

<p>Minutes of the Appeals Committee</p>
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11th July, 2005 at 2.00 p.m.
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor G. Davis (Chair);
Councillor S. Davies (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Idrees, Jones, Rogers and Ward.

Apology: Councillor Hinton.

5/05 **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Jones declared a personal interest in that she had previously been made aware of the Doorstep Calling Policy by a presentation to her Local Ward Committee.

6/05 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 relating to particular employees.

7/05 **Appeal in Respect of Door Step Calling Policy**

In accordance with the Authority's procedures, the Committee considered a dispute registered by the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) in respect of the Brigade's Doorstep Calling Policy.

The Fire Service had been undertaking home fire risk assessments (HFRAs) as part of its strategy for targeting 'at risk' members of the community with prevention based activity to reduce the number of fire injuries and deaths. The previous procedure of encouraging people to contact the Fire Service to arrange an HFRA had failed to reach those most at risk in the community and therefore a more proactive approach had been developed.

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The Doorstep Calling Policy had been developed based upon the Local Government Association's (LGA) Cold Calling Protocol for Local Authority Staff and in liaison with the Trading Standards Institute. The Policy had been subject to extensive consultation, which included discussions with the FBU. However, the FBU had expressed disagreement with the policy, in particular, the interpretation of 'doorstep calling' and concerns for the safety of Firefighters undertaking doorstep calling.

The Committee did not feel that the Authority's proposed HFRA - Door Step Calling Protocol was fully compliant with the LGA Cold Calling Policy for Local Authority staff in that it did not ensure that those people who do not fully understand English were aware that a Fire Fighter would call, or the reason for the call.

Whilst the Committee did not agree that 'Doorstep Calling' put Firefighters at any further risk than they were already, it did feel that the proposed protocol was not the most effective method of reaching those most at risk and ensuring that those contacted feel safe.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the proposed protocol on HFRA - Doorstep calling is not fully compliant with the LGA Cold Calling Policy for Local Authority staff;
- (2) that a new protocol be drawn up, on the basis that residents call a free phone number or return a tear-off slip in a pre-paid envelope to arrange an appointment and positively indicate that they want a firefighter to call;
- (3) that the leaflet include contact details in a variety of language to ensure that non-English reading/speaking members of the community are able to understand and make a positive response;
- (4) that, where possible, appointments to undertake Home Fire Risk Assessments be attended by a male and a female fire fighter;

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- (5) that the success of the new protocol be reviewed in 6 months and a report be submitted to the Executive Committee with statistics on the number of positive responses and the number of smoke detectors fitted.

(Meeting ended at 11.59 am)

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