

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

27 MARCH 2006

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Report by the Clerk

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider the attached report from the Standards Committee.

Background

- 2 The Committee has, as a matter of good corporate governance, resolved to provide the Fire and Rescue Authority with an annual report on its activities during each financial year. For this purpose the Committee met on 22 February 2006 to agree on its Annual Report for 2005/06.
- 3 Consequently the Committee's second Annual Report, which covers its activities between April 2005 and March 2006, is attached for Members' consideration.

Recommendation

- 4 That the Fire and Rescue Authority receives the Standards Committee's Annual Report and considers whether it wishes to support the Committee's recommendation for the requested change in legislation.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

ANNUAL REPORT

- 1 This is the Standards Committee's second annual report to the Fire and Rescue Authority and spans the period from April 2005 to March 2006.

Membership

- 2 The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Independent members

Mr Chris Bretherton-Watt (chair)
Mr John Pollard JP (vice chair)
Mr Simon Fysh

Fire and Rescue Authority members

Councillor Sharon Frobisher
Councillor Gwilym O Williams

Meetings held

3.1 The Committee strives to meet at least twice a year, usually about 6 months apart, or more often if business necessitates such meetings. During the year under review the Committee met on 3 occasions: 1 July 2005, 10 October 2005 and 22 February 2006.

3.2 Attendance was as follows:

Mr Chris Bretherton-Watt	3/3
Mr John Pollard JP	2/3
Mr Simon Fysh	3/3
Councillor Sharon Frobisher	2/3
Councillor Gwilym O Williams	3/3

3.3 The additional cost of the standards committee's activities, including travel and subsistence, printing, postage etc., is estimated to have been just over £700.

Issues discussed

4 The committee has discussed the following matters:

Consultations and draft legislation:

- 4.1 the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation and draft legislation on the "Review of the Model Code of Conduct". A copy of the Committee's response was circulated to all members of the Authority's Executive Panel prior to its meeting on 25 July 2005. The Panel subsequently decided that "on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authority, it did not wish to add any further observations or submit a separate response to the consultation";
- 4.2 the Assembly Government's consultation on the "Proposed Amendments to the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001". The Committee's response to this consultation encompassed issues such as granting independent members of standards committees the right to apply, by means of an open competition, for a second term of office and that the Assembly Government secure an amendment to primary legislation that would allow a standards committee to devolve the power to grant dispensations to the chair of the committee. The Committee also suggested that, in line with the Assembly Government's policy in *Making the Connections*, legislation be introduced that removed the requirement for each individual authority to establish its own standards committee;
- 4.3 the Assembly Government's consultation on the "Draft Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (Standards Investigations) Order". The Committee's response was agreed by correspondence and supported the thrust of the draft order. In its response the Committee also registered its regret that the Assembly did not possess the necessary powers to implement changes to the regime that would enable all complaints to be investigated locally in the first instance with only the more serious ones being referred to the Ombudsman. It therefore reiterated its call for primary legislation to be amended. The Standards Committee asks that the Fire and Rescue Authority should support its stance on this matter.

Other business:

- 4.4 procedures for handling investigations and hearings by the committee. These procedures were finalised and amended to reflect the present requirement that all complaints in the first instance had to be referred to the Ombudsman for determination on whether he would investigate a complaint or refer it to the local monitoring officer for investigation;

- 4.5 provision of an annual budget for the committee. Consideration was given by Committee members to whether the Standards Committee should be allocated its own budget. Following reassurances that the Committee's expenditure could be satisfactorily monitored, via the Authority's Committee Services' budget, it resolved that the provision of an expenditure update report at each meeting would suffice;
- 4.6 training requirements for members of the committee and for members of the fire and rescue authority. No additional training needs were identified for Standards Committee members, or for Fire and Rescue Authority members, on the ethical framework. This area will be reviewed on a regular basis;
- 4.7 progress on legislation: the committee has been regularly kept informed on the expected timetable for legislation on which it has been consulted.

Complaints against members of the fire and rescue authority

- 5 During the period of this report, no complaints have been made against councillors in respect of their role as members of the fire and rescue authority. Accordingly, no matters have been referred to the committee for investigation or decision. The committee hopes that this pleasing position will continue.

Other activities undertaken by members of the standards committee

- 6 There is no obligation or expectation that independent members of the Standards Committee should attend meetings in addition to those of the Committee. Independent members of the Standards Committee have not been present, as observers, at any Fire and Rescue Authority or Executive Panel meetings during the past twelve months.

Conclusion

- 7 The Standards Committee recommends that the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority supports a change in legislation to allow all complaints to be investigated locally in the first instance with only the more serious ones being referred to the Ombudsman.

March 2006