

Minutes of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority

19th April 2010 at 11.00 am
at the Fire Service Headquarters, Birmingham

Present: Councillor Ward (Chairman);
Councillor S Davis (Vice-Chairman);
Councillors Alden, G Davies, Delaney, Douglas-
Maul, Gazey, Idrees, Jones, O'Neill, F Robinson,
M Robinson, Skinner, Spence, Stevenson, Tagger
and Turner.
Mr Denny and Mr Topliss.

Apologies: Councillors Chambers, Eustace, Hinton, Ryder,
Sutton and Mr Ager.

17/10 Chairman's Announcements

- Two firefighters from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority, James Shears aged 35 and Alan Brannon aged 38, had tragically died in the line of duty at an incident at a tower block in Southampton on 6th April 2010. Two further firefighters had been taken to hospital with minor burns.

The Authority was supporting Hampshire Police on the investigation into the incident and a team of seven staff had been allocated, led by ACFO John Brown. It was anticipated that the investigation would take a number of months and arrangements were in place to provide cover for the staff deployed on the investigation.

The Authority observed a minute of silence as a mark of respect for the firefighters who had tragically lost their lives.

- Members wished the Chief Fire Officer well for his climb up Mount Snowden on 21st April 2010 in aid of the Firefighters' Charity and Help for Heroes.

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18/10 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th February, 2010 be confirmed as a correct record.

19/10 **External Audit Plan and Scale of Fees for 2010/2011**

The Authority noted the Audit Commission's proposed work plan and scale of fees for 2010/2011.

The total fee for 2010/2011 was £93,326. This was in comparison to a fee of £87,850 in 2009/2010. The increase of approximately £13,000 was largely based upon the additional work required in relation to the introduction of the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). However, the Audit Commission had confirmed that this would be fully subsidised and consequently there would be no net overall increase in the fees in 2010/2011.

The Audit Commission also confirmed that, when calculating the Authority's fee for 2011/2012, the gross figure of £87,850 would be used to determine any percentage increase.

20/10 **Standards Committee – Appointment of Independent Members**

The Monitoring Officer reported that the independent members of the Authority's Standards Committee were approaching the end of their term of office and, in accordance with the requirements of the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008, it was necessary to re-advertise the positions.

The Authority received an updated role description for independent members and proposed timetables for their recruitment and selection, and induction.

Current guidance from the Standards Board for England (SBE) suggested that independent members should serve a maximum four-year term of office. The guidance also suggested however, that independent members could be appointed for differing

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lengths of time so that experience was not all lost at once, which could be the case if all members retired simultaneously. The Appointments Committee would be asked to take this into account when making the appointments.

It was proposed to impose a minimum attendance requirement on independent members, as was the case with elected members, which had been included in the role description now submitted.

The Authority noted that existing independent members of the Standards Committee would be able to re-apply.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to advertise for three independent members of the Standards Committee in accordance with the requirements of the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008, on the basis of the role description set out in Appendix 1;
- (2) that the timetable for the recruitment of independent members of the Standards Committee be approved;
- (3) that the induction programme for independent members of the Standards Committee be approved;
- (4) that the Appointments Committee be asked to take into account Standards Board for England guidance in relation to staggered terms of office for independent members of the Standards Committee when making its recommendations to the Authority on the persons to be appointed;

- (5) that if an independent member of the Standards Committee fails to attend any meeting of the Committee or its Sub-Committees over a period of six consecutive months he shall, unless the failure was due to a reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a member of the Committee;

21/10 **Approved Duty – Chair of Member Development Working Group**

Approval was sought to enable the Chair of the Member Development Working Group (MDWG) to claim travel and subsistence allowance for attendance at officer meetings in relation to the Authority's work towards achieving the Primary Level Member Development Charter.

This was not permitted within the current Members' Allowances Scheme and the Chair was only permitted to claim for attendance at meetings of the MDWG. However, as the work towards the Charter increased, it was anticipated that the Chair would be called upon more often to attend informal meetings with officers and advisors from the West Midlands Leaders Board. It was therefore proposed that attendance at these meetings be regarded as an approved duty.

Resolved that attendance by the Chair of the Member Development Working Group at officer meetings associated with the Authority's work towards achieving the West Midlands Member Development Charter be regarded as an approved duty for the purpose of travelling and subsistence allowances.

22/10 **Minutes of the Executive Committee**

The minutes of the meetings held on 15th March 2010 were received.

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The Clerk noted that Councillor Hinton's name appeared in both the list of those present and the list of apologies and undertook to correct this.

23/10 Notes of the Policy Planning Forum

The notes of the meeting held on 29th March 2010 were received.

24/10 Minutes of the Audit Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th March 2010 were received.

25/10 Minutes of the Appeals Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th March 2010 were received.

26/10 Notes of the Joint Consultative Panel

The notes of the meeting held on 15th February 2010 were received.

(Meeting ended at 11.41 am)

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| <p><i>Contact Officer: Stephnie Hancock Democratic Services Unit Sandwell MBC 0121-569-3261</i></p> |
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WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - INDEPENDENT MEMBER

ROLE DESCRIPTION

The Authority is required to have a Standards Committee to oversee the standards and ethics of elected, co-opted and independent members. The Committee's role includes assessing and reviewing complaints about members and the conduct of hearings into alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct, as well as advising and raising awareness of issues relating to ethics and conduct.

The Committee currently comprises three independent members and six elected members. Independent members act as Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee. Independent members also chair the Assessment, Review, and Consideration and Hearings Sub-Committees.

Aims of Role

Independent members are important in helping increase public confidence in local government. They provide a clear signal that the Standards Committee acts fairly and impartially. They also bring a wider perspective to the Committee from their outside experiences.

Independent Members will:

- Attend, participate in and chair meetings of the Authority's Standards Committee and Sub-Committees.
- Assist Members of the Authority to observe the Members' Code of Conduct and to maintain high standards of conduct generally.

Skills and Competencies Required

1. A keen interest in standards in public life.
2. A wish to serve the local community and uphold local democracy.
3. High standards of personal integrity.
4. Familiar with ethical dilemmas.
5. Good communication skills both written and verbal.
6. Ability to act as the chair of an assessment or review sub-committee or a determination hearing or the Standards Committee. The Chair will need to command the respect of members and the local community.

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7. Ability to examine evidence and complex documentation; to take an objective, independent and unbiased view; and to exercise sound decision making skills.
8. Effective questioning skills.
9. Assertive and with leadership qualities, particularly in respect of exercising sound judgement.
10. Ability to speak in public and to make media statements.
11. Ability to represent the Authority to other bodies and organisations.

Time Commitment

Meetings of the Standards Committee are held during the day at the Fire Service Headquarters, and generally last one to two hours. The Committee meets on average four times a year.

Meetings of the Assessment, Review, and Consideration and Hearing Sub-Committees are held as and when necessary.

The Local Government Act 1972 provides that if an elected member fails to attend any meeting of the authority over a period of six consecutive months he shall, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the Authority before the expiry of that period, cease to be a member of the Authority. The same attendance requirement will apply to independent members of the Standards Committee. You will therefore be expected to abide by the six month rule and if you fail to do so, a vacancy will be declared.

Remuneration

Members receive an allowance of £350 in addition to travel and substance expenses.

Induction and Training

An induction programme will be provided for independent members. Additional training is provided as necessary.

Indemnity arrangements

Independent members carrying out their statutory duties are protected by the Authority's indemnity arrangements under the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order 2004.

Special Conditions

1. You cannot apply if you have been a Member or employee of the Authority at any time during the last 5 years or are a serving elected Member or employee.
2. You cannot apply if you are a relative or close friend of a Member or employee of the Authority.
3. You must sign an undertaking to comply with the Authority's Code of Conduct for Members and disclose your interests in the register of members' interests.
4. You must disclose whether you are an active member of any political party at local, regional or national level.
5. You must disclose whether you hold any contract with the Authority.
6. You must disclose whether you are a party to any outstanding complaint or grievance against the Authority.
7. Canvassing by the candidate will disqualify your application.