

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Standards Committee

17th May 2009

1. THE STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND - ANNUAL RETURN QUESTIONS

Report of the Monitoring Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT Members consider the Annual Return made to the Standards Board for England and discuss what actions the Monitoring Officer, Standards Committee or the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority should take in the future to further strengthen the activities and arrangements for promoting and supporting high standards of ethical conduct.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The Standards Board for England is the strategic adviser and regulator for the local standards regime.
- 2.2 As well as requiring quarterly and annual returns from the Authority it requires completion of the Annual Return Questions (Appendix 1). The Monitoring Officer attends to the returns.
- 2.3 The Standards Committee has mainly met to consider legislative changes, associated guidance or for training and development purposes. Whilst Sub-Committees of the Standards Committee have been established as required there have been no complaints received and therefore no case work for the members of the Standards Committee to be engaged in. It must be noted however that two of the main purposes of the Standards Committee is in fact to:
- promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority; and
 - to determine, monitor and review the arrangements for the local ethical standards regime.

- 2.4 By considering and as appropriate following good practice from the Standards Board for England or other authorities the Standards Committee and the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority can further improve the effectiveness of the local ethical standards regime. To enable this the Standards Committee is requested to consider the Annual Return Questions with a view to developing and implementing some of the ideas being suggested.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Annual Return Questions relate to a series of topics:

- Communication;
- Influence;
- Training and support;
- Investigations.

- 3.2 The Standards Board has said that it will collect information from annual returns and use this to improve performance, champion the work of standards committees and to ensure that it has an effective overview of local standards framework. In particular the Standards Board will collect notable practice examples of standards committee activities and will disseminate these. Equally the information will be used to identify gaps in the local standards framework and to identify strengths and weaknesses of local arrangements. The information will help the Standards Board to identify those authorities who could be experiencing difficulties and may require support and advice.

- 3.3 It is advisable to be proactive and to consider any gaps and how to address them. The Standards Board appears to be working closely with the Audit Commission and developing its regulatory role. The Monitoring Officer will facilitate a discussion at the meeting of Standards Committee.

- 3.4 There are some gaps in the arrangements, some of which are to be addressed in the coming year.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Standards Board is the strategic adviser and also regulator of the local standards regime. The Annual Return Questions concern topics it considers relevant and important to effective ethical governance. Any gaps identified by the Standards Committee should be proactively addressed. In turn this should strengthen public confidence in the Authority and in local democracy. The Standards Board does have powers of intervention as well as a role to advise and support authorities.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Whilst development and implementation of any ideas to strengthen the local standards regime may have some resource implications these are unlikely to be significant.

**N SHARMA
MONITORING OFFICER**