

**NORTH WALES FIRE AUTHORITY**

**21 MARCH 2005**

**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 decided at its meeting on 15 December that, as a matter of good corporate governance, it should provide the Fire Authority with an annual report on its activities. The first report covers a period of 15 months from the establishment of the Committee.

**Recommendation**

- 3 That the Fire Authority considers the attached report.

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE OF NORTH WALES FIRE AUTHORITY

### ANNUAL REPORT

- 1 This report covers the period from the establishment of the Committee in November 2003 to March 2005. The Committee intends to produce a report for each financial year from now on.

#### Membership

- 2 The membership of the Committee has been as follows:

##### Independent members

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

##### Fire authority members

Councillor E Morgan Jones (November 2003 to June 2004)  
Councillor H T Williams (November 2003 to June 2004)  
Councillor Sharon Frobisher (From July 2004)  
Councillor Gwilym O Williams (From July 2004)

#### Meetings held

- 3.1 The Committee met on 3 occasions during the period under review: 21 November 2003, 28 January 2004 and 15 December 2004. The committee has agreed that it will plan to meet at least twice a year, about 6 months apart in future.

- 3.2 Attendance was as follows:

Mr Chris Bretherton-Watt	3/3
Mr John Pollard JP	3/3
Mr Simon Fysh	2/3
Councillor E Morgan Jones	2/2
Councillor H T Williams	1/2
Councillor Sharon Frobisher	1/1
Councillor Gwilym O Williams	1/1

- 3.3 The additional cost of the standards committee's activities, including travel and subsistence, printing, postage etc., is estimated to have been just under £1000 during the period covered by this report.

## Issues discussed

- 4 The committee has discussed the following matters:
  - 4.1 the legislative framework governing its work and the structure of the authority and its other committees. This was primarily by way of introductory training for members of the committee;
  - 4.2 how to handle registration of interests of members of the authority. The committee supported the proposal that was eventually agreed by the fire authority, namely that members should be asked to authorise disclosure to the fire authority of the interests they had registered with their “home” council;
  - 4.3 training requirements for members of the committee and for members of the fire authority. The three independent members attended the training day for new members of the authority that was held on 29 September 2004. This included a module on the ethical framework. The standards committee has subsequently concluded that no additional training is required for members of the fire authority but that it will review the position annually;
  - 4.4 Attendance by members of the committee at meetings of the authority or its other committees. It was agreed that members should endeavour to attend meetings from time to time, to observe standards of conduct at first hand as an aid to identify any training needs. Each of the independent members has attended at least one meeting of the authority or of another committee during the period under review;
  - 4.5 Reports of the ombudsman and Adjudication Panel for Wales. The committee noted the main trends in complaints that had been upheld against councillors but that no complaints had been made against any member of a fire authority in the period to March 2004. Very few complaints have been upheld against members of fire authorities in England. The committee will be considering whether any lessons can be identified from them that might inform future training;
  - 4.6 Procedures for handling investigations and hearings by the committee. These need to be finalised in light of the amendment to the standing orders, agreed in December 2004, which provide for the committee also to regulate its own proceedings.
  - 4.7 Scheme of allowances. The committee noted the introduction of allowances for members of the authority. Independent members of the committee receive only travelling expenses and subsistence where appropriate. The committee asked the authority to consider the question

of paying a nominal allowance to the independent members, and is grateful that the Executive Panel has pursued this by supporting change to the legislation to enable such allowances to be paid.

### **Complaints against members of the fire 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 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 In addition to occasional attendance at meetings of the fire authority or its other committees, the independent members and Councillor Frobisher attended the first annual conference of standards committees in Wales which was held in Aberystwyth on 11 February 2005. This gave the opportunity to hear from the ombudsman, chair of the Adjudication Panel and Welsh Assembly Government official about recent and forthcoming developments in the legislation and guidance, and to share experiences with members of other standards committees.

### **Conclusion**

- 7 The Standards Committee does not have any recommendations to make to the North Wales Fire Authority as a result of this report.

March 2005