

AT A MEETING of the HAMPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
STANDARDS COMMITTEE held at The Castle, Winchester on 18 December, 2009

PRESENT:

Mr. M. James (Independent Member – Chairman); C. Carter; Mrs. J. Frankum; A. Fraser; D. Harrison; F. Jonas; R.J. Kimber.

9 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Miss S. Roberts.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that, where they believed that they had a personal or personal prejudicial interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting, they should, normally at the time of the debate, declare their interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, consider whether to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with paragraph 12 of the Code.

Mr. M. James, as the independent Chairman, declared a personal interest in item 7 regarding the appointment of a Selection Panel to interview applicants to serve as independent members on the Standards Committee for the four-year term from February, 2010. It was noted that Mr. James was seeking re-appointment as an independent member on the Committee. (Minute 15 refers).

11 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October, 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising:

Arrangements to Combat Fraud and Corruption

Pursuant to Minute 6, it was confirmed that the relevant Fire Service Order with information about whistleblowing had been circulated to Members for their information.

Possible Joint Working Arrangements

Pursuant to Minute 7, regarding possible joint working arrangements with Hampshire County Council's and Hampshire Police Authority's Standards Committees, the Clerk reported that dialogue with the other authorities had been initiated and confirmation of the position was awaited.

12 **DEPUTATIONS**

There were no deputations.

13 **APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Committee were reminded that at their last meeting they had agreed to defer this item. They supported the proposal to consider the appointment of a Vice-Chairman at their next meeting on 12 March, 2010. By this time, the independent member appointment would have been made by the Fire Authority on 10 February, 2010 for the next four year period.

14 **REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

The Committee considered the report of the Clerk (Item 6 in the Minute Book) on an invitation for each committee to review their terms of reference. Responses would be reported back to the Governance Committee on 20 March, 2010 and recommendations about the future governance structure then proposed for adoption by the Authority at its Annual Meeting in June, 2010.

Members supported no changes to the Committee's terms of reference recognising that they are largely prescribed duties under legislation. However, they wished the Governance Committee to consider as an option the possible amalgamation of the Governance and Standards Committees and to explore the possibility of greater Member involvement in any particular Fire and Rescue Service matter not covered under present arrangements. Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) That, whilst the Standards Committee supports no changes to its terms of reference, recognising that they are largely prescribed duties under legislation, the Governance Committee be asked to consider the merits or otherwise of amalgamating the Governance and Standards Committees and to explore any fire and rescue service matters not currently covered by the existing Committee arrangements which would benefit from such involvement.
- (b) That the Chairman of the Standards Committee present the Committee's comments on this item to the Governance Committee on 24 March, 2010.

15 **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO SERVE ON HFRA – STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Clerk advised that the Authority had authorised the Committee to appoint a panel of four of its members, with responsibility for interviewing candidates to serve as independent member of the Committee for a four year period from February 2010 and making recommendations to the Authority for appointment. The Chairman, Mr M. James, declared a personal interest in this item, as an applicant for reappointment. Considering (i) the legal requirement for business meetings of the Committee to be chaired by an independent member, (ii) that

neither of the other two independent members was present (the one who was intended to chair this item having given apologies at short notice), and (iii) the business need to appoint the panel without delay to meet the timescales in the appointment process, the Committee decided that this item of business would be restricted to the appointment of the panel members only, with no discussion about any other aspect of the interview and selection process. On the basis that this item of business was a purely procedural step that the Committee had been authorised to take by the full Authority, and as there was little scope for the Chairman to influence the decision - the nominations to the panel effectively being made by the political groups on a proportional basis - the Clerk advised that Mr James could decide that he did not have a prejudicial interest in this item. This was on the basis that the full test for a prejudicial interest was not met, as a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would not reasonably regard his interest in the item as so significant that it would prejudice his judgement of the public interest. Mr James therefore remained in the Chair for this item but took no part in proceedings. The Clerk invited the political groups to nominate their representatives on the panel and these nominations were endorsed by the Committee. There was no discussion of any other aspect of the interview and selection process.

RESOLVED:

That Councillors C. Carter; Mrs. J. Frankum; D. Harrison and R.J. Kimber be appointed as elected Members of the Selection Panel to interview those candidates who had applied to be independent members of the Standards Committee for the four-year term from February, 2010.

NOTE: At the conclusion of the formal business of the meeting, Mr M. James left the room and the remaining members had an informal discussion about the conduct of the interview process and the qualities to be sought in candidates for independent member. Then with Mr James present once again, the Clerk provided Members of the Committee with a training update on developments in the ethical standards framework.

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