

<p>Minutes of the Standards Committee</p>
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14th December, 2009, at 1.30 pm
at Fire Service Headquarters, Vauxhall Road, Birmingham

Present: Mr Topliss (Chair);
Councillors Idrees, Ryder, Singh and Sutton;
Mr Bagley.

Apology: Mr Denny.

16/09 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September, 2009, be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the addition of Councillor Sutton to the list of apologies.

17/09 **Standards Board DVD – Assessment Made Clear**

The Committee viewed the “Assessment Made Clear” DVD by the Standards Board for England. The DVD was designed to help Standards Committee Members and local authority officers involved in the assessment of complaints about elected and co-opted Members. It went through the four stages of the assessment process, looking at important or contentious issues along the way. These stages were pre-assessment, assessment, decision and review.

Dramatised case studies were used to demonstrate the criteria that guided each decision, including whether any investigation should be conducted locally or referred to Standards for England. It also showed when it may be appropriate to take no action or other action.

The Monitoring Officer reported that there had been no complaints against Members of the Authority and therefore Members of the Standards Committee had not been engaged in the practical process of assessment.

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The Chair and Monitoring Officer requested that the Committee provide comments and feedback on the DVD via the Standards Board for England website.

18/09 **Core Values**

The Committee was informed that in December 2004, the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) published recommendations for Core Values for the UK Fire and Rescue Services. This was the result of joint working across the country. The concept behind them was to link the strands of modernisation and help define what was expected of individuals.

Although the Core Values were, in principle, a national set of values for all UK Fire and Rescue Services, each organisation was allowed to reword or alter them to fit local need/culture. The Service currently had four Core Values: Service to the Community; People; Diversity; and Improvement.

The Core Values set the cultural context in the way the organisation worked. They were embedded in the organisation via various methods such as posters; articles in Firepower magazine; and 'Living the Values' training. This was a standard training session which was being delivered across the Service on a rolling programme of two crews plus six support staff per week plus extra courses on request. It was anticipated that all watches would have received this training by December 2010.

The Committee noted the Core Values for the Service.

19/09 **Officer Code of Conduct**

It was reported that public confidence in the integrity and standards of conduct by employees of the Service must be high. The public was entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees. Employees were expected to observe certain standards of behaviour and to bring to light any irregularity in behaviour or procedure.

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The amendments to the Policy reflected national guidance on the Code of Conduct which would meet the recommendations of the Internal Audit report on Governance.

The policy had been subject to a four week consultation process with Trade Unions.

The Policy had to be renamed to follow the national code of conduct guidance for local government terminology.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the Government had consulted on an employee Code of Conduct but there had been a further delay in putting it into effect. If and when the national Code of Conduct emerged, there may be aspects that were different from this local Code of Conduct and in any event the Authority could not be sure that the national Code of Conduct would be applicable to fire authorities. The draft for consultation, for example, contained core values that were similar but not the same as currently for the Authority. In the meantime, the Authority was being proactive in reviewing the position and having the local Code of Conduct and submitting it to the Committee.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the title of the policy be changed from 'Official Conduct' to 'Code of Conduct';
- (2) that the Code of Conduct Policy, attached as an Appendix, be approved.

20/09 **Standards for England – Annual Review 2008 – 2009 Local Standards: National Perspectives**

The Committee considered the Standards Board for England Annual Review 2008/09 which set out a useful summary of the national picture and notable practice. It was important that Members had an awareness of this even though there had been no complaints against Members of the Authority.

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21/09 **2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees**

The Chair and Monitoring Officer shared with the Committee their experiences and learning from the 2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which was held on 12th and 13th October, 2009.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Independent Members on the Committee would be due to retire at the end of the current municipal year. The Chair requested that a report be presented at the next Committee outlining the timetable for recruiting new members.

Resolved that the Monitoring Officer be requested to present a report to the next Standards Committee outlining the timetable for recruiting new Independent Members.

22/09 **Review of Register of Gifts and Hospitality in Relation to Members**

The Committee received the Register of Gifts and Hospitality in relation to Members and Co-opted Members for the last twelve months.

The Monitoring Officer had a statutory duty to maintain a public register of councillors' and co-opted members' interests and also a record of any gift or hospitality received with an estimated value of at least £25.00.

As a public register, the Authority had to ensure that this record was available for inspection by the public at all reasonable hours. Currently the Register was kept in paper form.

There were three recorded entries for the last twelve months, all of which were made by the former Chairman of the Authority.

The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that she would be sending an annual reminder and a guidance note to all Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority in regard to the Register.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Monitoring Officer be requested to provide an annual report to the Standards Committee on the gifts and hospitality declared by Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority;

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- (2) that the Monitoring Officer send an annual reminder and a guidance note to all Members and Co-opted Members of the Authority in regard to the Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

23/09 **Work Programme 2009/2010**

The Committee received a work programme for 2009/2010, which had been prepared by the Monitoring Officer and captured both statutory functions required by relevant legislation and non-statutory functions, including those promoted by the Standards Board for England.

Resolved that the Standards Committee Work Programme 2009/2010 be approved.

24/09 **Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be on Monday 15th March, 2010 at a time to be arranged.

(Meeting ended at 3.14 pm)

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Contact Officer: Amarjit Sahota</i> <i>Democratic Services Unit</i> <i>Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council</i> <i>0121 569 3189</i></p>
