

Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England

Standards Committee, item 5

Committee: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Agenda Item

Date: September, 17, 2007

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Title: ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS
OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES IN ENGLAND

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Item for decision

Summary

1. This report is to inform members of the existence of the Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce) and to seek members' views as to whether it would be appropriate for one or more of the Council's independent persons to become members of the organisation.

Recommendations

2. Members determine whether or not it would be appropriate to have representation on AIMSce and if so nominate members for that purpose.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author.
 - Letter 24 July 2007 from AIMSce
 - Website www.aimsce.org.uk
 - Email from the Chairman of AIMSce dated 21 August 2007

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	There is currently no budget for the Standards Committee and hence no budget for membership. However, the fees are very modest and should members

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	determine that representation is appropriate it is unlikely that costs would prove a barrier.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

5. I have received a letter from the Chairman of AIMScE who informs me that he is seeking to form a national register of independent members of the standards committees. He asks me to draw the attention of the independent members to the existence of AIMScE and by inference is seeking to recruit additional members.
6. The Association was formed in October 2006. An inaugural meeting was held on 16 October at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham, the venue for the Standards Board Annual Assembly. A constitution was adopted which is available to view on the Association's website.
7. The objectives of the Association are set out in paragraph 3 of the constitution. They are:-
 - (i) To be a professional organisation for independent members, to provide them with support, to champion their interests and to empower them in their role and function.
 - (ii) To provide members with advice and guidance on their statutory duties and responsibilities and their role in a Standards Committee.
 - (iii) To maintain a register of members.
 - (iv) To provide support to members in exchanging view, comments and recommendations with the Standards Board for England, relevant Government departments and other bodies associated with standards in public life.
 - (v) To publish a regular newsletter containing relevant information and news relating to the ethical agenda and standards of conduct in public life.

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- (vi) To carry out and support relevant research in matters affecting the membership.
 - (vii) To manage the affairs of the Association, harnessing the relevant expertise of its membership when appropriate.
 - (viii) To develop and grow in whatever manner is relevant in the future.
 - (ix) To establish and maintain friendly, co-operative working relations with other stakeholders.
8. Membership of the Association is limited to persons appointed as independent members of standards committees. Management of the Association is by a board of directors appointed from the members. There is provision in the constitution for co-opted specialists on the board of directors but such persons do not have a vote by virtue of acting in that capacity.
9. There is a joining fee of £15 and an annual membership subscription of £10. However, the first year subscription reduces to £5 for members joining after 1 October in any year.
10. It is not clear from the Association's website whether or not it has the backing of the Standards Board but clearly it has established links with the Board. The Association has also secured a conditional seed funding grant from the Joseph Rowntree Trust Limited although the conditions attached to the grant are not apparent from the website.
11. Having read documents on the website I do have concerns regarding the operation of the organisation. In particular, the first annual general meeting was to have been held in June 2007 at the House of Commons. A keynote speaker was said to have been invited. I am informed however, that the annual general meeting has not yet taken place and indeed has not yet been called. The date and venue has yet to be agreed.
12. The Association was to publish regular newsletters. It appears that the newsletter may have been published in March, June and July of 2007 but only the July newsletter is accessible on the website.
13. The July newsletter discloses correspondence which evidences disquiet within the organisation. In particular a letter circulated electronically to members of the Association from Mark Southwell (Chairman Isle of Wight Standards Committee) commences "this newsletter, [June 2007] not for the first time, leaves me a little perplexed and worried about what AIMScE is doing, how it is perceived and where it is going."

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14. The home page on the website contains a link to what is supposed to be the AIMScE Annual Report. However, on opening this link it is the Annual Report of the Standards Committee of the Isle of Wight Council. This type of error does not inspire confidence in the credibility of the organisation although in fairness I am informed by the current chairman that the website is currently not under the Association's direct control.