

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

15TH JANUARY, 2007

1. STRONG AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

Joint report of the Clerk and of the Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- (1) THAT members note the contents of the report and discuss how the changes might impact on the work of the Standards Committee and more generally on the members of the Authority and the Authority itself.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to bring to members' attention the Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" and in particular on the provisions with regard to the ethical framework.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Government published "Strong and Prosperous Communities" – The Local Government White Paper in October 2006.
- 3.2 The Paper includes proposals that aim to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. The intention is to rebalance the relationship between central government, local government and local people so that communities become stronger and more prosperous and better public services are delivered. A summary of the proposals is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Chapter 3 is titled "Effective, accountable and responsive local government. It includes proposals for the establishment a new locally based conduct regime.

- 3.4 The Paper states that strong and accountable local leadership requires the highest standards of conduct and that these would be more likely to be guaranteed if decision-making on conduct issues was devolved to the greatest extent possible to the local level.
- 3.5 The Government intends to legislate to deliver:
- “• a more locally based regime, with local standards committees making initial assessments of misconduct allegations and most investigations and decisions made at local level;
 - a revised strategic regulatory role for the Standards Board to provide supervision, support and guidance for local authorities and ensure consistent standards.”
- 3.6 Further, the Government intends to “put in place a clearer, simpler and more proportionate code of conduct for local authority members and a new code for employees. Changes to the Members’ Code will include amending the rules on personal and prejudicial interests to remove the current barriers to councillors speaking up for their constituents or for the public bodies on which they have been appointed to serve. So, for example, in future members of a planning or licensing committee will have more opportunities to represent their constituents on planning or licensing issues that affect their wards. Members will be able to speak and vote on such issues unless their interests in the matter are greater than those of most other people in the wards.”

4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

In preparing this report, an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out, as the matters contained in this report will not lead to and do not relate to a policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Government intends to publish a bill shortly to further progress the proposals. The changes will require primary and secondary legislation to be enacted. There may also be further consultation.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 It is too early to say to what extent the changes to the conduct regime will require additional resources.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

“Strong and Prosperous Communities” – The Local Government White Paper – October 2006.

NEERAJ SHARMA
MONITORING OFFICER

SUSAN PHELPS
CLERK