

Agenda item:



Walsall Council

Standards Committee

16 June 2008

**Seventh Annual Assembly of Standard Committees –
13 and 14 October 2008**

Summary of Report

To request that the Committee nominate two independent members to attend the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees on 13 and 14 October 2008 at the ICC, Birmingham.

In addition to the two independent members, a member from each of the three political groups on the Council will also be invited to attend the Conference.

Recommendations

- (1) That the content of the report be noted;
- (2) That the Committee be requested to determine which two independent members will attend the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees in accordance with the agreed system of rotation and that provision for a substitution be made if the member(s) nominated cannot attend.
- (3) The Committee is requested to indicate which three elected members will also be attending the event.

Resource and legal considerations

None arising from this report.

Citizen impact

None arising from this report.

Environmental impact

None arising from this report.

Performance and risk management issues

None arising from this report.

Equality implications

None

Consultation

None

Background papers

All published

Signed:

Assistant Director of Legal and Constitutional Services and Monitoring Officer

Date: 2 June 2008

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The Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees is to be held on Monday, 13 and Tuesday, 14 October 2008 at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham.

This years Conference is entitled “Delivering the Goods – Local Standards in Action” and will highlight key issues of governance and ethics including how to develop an exemplary Standards Committee, promote good governance and partnerships and build public confidence in members.

The Conference features a wide range of sessions under two main headlines – “Standards in Action – getting it right” and “The Bigger Picture – governance, ethics, leadership”. These sessions cover the local standards system including managing local assessment, investigations and determinations, mediation and handling complex complaints.

The conference has a number of breakout sessions which have either practical focuses or look at the wider issues of governance, leadership and ethics. These include:

- **Getting up to speed** – a beginner’s guide to the Code of Conduct and the Standards Board (this session is aimed at delegates who are new to the Code or Conference).
- **Alternative action masterclass** – this workshop provides delegates with an overview of the processes and benefits of alternative actions.
- **What went wrong?** – this mini plenary session looks at what happens if investigations and hearings don’t go to plan.
- **Balancing act** – this workshop provides delegates with the chance to consider their criteria for consistent and effective handling of local cases.
- **Mind the gap – setting standards for joint working** – this mini plenary session helps delegates to identify appropriate behaviours and governance for joint working.
- **Delivering local assessment** – this workshop is useful for delegates who are new to local assessment or who want to improve their understanding of the process and the key steps involved.
- **First response** – this workshop focuses on how to manage the assessment of complex and challenging complaints.

- **The Code made clear** – this mini plenary session takes delegates through cases which help illustrate and clarify complex, problematic or new areas of the Code.
- **Communicating with communities** – this mini plenary session provides practical suggestions on how Standards Committees can improve their communication with the local community.
- **Delivering local investigations** – this workshop brings delegates up to speed with each stage of the investigation process.
- **In confidence** – this mini plenary session will use examples to provide guidance on key areas of the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and other areas of the legal framework. It also outlines the pitfalls and how to avoid poor information management.
- **Keeping track of standards: monitoring and support** – this mini plenary session explains how the Standards Board will monitor how local arrangements are working.
- **Delivering local determinations and setting sanctions** – this workshop will use examples to demonstrate the factors that should be considered when setting sanctions and also includes information on how to prepare and present cases to the Adjudication Panel for England.
- **Joining the dots: understanding corporate governance** – this mini plenary session looks at the relationship and shared agenda between Standards Committees and Corporate Governance, Scrutiny and Audit Committees.
- **Mediation in action** – this practical workshop provides delegates with an introduction to mediation skills.
- **Planning ahead** – this workshop takes delegates through difficult planning scenarios and discusses some of the planning pitfalls and how to avoid them.
- **The parish perspective** – this workshop is available to Standard Committee members and delegates who work with town and parish councils.
- **Focus on fire, police and park authorities** – this workshop is aimed at members of Standards Committees in fire, police or park authorities as well as the delegates who work with them.

A copy of the advance programme has been included as Appendix A to this report. A total of six places have been reserved for the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standard Committees.

We understand that commitment to the Assembly is important and members (both elected and independent) who state that they will attend must do so as our money is not refunded if non attendance occurs. We would need to know at least four weeks prior to the event if a member is not able to attend so that a substitute can be sought.

The Committee at its meeting on 29 April 2004 agreed a rotational system of attendance so that over a three year period each independent member has the opportunity to attend the Assembly.

Attendance at the Assembly provides an ideal opportunity for members and officers to exchange information and details best practice on the latest legislative and procedural developments relating to the work of the Standards Committee.

In determining which two members attend the conference each year the Committee is recommended to have regard to the following factors:

- Those independent members who have not previously attended the conference in the past.
- When the independent member was appointed – more recent appointments should be considered for attendance at the event sooner rather than later.
- The availability of independent members to attend. If for any reason the member nominated cannot attend, provision for substitution must be made.

The table below shows details of each independent member against the criteria set out above:

Independent member:	Previous attendance:	Retirement:
Mr R Meller	Yes - 2007	2009
Mr L Bates	Yes - 2007	2009
Mrs H Bashir	No	2010

We currently have a total of three vacancies outstanding. Following the conference, a detailed report will be submitted to the next available meeting of the Committee so that information and experiences can be shared with all members.