



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE held on 19 November 2008 Fire Service Headquarters, Winsford

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

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

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

RESOLVED:

- [1] the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2008 be confirmed as a correct record;
- [2] the appointment of a new Independent Member of the Standards Committee, Mr David Morris, be noted; and
- [3] the issues arising from the seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees be considered and the date of the eighth Annual Conference on 12-13 October 2009 be noted.

2 2007 – THE REVISED CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE – SUMMARY PROGRESS REPORT

The Head of Finance and Governance presented a report, which set out progress against the Core Principles 1-3 of the Corporate Governance Action Plan. Members noted that Principles 4-6 would be presented at the next meeting of the Standards Committee on 21 January 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 partnership working and stakeholder events. The Head of Finance and Governance informed Members that these were areas that the Service was reviewing in preparation for the Comprehensive Area Assessment Audit due to take place in 2009.

Members were informed of the high levels of engagement between the Authority and its partners' already in place across the community and were assured that specific issues affecting particular communities were covered as part of a formal service strategy through the IRMP.

RESOLVED:

That Members progress on themes 1 - 3 of the Code of Corporate Governance be noted.

3 REVISED MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT AND OFFICERS CODE OF CONDUCT CONSULTATION

The Corporate Support Manager and the Service Solicitor presented a report outlining a number of proposals, set out in a consultation from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). The Consultation proposed a number of minor changes to the Member Code of Conduct and the Standards regime. The report sought to establish a number of key principles upon which a full draft response could be built. In particular Members considered proposed additions to the constraints applicable to a Councillor when operating in a non-official capacity. While Members agreed with the definition of a criminal conviction as set out in the Consultation, they also agreed that with regard to offences, individual consideration on a case by case basis must be the way forward and not a blanket approach.

In addition, the report asked Members to give a view on proposals to introduce a Code of Conduct, similar in scope to the Member Code, for local government employees. The report sought to establish a number of key principles upon which to base a response and also considered whether to recommend to the Fire Authority Members that they adopt the Code of Conduct for employees, as an interim measure.

Members did not support consultation proposals to introduce a code that did not apply equally to all staff, but did recognise some justification for an enhanced Code of Conduct, encompassing officers in a politically restricted post in the enhanced tier not just officers at a certain level of seniority.

The Corporate Support Manager informed Members that breaches of the Officers Code of Conduct would be dealt with through normal disciplinary procedures and would not be brought to the Standards committee.

RESOLVED: That

- [1] the report be received and the content of the consultation be considered;
- [2] the key principles in relation to the response to the consultation be adopted as the view of the Committee and used to draft a response; and
- [3] a further report be taken to the Fire Authority in December on the adoption of the code for conduct for employees and to sign-off a draft response to CLG.

4 URGENT BUSINESS AND EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

(1) Urgent Business

RESOLVED:

There were no items considered under urgent business.