



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on 1 July 2009 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors M Biggin, B Livesley, K Musgrave and H Mundry

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS: Mr W Ravenscroft (in the Chair), Mr R Garner and Mr D Morris

APOLOGIES: Councillors E Johnson and C Thorley

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Members were asked to note the membership of the Committee for 2009-10, as agreed by the Fire Authority at their Annual General Meeting on 3 April 2009 and listed below:

Mr W Ravenscroft - Chair
Councillor M Biggin
Councillor E Johnson
Councillor B Livesley
Councillor H Mundry
Councillor K Musgrave
Councillor C Thorley
Mr R Garner - Independent Member
Mr D Morris - Independent Member

B DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

C MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE

Members confirmed the minutes of the previous committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the re-election of the independent Member, Mr W Ravenscroft, as the Chair of the Committee for 2009/10 be noted;**
- [2] the Membership of the Committee for 2009/10, as agreed by the Fire Authority at their annual general meeting on 3 April 2009 and as listed above in 1(A), be noted; and**

[3] the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 March 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

2 STANDARDS BOARD – ANNUAL RETURN 2008-09

The Corporate Support Manager presented a report, which provided details of the Authority's Annual Return to the Standards Board for England. The objective of the Annual Return was to provide information to the Standards Board on the processes and procedures that the Authority operated to manage the Local Standards Framework. The return covered the period from 8 May 2008 to 31 March 2009.

The information collected in the Annual Returns would be used to drive up performance, champion the work of Standards Committees and would ensure that the Standards Board had an effective overview of the Local Standards Framework.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer explained to members of the Committee that, following the completion of the return, areas had been identified for review. These areas included the publication of registers of interests and the promotion of the role of the Standards Committee both internally and externally. These areas would be added to the Committee's work programme to review over the coming year. It was noted that a further paper on the work programme would be submitted to the Standards Committee in September 2009.

Members queried whether a Member and Officer protocol had now been established. The Deputy Chief Officer, Corporate Support explained that the draft protocol had been developed but the publication of the code of conduct for Officers needed to be taken into consideration before the final document could be published.

RESOLVED:

That the Authority's Annual Return submitted to the Standards Board for England and attached to the report be noted.

3 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT – PROCEDURES FOR FILTERING COMPLAINTS

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report which set out a proposed revised procedure for the filtering of complaints under the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2004.

In January 2008 Cheshire Fire Authority agreed to implement the procedures detailed in the Regulations by the formation of two Sub-Committees of the Standards Committee and to use the Deputy Monitoring Officer (who at that time was the Monitoring Officer at Staffordshire Fire Authority) to hear appeals against the outcome of filtering decisions in a reciprocal arrangement. Since that date the reciprocal arrangements had changed and, therefore, the procedure required revision.

Members were asked to approve the recommended option to appoint Members of the Sub-Committee and also to approve the proposed revision of the filtering arrangements and the procedure for publicising the complaints process.

RESOLVED: that

- [1] the proposed revision of the filtering arrangements of complaints made to the Standards Committee, as described in Annex 1 of the report, be approved;**
- [2] the option to appoint members of Sub-Committees as required, and as described in paragraph 24 of the report, be approved;**
- [3] a training session on the role of the Standards Committee in complaints investigation at the rise of the Standards Committee on 30 September 2009 be approved; and**
- [4] the procedure for publishing the Standards Committee complaints process, as outlined in Annex 2 of the report, be approved.**

4 COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 2008

The Corporate Support Manager presented a report to Members which set out the figures relating to complaints and compliments made to the Authority during 2008. Members noted that these were reported to the Standards Committee on an annual basis.

The report highlighted that the number of complaints received had remained the same as the figures recorded the previous year and that there had been a rise in compliments recorded. A new on-line system and increased activity in the community had led to an increase in the number of compliments received.

Members were also informed of the launch of the project 'Listening to our Customers' which would obtain feedback for the three main areas within the Service – Emergency Response, Community Fire Protection and Community Safety. As part of this project the Authority needed to ensure that there were consistent and effective channels to collect customer comments and complaints. The Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Scheme would be reviewed to ensure that it linked into the project.

Members discussed the relatively low number of complaints received in relation to the service provided and also that the collation of the information provided valuable data for the service.

RESOLVED:

That the information regarding complaints and compliments received for the calendar year 2008 be noted.

5 2007 THE REVISED CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE – SUMMARY PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services presented a report, prepared by the Head of Finance and Governance, which set out progress against Core Principles 4-6 of the revised Code of Corporate Governance Action Plan.

The report provided a summary of progress against identified actions, following the adoption of the revised Code of Corporate Governance 2007. Members noted progress made to date and raised a number of issues in respect of the information provided.

Members discussed the arrangements for whistle-blowing and Safe Call (confidential reporting procedure) which was reviewed and incorporated into the Corporate Health Strategy. The procedure was monitored by the Health and Safety Committee.

The Response Panel recruitment was also discussed. Members raised queries on the % response received from the panel and also the composition of the panel. It was requested that a briefing paper on the Response Panel be submitted to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the progress on core principles 4-6 of the revised Code of Corporate Governance action plan be noted.

6 MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT 2009-10 : UPDATE

At its meeting on 18 March 2009 the Standards Committee agreed that a report would be submitted to the next meeting which provided details of the re-constituted Member Training and Development Group and an agreed programme for 2009/10. The report provided an update on the development of the Member Training programme for the coming year and also the proposed work programme for the Member Training and Development Group.

Committee members requested that the Standards Committee receive an annual report which provided the details of the Member Training programme and Members attendance as part of their role in monitoring the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance.

RESOLVED:

[1] That the content of the report be noted; and

[2] That an annual report on the Member Training programme be submitted to the Standards Committee.

7 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report seeking nominations for up to three members of the Cheshire Fire Authority Standards Committee to attend the 8th Annual Assembly of the Standards Board for England. The report was brought to the Committee under Standing Order 3.69 as information in respect of the event was not received until 25 June 2009.

RESOLVED:

- [1] That the report be noted; and**
- [2] That the following Members be nominated to attend the 8th Annual Assembly of the Standards Board on 12th and 13th October 2009;
Councillor Bill Livesley;
Robert Garner.**