

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Standards Committee
held at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Monday 24 July 2006 at 5.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Holyoak (from 5.10 pm), Mellings and Morgan, and non-elected Independent Member, Mr Tebbutt.

The Election of Chair and Appointment of Vice-Chair were inadvertently omitted from the agenda. These items should be considered at the first meeting of the Committee, which takes place after the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority (held on 19 July 2006). Therefore these items were dealt with before the start of the published agenda.

Election of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Morgan and seconded by Councillor Mellings

That Independent Member, Mr Tebbutt, be elected Chair of the Standards Committee to hold office until the meeting of the Standards Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

There being no other nominations, Mr Tebbutt was duly elected Chair.

Appointment of Vice-Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Mellings and seconded by Mr Tebbutt

That Councillor Morgan be appointed Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee to hold office until the meeting of the Standards Committee immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority.

There being no other nominations, Councillor Morgan was duly appointed Vice-Chair.

1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence had been received from Members.

The Group Solicitor had advised that he would be unable to attend the meeting.

Councillor Holyoak had advised that she would be late arriving at the meeting, as she had another meeting beforehand.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.



3 Minutes

Members received the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 26 April 2006.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting, held on 26 April 2006, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.*

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

In relation to the issue of public questions, Councillor Morgan asked if it was commonplace for Standards Committees to receive public questions. The Clerk could not answer this at the meeting but undertook to look into the matter.

5 Register of Members' Interests

This report informed Members of the Standards Committee of the response to the recent request for all Fire Authority Members to complete the Register of Members' Interests form.

Since the report was written, one additional Register of Interests had been received, making the total received fifteen out of a possible nineteen.

Councillor Mellings commented that reasonable steps had been taken to prompt Members to complete the forms and that the onus was now on individual Members to return the forms. The Clerk emphasised the importance of Members returning the forms, as, should a complaint be made to The Standards Board, their first request would be to see the Register of Interests and evidence of attendance at Code of Conduct training for the Member concerned.

Councillor Morgan recommended that a reminder should be sent to Members about completing the Register of Interests. He also asked if the Registers of Interest that Members complete for the local authority could be shared with the Fire Authority to avoid duplication. The Clerk was unsure about this, as the Standards Board view the local authority and the Fire Authority as two separate legal entities, but undertook to look into the matter.

Councillor Holyoak joined the meeting at this point (5.10 pm).

The Chief Fire Officer suggested that a letter prompting Members to return their Register of Interests and Code of Conduct training questionnaire (see agenda item 6 below) be sent to those Members, who have not yet returned their forms. Members agreed that this would be the best course of action.

Resolved: *that*

- a) *Members note the content of the report; and*
- b) *A reminder letter be sent to those Members, who have not yet returned their Register of Interests and Code of Conduct training questionnaire to ensure that the Register of Members' Interests for all Members is up-to-date.*



6 Code of Conduct Training

This report provided the Standards Committee with details of recent training in the Code of Conduct, organised by Borough of Telford & Wrekin and made available to Fire Authority Members. It also advised the Committee of the responses to a questionnaire, in which Members were asked to provide details of training, which they have received in the Code of Conduct, during the last year.

The Clerk advised Members that further Code of Conduct training sessions would be held later in the year when the revisions to the Code of Conduct were issued. The Borough of Telford and Wrekin are anticipating booking Peter Keith-Lucas to carry out the training.

Councillor Morgan recommended Code of Conduct training to Members as being very worthwhile. Councillor Holyoak commented that Code of Conduct training seemed to be provided by many different organisations, such as parish councils and local authorities but there are slight differences in the training provided.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the report.*

7 The Adjudication Panel for England

This report provided Members of the Standards Committee with information regarding the work of the Adjudication Panel for England.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the report.*

8 Case Reports in Relation to Fire Authorities

This report provided the Committee with information relating to complaints alleging breach of the Members' Code of Conduct against Members of Fire Authorities.

Only one example of a complaint against a Member of a Fire Authority had been found on the Standards Board website. Members agreed that it was an interesting example.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the report.*

9 Standards Board Bulletin

At its last meeting the Standards Committee agreed that Standards Board Bulletins should be circulated to all Members of the Fire Authority. Accordingly, a copy of Bulletin 29 was emailed to all Members (including the two Independent Members of the Standards Committee) on 1 June 2006. It was also agreed that the Bulletins should be brought to meetings of the Committee for discussion.

The Clerk brought Members' attention to the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees, to be held on 16 and 17 October 2006 in Birmingham. Members' attention was also directed to the Standards and Audit Committees article on page 3 of the Bulletin and to the Referral and Investigation statistics on pages 4 and 5.

Resolved: *that Members note the content of the Standards Board Bulletin.*



Councillor Mellings left the meeting at this point (5.35 pm).

10 West Mercia Independent Members' Forum

Members received the minutes of the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum held on 3 February 2006.

It was confirmed that Shropshire will host the January meeting of Independent Members' Forum. The meeting will take place at 2.00 pm for 2.30 pm on Friday, 26 January 2007 at the Shropshire Education and Conference Centre, Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Shrewsbury. The two Independent Members of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee together with the Chief Fire Officer, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer, the Standards Committee Solicitor and Committee Clerks will attend.

Independent Member, Michael Tebbutt, had attended the February meeting of the Forum and he drew Members' attention to the comments made in the section of the minutes relating to proposed changes. Of particular note were the comments about the sidelining of Members and the confusion over the definition of the term "Independent".

Mr Tebbutt reported that the Independent Members' Forum seemed to be struggling. The meeting, which was held at Oswestry on 7 June, was not well attended. Councillor Morgan asked if the lesser used venues needed to be supported or if three or so main venues needed to be used instead. Mr Tebbutt confirmed that the poor attendance is a geographical issue, as some Members are being asked to travel long distances to attend the meetings. The Clerk suggested that the attendance at the meeting to be held at Shrewsbury in January 2007 be monitored and a report brought to the Standards Committee. It was suggested that, if Members were being asked to travel long distances, then a light lunch should be provided for them on arrival. The catering arrangements for the Shrewsbury meeting need to be confirmed.

Resolved: *that Members note*

- a) *The minutes of the West Mercia Independent Members' Forum meeting, held on 3 February 2006; and*
- b) *The date, time and venue of the Independent Members' Forum meeting, which will be held in January 2007.*

The meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

CHAIR:.....

DATE:.....

