

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND ESSEX FIRE
AUTHORITY JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL,
CHELMSFORD, ON 20 JULY 2011**

Membership

**Appointed by Essex County
Council**

Independent Members:

- * Mr A French (Chairman)
- Mr D Farrow (Vice-Chairman)
- Mr C Jackman

Mr Colin Booth

Councillors:

R Bass (Chairman of the Council,
ex officio)

- * Mrs M Fisher
- * Mrs E Hart
- * M Mackrory
- * J Pike
- * C Pond
- * D Robinson
- K Twitchen
- * Mrs M Webster
- * Present

**Appointed by Essex Fire
Authority**

Independent Member:

- * Mr M Goodswen

Councillors:

S McPherson (Thurrock Borough
Council)

- * R Pearson (Essex County Council)
- Fay Evans (Southend Borough
Council)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door

Committee Officer

Colin Ismay

Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer

22. Election of Chairman

The Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer called for nominations for an Independent Member to be elected Chairman. It having been duly moved and seconded it was

Resolved:

Mr Anthony French be elected Chairman. (Mr French took the Chair.)

23. Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman called for nominations for Vice-Chairman. It having been duly moved and seconded it was

Resolved:

Mr Daniel Farrow be elected Vice-Chairman.

24. Apologies

The Committee Officer reported apologies from Mr D Farrow, Mr C Jackman, Mr C Booth and County Councillors R Bass and K Twitchen, Southend Borough Councillor Evans and Alex Hallam, Deputy County Solicitor.

25. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

26. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. Matters Arising

No Matters Arising were reported.

28. Development of a Local Code of Conduct

The Committee received a report (SC/004/11) to update the Committee on the Government's Localism Bill and the Essex County Council view on the Localism Bill from Alex Hallam, Deputy County Solicitor. Colin Ismay, Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer updated the Committee on this item which had been presented to the Full Council meeting on 12 July 2011. The Monitoring Officer would take responsibility for drafting a local Code of Conduct with appropriate National Bodies, this Code of Conduct requiring authorisation by the full Council.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members suggested that the County should work with Districts/ Boroughs and Parish Councils alongside the Police and Fire Authority to produce a consistent local Code of Conduct across Essex;
- that if no consistent Code of Conduct was applied across Essex, Members of more than one Local Authority and the public would find the different Codes of Conduct too complex to be workable;
- that joint Standards Committees could be set up between County and District/Borough Councils when an alleged complaint against a Member covers both County and District roles.

Discussion also took place around the issue of prejudicial interest and the impact this has on a Member's ability to participate in meetings. There was a range of views on this issue.

Resolved:

- i) That the Committee be involved in the process for drafting a new local Code of Conduct;

- ii) That it be recommended that all three tiers of Local Government, the Police Authority and the Fire Authority be involved in the process for producing a consistent Code of Conduct across Essex;
- iii) That the Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer draft a report on the Code of Conduct for discussion at the next meeting.

29. Member Allowance Scheme

The Committee received an update report (SC/005/11) on the Member Allowance Scheme and matters relating to the future of the Standards Committee Regime from Colin Ismay, Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer.

A lot of the statistical information for the Essex County Council Member Annual Report could be taken from the website and added to the Member's report by the Governance Team. There was a free text area for Members to complete.

Members considered that more detailed notes for guidance were required on this document to assist them in understanding the extent of the information that they could put in the free text area, and the use to which the Report may be put.

The Committee will consider the workload impact of the Annual Report at its next meeting, by which time it is hoped most reports will have been submitted by Members.

30. Ethical Governance Audit

The Committee received and noted report (SC/006/11) on the Ethical Governance Audit from Colin Ismay, Head of Scrutiny and Lead Governance Officer. Members and some Officers had been requested to complete the confidential Ethical Governance Audit survey to which there had been a good response.

Some Members of the Committee had focus group meetings with the Audit Commission. The Governance Team would have its own focus group with the Auditors. A number of individuals, including the Chairman of the Standards Committee, were to have one to one discussions with the Audit Commission"

31. Annual Report 2010/11

The Committee noted the Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority Joint Standards Committee Annual Report 2010/11 (SC/007/11) which had been presented to the Full Council on 12 July 2011.

32. Governances Issues

The Committee received a copy of the statement (SC/008/11) made by the Leader at the Full Council meeting on 12 July 2011. The Head of Scrutiny

and Lead Governance Officer reminded Members that this matter was under investigation by Essex Police and therefore the specific issue could not be discussed but Members could discuss the overarching issue of Members' ethics.

Discussion took place regarding the processes for Members' expenses and that every Member's expenses were now checked before payment was made in a consistent way. This process was part of a general suite of governance arrangements that had been or were being implemented.

33. Recent Complaints

The Committee received an oral update on two recent complaints from the Chairman.

34. Date and Time of the Next Meeting

The Committee agreed the meeting dates scheduled for 2011/12 and noted the date of the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 22 September 2011 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2.

As there was no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 11.12 am.

Chairman