

Newsletter – June 2009.

CURRENT ISSUES.

1. The Standards Committee (Further Provisions) (England) Regulations 2009.

These were made 18th May, Laid before Parliament on 21st May and are Coming into Force on 15th June 2009.

2. Joint Standards Committees Guidance.

The Standards Board for England's Guidance for Joint Standards Committees is in preparation and is expected to be issued shortly.

3. 'Planning Ahead' essential for standards committees.

Friday 17 April, 2009 SBE News release. The Standards Board for England is working with local authorities to maintain an ethical approach to planning applications – by providing them with a planning game for standards committees. To find out more either e-mail press.enquiries@standardsboard.gov.uk. Or use this link <http://www.standardsboard.gov.uk/PressOffice/title,17638,en.html>

4. Tenure of Independent Members.

Peter Rowland, who has been the Vice Chair of the Association, has been unable to gain a new position since his council was dissolved through the creation of the new Unitary Authority of Shropshire County Council. His parting advice is as follows:

TENURE MATTERS. It is best practice that once someone is appointed as an Independent Member (IM) of a Standards Committee, then they should receive from the Authority a letter which sets out the terms and conditions of the post. This should include the length of time of the appointment. The IM now has tenure and so cannot be removed from the post of IM except in the most serious of cases. This is important because it then puts the IM above any administrative or political pressure and allows them to pursue matters rigorously according to their own conscience. There have been cases where, regrettably, such pressure has been put on an IM. Although dangerous to all IMs, it is particularly serious when the IM is a Chair.

In my view, the only ways to remove an IM are

1. When the term of office comes to an end and the IM is not re-appointed
2. If the IM is convicted of a serious criminal offence

3. If the IM has not attended a series of meetings (in accordance with the appropriate local protocol) or
4. If the IM is in breach of the Code of Conduct.

It should be noted that items 2, 3 and 4 apply equally to IMs and to elected members.

Peter Rowland.

Repeated issues.

5. Annual Assembly.

The Association has been invited to host a Fringe Event and also to have an Exhibition Space of 2m x 2m. We accepted the invitation for these; we have three years of prior experience of hosting a Fringe Event. The title of the Fringe Event is “Into Focus – The development of Independent Members”. The exhibition space includes a table and two chairs. We will be seeking offers from members to assist at the exhibition space in due course.

Meanwhile since the Assembly has proven most popular in recent years and has in fact been sold out several weeks before the start of the event, you are encouraged to book your place early. If this is done by your authority, then experience leads to the advice, to keep the pressure on so that your authority books early to ensure your place. If you fail to get a booking please let us know.

6. Annual General Meeting and Training Event.

The Association is considering holding a one day training event on the same day as its Annual General Meeting. Before making arrangements and inviting expert speakers we would need to know if you would wish to come to London, mid week in November to such an event. We will need to charge a modest fee for the training to cover the hire of a hall and the costs of our expert speakers. Please advise me at an early date if this would interest you and the level of fee you or your authority would be willing to pay. We have received several replies but would request more in order to gauge opinion.

7. Local Government Award.

We congratulate Rossendale Borough Council, the winner in the Standards and Ethics category at the LGC Awards 2009, Many Standards Committees submitted bids; Leeds City Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Newark & Sherwood District Council, and Newcastle City Council were shortlisted for the final. We plan to invite the winners and other shortlisted Standards Committees to tell their valuable stories to tell through these pages so that the rest of us may benefit. There has been some positive response and we will be publishing some of the experiences in due course.

8. Unitary Councils 2009.

The move to unitary local government in Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire and Wiltshire has occurred with 44 local councils reduced to just nine. This has affected some of our members. We congratulate those who have been appointed to the standards committees of the new authorities. We await news of others. We have contacted the chairs of the new standards committees. Meanwhile if anyone has news that will interest others, particularly how the change over process has taken place and its influence on cases in the course of pre-assessment or investigation etc, please let me know.

9. Annual Subscriptions.

Subscriptions renewals are progressing well. So far 98 subscriptions for the year commencing 1st April, 2009 have been paid in full or in part. The part payments arise because some of the Bankers Orders Forms were not changed. Some members are still uncertain as to whether or not they will be reappointed. If their reappointment date falls part way through the year, then benefit from the change to the Constitution made at the Annual General Meeting can be gained by the authority if it pays your subscription direct. To date this year 38 authorities have made direct subscription payments; others have promised to pay but there are delays in their systems.

New Membership Application Forms to apply with effect from 1st April are available. Some recent applications have been on the old form.

10. Recruitment.

Recruitment is continuing. We would very much like to recruit at least one Independent Member of every eligible Standards Committee. Please help us to recruit new members. If you know of any Independent Members who are newly appointed, upgrading to the role of Chair of the Standards Committee or a sub-committee of a Standards Committee and are not yet AIMScE members then please encourage them to join us.

11. Directors.

Following the resignation of Peter Rowland we only have 3 directors of the Association we appeal to anyone interested to take office. We are seeking several volunteers to become directors of the Association. If you feel able to give your support please come forward with your suggestions. We meet about four times a year; the rest of the work is generally done by e-mail.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS.

Do you have one? AIMSce continues to get asked questions about all matters of concern from individual Independent Members. We welcome these. If there is something that is of concern to you, please send it in to Bruce Claxton at bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk

Your contributions to the Newsletters.

Please help to spread good practice by providing information that we can publish to assist our members to benefit from the experiences of each other.

Independent Members Forums.

The following meetings have been advised:

The **Derbyshire Forum** for independent members: Date and Location not yet notified. Contact Michael Blake at Mjblake@btinternet.com.

The Yorks & The Humber Independent Members' Forum will next meet in late October; date and location to be advised in due course. Contact Mike Wilkinson at mike.wilkinson@aimsce.org.uk.

The **Hampshire, Isle of Wight, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey** Independent Members' Forum will next meet on Monday, 19 October 2009 at Arun District Council, Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton, BN17 5LF. Contact Bruce Claxton at bruce.claxton@aimsce.org.uk.

Bruce Claxton,

Newsletter Editor.