

**Minutes of the Standards Committee held on 13th January 2011 at
North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St Asaph**

Present

Simon Fysh (Chair)
Jane A Eyton-Jones (Vice-Chair)
Celia Blomeley
Cllr Glyn Williams

Also in attendance

Colin Everett, Clerk
Alwen Davies, Member Liaison Officer

Apologies

David Morris
Cllr Merfyn Thomas

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 None.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4TH MAY 2010

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 4th May were approved as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 6.2 - Complaints reaching Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure - following the Clerk's suggestion at the last meeting, that it would be useful to have an independent member from the Standards Committee on the stage 3 panel, it was agreed that an independent member could usefully attend as an observer or a full panel member. The independent member could be rotated in order to increase all independent members' knowledge and experience. However, it was acknowledged that only two complaints had ever reached stage 3 of the procedure. The Clerk would recommend a change to the constitution of the Complaints Panel. The Clerk further reported that the Panel, when it had met, was conducted well and that he had no concerns to report.

4 MEMBERSHIP ISSUES

4.1 The Clerk informed Members that David Morris had been appointed in September, and was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting. Members had previously been informed of the appointment and had received a copy of Mr Morris' CV for information.

5 OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT

5.1 The annual report was circulated and it was agreed that Members would read the report and contact the Clerk if they had any queries. The annual report is an opportunity for the Ombudsman to explain his activities and to

draw advice to bodies subject to his role from the learning of maladministration casework and standards of conduct casework.

5.2 Cllr Williams asked about disciplinary cases within the Service and whether they were resolved within a reasonable timescale. He was concerned that the stress of being suspended affected families and marriages due to the uncertainty and asked for assurances that cases are not drawn out longer than necessary within the Fire and Rescue Service.

5.3 The Clerk explained that this was not within the remit of the Standards Committee. However, members of the Committee were entitled to have summary information which was reported to the Authority/Executive. There was no evidence to suggest that the Service was not adhering to its policies in human resources and the Clerk advised that performance in this area was not of concern to senior officers or to the Authority. He would relay the councillor's questions to senior officers and provide the information requested for information.

6 ALLOWANCES CONFIRMATION

6.1 The Clerk reminded Members that the Authority had agreed to pay independent members an allowance. Members were asked to contact Alwen Davies if they wished to accept the allowance which would be backdated to 1st April 2010. Some had already done so.

6.2 It was noted that the Chair of the committee's annual allowance is £362.50 and other members will receive £190 annually.

7 POLICY ON COMPLAINTS ABOUT MEMBERS

7.1 Members were informed that the vice-chair of the Authority had been suspended by the Ombudsman for a period of three months following an issue at Anglesey County Council. The matter had no bearing on the Fire and Rescue Authority but as the member was suspended from his constituent authority he was also suspended from all other related duties for the same period.

7.2 The complaints about members' policy, which was last updated in 2008, was circulated.

7.3 Ms J Eyton-Jones asked whether the queries raised in 6.3 of the minutes of the last meeting had been answered. The Clerk stated that although the committee's remit was to deal with members' issues, members were entitled to show an interest in the Service's work and therefore agreed to ensure that the queries would be answered and the responses emailed to members following the meeting.

7.4 The Chair asked that everyone read through the complaints about members policy and contact the Clerk if there were any issues. Members acknowledged that the Ombudsman is due to publish a complaints policy for use by all public bodies in Wales, however, it was currently unknown when this would be made available.

8 WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

- 8.1 It was noted that there is no separate whistle-blowing policy for Members but a generic one for the whole Authority. However, the Clerk asked for copies of the Service's Public Interest Disclosure policy to be circulated to members of the Standards Committee as it was relevant. It was noted that the policy had been cross-referenced with the X-Pert system and was up to date. If members had any issues after reading the policy they were invited to contact the Clerk. There was no history of the policy being called upon and therefore no information to report.

9 CODE OF CONDUCT TRAINING

- 9.1 Following a discussion at a previous meeting of the Committee, constituent authorities had been asked to provide details about training they had given to their councillors about the code of conduct. The training provided within the Fire and Rescue Authority on the code is basic as it is expected that they are all fully briefed by their constituent authorities. Information had been received from Wrexham, Flintshire, Anglesey and Conwy. Gwynedd had provided its full training programme but not detailed information about which members had received the training. Follow up work will be done by the Clerk to ensure all Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority had indeed received code of conduct training.

10 AUTHORITY UPDATE

- 10.1 The Clerk reminded Members that all agendas and reports for Authority meetings are available on the Authority's website. The Clerk informed members of the following:
- 10.2 Regular performance monitoring reports are submitted to the Executive Panel and the Authority which compares the Authority's latest performance with previous years as well as providing comparison on an all-Wales basis.
- 10.3 The Audit Committee has now been in place for over a year and is well-established; the Committee provides a good checking balance in the system.
- 10.4 An extraordinary meeting of the Authority had been held before Christmas to discuss the budget for the next three years. The Authority's budget consists mainly of contributions from constituent authorities and some specific grant funding is also received from the Assembly. Officers had worked on various options to deal with the budget reductions and the Authority had opted for a small decrease in the budget, which will mean some operational changes but would not put the Service at undue risk.
- 10.5 The Chair asked whether it would be feasible to combine Standards committees to cover all three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales, as its workload was minimal. The Clerk explained that by law each Authority was required to have its own Standards committee and that it was there as a safeguard.