

The 2008/09 Annual Report of the Standards Committee to the Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority

Committee Membership:

Chairman: Dr Murray Mylechreest
Mr Colin Emeny,
Mr Richard Gething
Mr Robert Rogers
Mr David Stevens

Members of the Authority appointed to the Committee:

Councillors Reg J Farmer and Jeremy R Webb (deceased).

Terms of Reference of the Standards Committee:

1.
 - Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by the Members of the Authority;
 - Assisting Members to observe the Code of Conduct;
 - Advising the Authority on the adoption or revision of the Code of Conduct;
 - Monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct;
 - Advising, training or arranging to train the Members of the Authority on matters relating to the Code of Conduct;
 - Granting dispensations to Members, in circumstances to be prescribed in Regulations, from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - Dealing with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the Monitoring Officer or any matter which is referred by an ethical standards officer to the Monitoring Officer
 - Setting up a sub-committee or making arrangements with an adjoining authority with regard to reviews of initial assessments of investigations
 - Conducting assessments and investigations of allegations of breaches by Members of the Code of Conduct

Meetings held 2008/09

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| 2. | Assessment Sub-committee | 18 September 2008. |
| | Standards Committee | 21 November 2008. |
| | Standards Committee | 17 April 2009 |

Member Training

3. The Committee considered the Members' Training Programme implemented by the Authority for 2007/08 and 2008/09. The Committee was disappointed at the low level of attendance by Members at training events (an average attendance of 28%) and highlighted the concerns this raised for the Corporate Governance of the Authority. The Committee was concerned that by not attending training, Members would miss out on essential information and advice that would enable them to carry out their roles and it was felt that this was a corporate risk to the Authority.
4. The Committee has endorsed the Member Development Plan for 2009/10, and is considering joint Standards Committee training with the constituent Authorities. The Committee reiterates the importance of Member training on the Code of Conduct, Governance, Standards and Ethics, particularly for any new Authority Members following the Local Government elections in June 2009.

Local Assessments

5. There was only one allegation received during the year regarding a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. The Committee formed an Assessment Sub-Committee to consider the alleged breach and the matter was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.
6. In May 2008 responsibility for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct by Members was transferred from the Standards Board for England to Standards Committees. The Authority has drafted Local Assessment Procedures and Criteria for same, for dealing with alleged breaches by Members of the Authority's Code of Conduct, which were adopted by the Committee in April 2009 and are now published on the Service website.
7. In order to effectively carry out these statutory responsibilities the committee had to make the following addendum to its Terms of Reference:

Setting up a sub-committee or making arrangements with an adjoining authority with regard to reviews of initial assessments of complaints

Codes of Conduct Consultation paper

8. The Committee made a submission to The Department of Communities and Local Government regarding the proposed changes to the Members' Code of Conduct and the introduction of an Employees' Code of Conduct, as set out in the paper *"Communities in control: Real people, real power: Codes of conduct for local authority members and employees."*

West Mercia Independent Members Forum

9. South Shropshire District Council hosted the Forum, which met in Ludlow on 4 February 2009. The Forum was addressed by Dr. Richard Chilton, Chairman of the Standards Board for England who said that the involvement of Independent, non-elected Members on Standards Committees increases public confidence in the Local Assessment process. The Standards Board is satisfied that local Assessments are better handled at local level, and the Board is pleased with the results since the introduction of the Local Assessment process on 8 May 2008.

Code of Corporate Governance

10. At its meeting on 17 April 2009, the Committee considered compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance for the Authority for 2008/09 in relation to areas concerning Standards of Conduct. The input from the Committee will contribute to the annual review of the Code of Corporate Governance which will subsequently be reported to the Authority.

Attendance at Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

11. The Committee was represented at the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, which was held from 13-14 October 2008 in the ICC in Birmingham. The Assembly was addressed by Mr. Sadiq Kahn, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government, and Speakers included:
 - Dr. Robert Chilton, Chairman of the Standards Board for England
 - Ms. Glenys Stacey, chief executive of the Standards board for England
 - Sir Christopher Kelly, Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life
 - Dr. Richard Cowell, Centre for local and regional government research, Cardiff University

Guidance for Members and Employees in the pre-election period

12. The Committee approved the draft guidance to assist Members and Employees in the pre-election period and ensure the proper use of the Authority's resources/facilities.

Recommendation

The Standards Committee recommends that:

- (i) **The Annual Report be noted by the Authority,**
- (ii) **The Fire & Rescue Authority notes the concerns of the Standards Committee at the low level of attendance by Members at Training Seminars, and the concerns raised for the Corporate Governance of the Authority,**
- (iii) **The Fire & Rescue Authority and Group Leaders encourage Members to attend future training events, and**
- (iv) **The Authority approves the addendum to the Committee's Terms of Reference, as follows:**

"Setting up an Assessment Sub-Committee or making arrangements with an adjoining Authority with regard to conducting assessments of complaints"

Appendices- None

Background papers:

- a) Minutes of Standards Committee Meeting on 21 November 2008
- b) Agenda and Papers for Standards Committee Meeting on 17 April 2009, including the Local Assessment Criteria and Procedures
- c) Members' Code of Conduct