

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

The Committee as a matter of good corporate governance has produced an annual report covering its activities during the year to 31st March 2006.

2. Membership

The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Independent Members

Mr Gerwyn Morgan (Chair)

Mrs Sue Fox (Vice Chair)

Mr Meirion Howells

Mr Richard Martin

Authority Members

Councillor Jim Davies

Councillor Paul James

Councillor Glyn Seabourne

3. Meetings Held

3.1 Whilst there is a statutory requirement for the Committee to meet at least once a year, the Committee strives to meet at least twice a year, or more often if business dictates. During 2005/06 the Committee met on three occasions: 12th May 2005, 7th July 2005 and 13th October 2005.

3.2 Attendance was as follows:

Mr Gerwyn Morgan	3/3
Mrs Sue Fox	2/3
Mr Meirion Howells	2/3
Mr Richard Martin	2/3
Councillor Jim Davies	3/3
Councillor Paul James	0/3
Councillor Glyn Seabourne	3/3

4. Work carried out during the year.

4.1 Review of the Model Code of Conduct. A substantial portion of the Committee's work during the year has been in relation to the draft revised Code of Conduct issued for consultation by the Welsh Assembly Government on the 28th April 2005 and responding thereto. The committee welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposed draft

code and was supportive of the underlying principles of simplification and clarification particularly in relation to disclosure and registration of interests. Whilst it was originally anticipated that the revised code of conduct would be presented to the National Assembly for approval in plenary during 2005, to come in to force on the 1st June 2006, currently there is no firm indication when the Order is to be enacted.

4.2 Review of other draft regulations on issues relevant to the work of the Committee.

- ***The Local Authorities Indemnification of Members and Officers (Wales) Regulations 2006.*** Order has been enacted, draft guidance issued by Welsh Assembly Government and an all Wales group set up to develop a model which can be used by all authorities. A scheme will be presented to the Authority for consideration shortly.
- ***The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) Regulations 2006.*** Enacted 3rd July 2006 offering the same level of protection to Chief Finance Officers and Monitoring Officers as that given to Chief Executives, whilst also updating the current disciplinary procedures for statutory officers. Identified that the Order applies only to county and county borough councils. Accordingly representations made to Welsh Assembly Government that the same principles should be applied to Fire and Rescue Authorities. Regulations, specific to Fire and Rescue Authorities likely to be made under separate regulations.
- ***Review of Councillor's Allowances Regulations.*** Reviewed and responded to Consultation document.
- ***Political Activity and Rules Governing Political Balance.*** Responded to Consultation document. WAG do not currently propose to take any action at this stage but will decide on the way forward when UK government is clear on any changes require to primary legislation.
- ***Standards Committees (Wales) Amendment) Regulations 2006.*** Responded to consultation document. To be enacted July 2006.
- ***The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006***
The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2006. Revisions required to ensure compatibility with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation. Anticipated that the Wales specific Order will come in to force on the 6th December 2006.

4.3 Other Work

- Considered *The Tenth report of the Committee On Standards in Public Life.*

- the Committee has responsibility to oversee the Authority's complaints procedure and during the year has reviewed and analysed complaints made to the Authority on a quarterly and annual basis.
- Received the Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2004/05. The Ombudsman concluded in his review of the year that the framework for ethical standards is working well and that standards of conduct in local government is high. The overall level of complaints across Wales had fallen slightly. There were no complaints in relation to members of this Authority.
- Review of training for both members of the committee and for members of the Fire and Rescue Authority. No additional training needs were identified on the ethical framework pending the introduction of the new Code of Conduct.

4.4 During the period covered by this report, no complaints have been made against Members 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 this position will continue.

4.5 No requests for Dispensations to speak and or vote in respect of Declarations of Interest have been considered by the Committee.

4.6 The Chair, Vice Chair and officers of the Authority attended the first All Wales Standards Conference held in Aberystwyth which has been widely acclaimed as a great success. Another conference is scheduled to be held in Aberaeron on 22nd September 2006.

5. Conclusion

Much of the work of the Committee during the year has focussed on the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals to amend the Code of Conduct which is expected to be enacted at the tail end of the current year. It is anticipated that this will continue to be the main focus of the committee's deliberations in the forthcoming year. Whilst there will be a significant training implication in respect of the new code, we are conscious of the need not to duplicate any training provided by the constituent authorities.

Despite not having to consider any complaints or requests for dispensation, the Committee has continued to be very proactive in promoting good governance and the ethical framework, and fully participated and kept up to date with ongoing legislative changes and governance requirements.

