

SOUTH WEST INDEPENDENT MEMBERS GROUP MEETING – 29TH SEPTEMBER AT POOLE, DORSET

Report:

This meeting was poorly attended, mainly because members had not had adequate notice. Several Standards Committees were not represented and only 17 attended the morning session and 12 in the afternoon. I think the fault lies in that notices were only sent to monitoring officers and some did not pass on the initial notification. In addition the agenda was only sent a week before the event.

As a result, it was decided there must be a proper database listing the Chairs as well as officer contacts and this is going to be done in time for the next meeting. They now have Greg's details as well as my own.

Very little came out of the meeting. There was a poor representative from the Standards Board who spoke on the procedure for determinations – something already well covered. The speaker was a last minute selection for they tried to get Sir Alistair Graham to come and he only declined recently.

During her talk, the speaker, a Legal Advisor to the SB, said how we must keep in mind the need not to show bias. This has resulted in a number of successful appeals.

There was a debate on whether the papers in respect of a determination should be sent to the press in advance of the hearing. Problems had happened when this had been done. The media can conduct a trial by media by quoting the details of the pre-hearing and other papers and is unfair if later on the panel agree the hearing can be in private. Most present thought it right not to send any papers but issue them on the day, but there was uncertainty how this conflicted with freedom of information.

There will be an attempt at the Birmingham Conference on the 12th October to set up an Association for Independent Members of Standards Committees. It will cost individual members £10 a year which the steering group hope can be recovered from their local authorities. There was not much support for the concept. We already have a regional group and members did not want to see a lobby group which might be divisive. Some monitoring officers have already said that they will not support their authority subsidizing the subscription.

The bad news. In the absence of Greg, I volunteered Taunton Deane as hosts for the next meeting in March. I hope Taunton will support the venue and am willing to do what I can to make it a success. We can do much better than Poole.

David Baker
Chairman
Taunton Deane Standards Committee
29th September 2006