DVD and, therefore, no decision was made as to whether a screening of the DVD should be provided for all Members of the Fire Authority.

### Committee Clerk's Note

With permission of the Standards Board for England the DVD has since been copied and forwarded to each member of the Standards Committee for viewing.

The meeting closed at 6.50 pm.

**Chair**.....

**Date**.....

