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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING (PART I)

Held on Tuesday 11 November 2008

Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire
and Rescue Service, Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire,
RG30 4FS



Independent Members present: Mr Albert Gregory
Mr Peter McGuigan
Mr John Quinton
Mr Ronald Webb

Elected Members present: Councillor Andrew Bradley
Councillor Colin Dudley
Councillor Peter Jones

In attendance: Lynda Kenyon (Committee Manager)
Caroline Redzikowska (Clerk and Monitoring Officer)

02.01.08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Prue Bray (Elected Member).

02.02.08 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Having been reminded that in accordance with the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare interests which are Personal or Personal and Prejudicial, where appropriate, it was **Noted** that on this occasion there were no such declarations made.

02.03.08 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2008 were **Agreed** as a correct record for signing by the Chairman. The Chairman confirmed that he had presented the Standards Committee's annual report to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 8 October 2008.

02.04.08 CONSULTATION ON REVISIONS TO THE MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT AND ON THE INTRODUCTION OF A CODE FOR EMPLOYEES

The Committee considered the recently published Consultation on the revisions to the Model Code of Conduct and on the introduction of a Code for Employees published by the Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Committee also considered its response to the Consultation, taking into account the suggestions included in Appendix C to the presented report. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer referred the Committee specifically to Question 14 ("*Should we*

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apply the employees' code to firefighters, teachers, community support officers, and solicitors?"). The Committee considered the merits of applying the employees' Code to this group of staff, whether the Authority needed a further Code when it already has a voluntary Code in practice, and whether there would be any benefits of applying two Codes of Conduct running parallel to each other. Councillor Peter Jones was concerned that the Government had not consulted with Representative Bodies.

The Standards Committee:

- a) **Noted** the presented report and the contents of the Consultation report.
- b) **Agreed** that the Committee should respond to the Consultations on the review of the Code of Conduct for Members and a Code for Employees.
- c) **Agreed** that the suggested response answers, as presented at Appendix C of the presented report, be submitted, subject to the following amendment to the answer to Question 13 ("*Do you agree that a mandatory model code of conduct for local government employees, which would be incorporated into employees' terms and conditions of employment, is needed?*"), as follows:
 - "No, we do not think that the need has been demonstrated, and we are concerned that there has been no consultation with Unions, however, if a Code is to be imposed, then our answers to questions 14-22 apply."

02.05.08 UPDATE REPORT

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer provided an update on 'Standards Activity' and issues, and the Committee was reminded of its Work Programme for the forthcoming meetings.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer confirmed that the revised Members' Interests forms had now been circulated to Members for completion and return.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer and Mr John Quinton provided a brief update from the Annual Standards Board for England's conference held in Birmingham recently, the salient points being that they believed the conference was slightly inferior to previous annual events, the workshops involved too many people to enable effective engagement, and that informal discussions with their peers had been of benefit. Mr John Quinton was also concerned whether the costs of the conference outweighed the benefits gained. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that she would consider the content of next year's annual conference to ascertain whether it would be prudent to attend. The Chairman thanked Mr John Quinton and the Clerk and Monitoring Officer for attending on behalf of the Standards Committee.

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The Clerk and Monitoring Officer reported that she would also be circulating the advertisements for the two Independent Member vacancies to the Unitary Authorities.

In considering an independent view to support any revised Members' Scheme of Allowances, the Standards Committee supported Councillor Peter Jones' opinion

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that the Committee should respect any recommendations presented by the independent assessor. Councillor Peter Jones stated that, as previously advised at the last meeting, he did not personally wish to participate in considerations of the Scheme. In response to Councillor Peter Jones, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer agreed that Members should be given the opportunity to submit their respective comments to the independent assessor.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer confirmed that, since the time of writing the Update Report, she had been advised that a shared training course for Standards Committee Members on local assessment was being conducted by West Berkshire on 21 January 2009 at 2pm (Market Street, Newbury, West Berkshire), the details of which had been circulated to the Committee Members. She encouraged the Committee Members to attend this training event and to advise her as soon as possible if they wished to attend.

All

The Standards Committee:

- **Noted** the contents of the report, and **Supported** the Update Report as a Standing Agenda Item.
- **Agreed** that, as a matter of good practice and for audit purposes, an independent view should be sought to support any revised Members' Allowances Scheme that might be drawn up.
- **Authorised** the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to make further investigations with a view to appointing an independent assessor to review the Members' Allowances Scheme and to make recommendations to the Committee.

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02.06.08 DATES OF 2009 MEETINGS

The Standards Committee Agreed that it would meet on the following dates in 2009:

- Thursday 15 January 2009
- Monday 9 March 2009
- Thursday 14 May 2009
- Thursday 9 July 2009
- Monday 14 September 2009
- Monday 9 November 2009

All the above meetings will take place at 5pm at the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Headquarters.

On behalf of the Standards Committee, the Chairman conveyed his thanks and appreciation to Mr Peter McGuigan for his hard work and contribution to the Committee and he wished him well.

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Minutes signed by Chairman as a correct record:

Signature 

Print Name ALBERT GREGORY

Date signed: 5th June 2009

