



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on 21 January 2009 at Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Cllrs M Biggin, D Freear, H Mundry and S Mosley

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

APOLOGIES: Cllr B Jones

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 November 2008 be confirmed as a correct record;

**2 2007 – THE REVISED CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE – SUMMARY
PROGRESS REPORT – THEMES 4-6**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services, presented a report, which set out progress against Core Principles 4-6 of the Corporate Governance Action Plan. Members noted that in line with the Committee's resolution to consider actions against the Plan as a continuous rolling programme, Principles 1-3 would be presented at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 18 March 2009.

The report provided a summary of progress against identified actions, following the adoption of the revised code of Corporate Governance 2007. The format for providing the information was agreed by Members of the Standards Committee at their meeting on 23 January 2008.

Members noted progress made to date and raised a number of issues, particularly with regard to the ongoing need for a regular review of the breakdown of Part 1 and Part 2 items on committee agendas and the level of community influence and involvement in fire service decision making. Members noted that this was an issue which would become more relevant following the publication of Government proposals on community engagement. On this point, Members were keen to ensure that the public had realistic expectations of their ability to influence key operational decisions.

RESOLVED:

That progress against themes 4 - 6 of the Code of Corporate Governance be noted.

3 REASONABLE TIME OFF FOR PUBLIC DUTIES

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services presented a report, prepared by the Service Solicitor, which outlined a number of issues in relation to granting staff "reasonable time off" for undertaking public duties.

Members noted that in November, The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) issued a consultation seeking stakeholder views on extending time off entitlements for public duties. At the meeting of the Fire Authority on 10 December 2008, Members agreed a response, which was submitted to CLG along with a covering letter from the Chair of the Authority. Following the submission of the response, however, Members raised concerns as to what could be deemed "reasonable" time off, for the purpose of the consultation and the relevant legislation. The report sought to canvass Members' views on this issue.

Members considered the impact of the consultation on the Service and were advised by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer that there were a number of employees to whom the provisions applied i.e. those acting as parish and town councillors, magistrates and school governors. Members noted that in the past the Authority had always taken an approach that involved staff using a proportion of their own time, in addition to being granted 'reasonable' time off, commensurate with operational requirements. Members agreed that this was a suitable approach and in most cases 'reasonable' could be determined as something which did not detract from the Authority's ability to provide an effective service.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Services noted the views of Members and confirmed that a revised Special Leave Policy would be produced when the outcome of the consultation was published. At the request of Members, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer also agreed to raise the issue of payment for such duties with Government and to consider how the set of allowances, for the positions for which time off is granted, might ensure there was no loss of earnings for staff, while preventing duplication of payment.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the issues raised in the report be noted; and
- [2] a review of the Service's Special Leave Policy be undertaken when the outcome of the Government consultation "Standing for Office : Time off Entitlements" is published.

4 URGENT BUSINESS AND EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

There were no items considered under urgent business.