

Minutes of the Standards Committee

5th March, 2007 at 1.30 pm
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Mr M Chambers (Chair);
Councillors Jackson and Ryder;
Mr C Topliss.

Observers: Councillors Douglas-Maul and Jones.

Apologies: Councillors G Davies and Singh.

8/07 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th January, 2007, be confirmed as a correct record.

9/07 **Consultation on Amendments to the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members**

The Committee considered a consultation document received from the Department for Communities and Local Government with regard to proposals for the revision of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members. Comments were to be submitted to the Department by 9th March, 2007.

The Committee made the following comments on the consultation document:

- Harassment/victimization was not specifically addressed in the amendment that would proscribe bullying. Members felt that the provision should make reference to bullying 'in all its forms' but should not be too prescriptive;
- Local protocols would assist members in deciding in what circumstances they were justified in disclosing

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confidential information in the public interest. It was also felt that for consistency 'public interest' should be defined by reference to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998;

- An amendment to allow a Member's behaviour in a private capacity to be considered within the Code was supported;
- Members felt that the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity should apply to Fire and Rescue Authorities, for which it was not currently mandatory;
- Members urged the retention of the current provision requiring Members to report other Member's breaches of the Code of Conduct to the Standards Board, with safeguards to avoid trivial and vexatious reports;
- The provision that any gift or hospitality over £25 must be notified to the Monitoring Officer should be retained;
- Public service interests should continue to be declared at each meeting whether the member intends to speak or not;
- The application to Fire and Rescue Authorities of the new provision to prevent members from scrutinizing decisions which they were involved in making was supported;
- The ten General Principles of Public Life should be included in the preamble to the new Code.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Monitoring Officer be authorized to submit a response to the Department of Communities and Local Government incorporating the comments of the Committee;
- (2) that the Monitoring Officer and Clerk take appropriate action to seek the formal adoption of the revised Code of Conduct as required and to arrange training for members on the same.

10/07

Going Local: Investigations and Hearings

The Committee viewed a training film produced by the

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Standards Board for England illustrating how to carry out a fair and balanced local investigation and the best procedure for a professional and effective hearing.

The Committee noted that its workload was likely to increase and that there could therefore be resource implications as a result of the move to local determination of breaches of the Code.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Monitoring Officer investigate the possibility of entering into reciprocal agreements with other Fire Authorities in the West Midlands Region in respect of local investigations and hearings;
- (2) that the training film be used as part of the member induction/training package.

11/07 **Date and time of next meeting**

Monday, 21st May, 2007 [to be confirmed]

(The meeting ended at 2.47 pm)

<p><i>Contact Officer: Georgina Wythes Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3791</i></p>
