LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS (ADVISORY) COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.35 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2016

MP701, 7TH FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG

Members Present:

Eric Pemberton (Vice-Chair)
John Pulford MBE
Salina Bagum
Nafisa Adam
Mike Houston
Daniel McLaughlin
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor David Edgar (Substitute for Councillor Candida Ronald)
Councillor Danny Hassell (Substitute for Councillor Marc Francis)

Observers:

Elizabeth Hall	– Independent Person

Apologies:

Councillor Marc Francis (Member)
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE (Member)
Councillor Candida Ronald (Member)

Officers Present:

Melanie Clay	– (Director, Law Probity and Governance)
Matthew Mannion	– (Committee Services Manager, Democratic Services, Law, Probity and Governance)

INTRODUCTIONS AND ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

During the introductions at the start of the meeting, Melanie Clay, Director, Law, Probity and Governance, reported that the Chair of the Standards (Advisory) Committee had resigned from his post due to his now living outside of the Borough. It was agreed that the Vice Chair Eric Pemberton would Chair the meeting in his place.

1.   **DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

2.   **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)**

RESOLVED

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record of the meeting subject to the inclusion of Elizabeth Hall's apologies in the attendance details.

3.   **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1   **Committee Membership Update**

Melanie Clay, Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance, introduced the report providing an update on the Standards (Advisory) Committee membership. She put on record the Committee's and officers' thanks to Matthew Rowe the former Independent Chair who had resigned his membership. It was considered that he provided excellent support to the Council in his role and would be missed.

The report set out that an appointment process would now be necessary to recruit to the role. In due course a report would be presented to Council on the matter.

The Committee discussed the report and agreed that Matthew Rowe should be formally thanked for his work. It was agreed that Melanie Clay would write to him on behalf of the Council and the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

2. That the Director, Law, Probity and Governance write to the former Chair Matthew Rowe expressing the Committee's thanks for his hard work supporting good governance at the Council and wishing him all the best for the future.

3.2   **Code of Conduct for Members - Complaints and Investigation Monitoring**

Melanie Clay, Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance, introduced the regular update report on the Code of Conduct for Members. She reported that it was noticeable how there had been a complete drop off in complaints made by Councillors against each other which was a welcome development and was a credit to all parties.

It was noted that there had been delays in investigating a number of complaints but that since Melanie Clay had joined the Council she had looked to progress the issues and ensure that processes were right to allow future complaints to be handled more efficiently. Officers were also looking to use the Governance Review Working Group to test out potential revisions to the procedures.

The Chair noted that the Committee had looked to ensure complaints were tackled within three months but that this obviously depended on the complexity of the case.

Members discussed the Code of Conduct and Elizabeth Hall confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken on looking at revisions to the Code but it was agreed that more work would be done and a briefing would be presented to the Committee Members for their consideration.

During discussion Members also requested that in the next update report, information be provided on the types of themes that emerge of the types of complaints made.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

3.3   Members' Attendance, Timesheets and Declaration of Interests: Monitoring Report

Matthew Mannion, Committee Services Manager, introduced the report setting out updates on Member attendance at Committee meetings, submission of timesheets and declarations of interest and engagement in Member Development Training.

The Committee began its discussion by looking at Member attendance at meetings. There was a general request to explore other ways of presenting the data. For example looking at percentage attendance as well as raw numbers. Officers promised to provide the Committee with examples of the different ways the data could be extracted from the Committee software to see which was most useful.

Members discussed the report and when looking at Member Development Training, stated that additional detail was useful in highlighting the different types of training, including workshops and setting out clearly when Members were required to attend and when it was optional or not relevant to that Member. It was noted that the Governance Review Working Group was exploring options for refreshing the training programme. Councillor Sirajul Islam noted that he should also be listed as having undertaken Appointments Sub-Committee training. It was noted that officers as well as Members would benefit from some of the training, such as around probity and it was suggested that officer training on responsiveness to enquiries by the public would be valuable.

The Committee then looked at the Appendix setting out the Timesheets submitted by Members over recent months. It was noted that, whilst many Members were complying with the requirement to submit timesheets a significant number were not.

It was noted that the Committee would regularly agree that the Chair should write to all Members setting out the importance of filling in timesheets and the view of the Standards (Advisory) Committee that they are an important part of the transparent monitoring of the work of Councillors. However, these regular letters did not appear to be improving the number of Members complying with the process and there was no sanction that could be applied to those that failed to comply.

A number of issues were noted with the system including:
- Members had not been shown how to submit timesheets electronically.
- The system required the submission of meeting attendance details when these were already known elsewhere in the system.
- The fields in the form were not all up to date.

Points noted in the general discussion included that:
- The Conservative Group had taken a group position that they did not have the time available to submit timesheets as responding to issues from the public had to take precedence with the time they had available.
- Timesheets were an inexact science and there were suggestions that some submissions were more accurate than others.
- No evidence had been produced to demonstrate that Timesheets were useful.
- How could Councillors demonstrate that they were working hard for their community if they were not reporting on their activity.
- The view of the Standards (Advisory) Committee (and the Standards Committee before it) had consistently been that submission of Timesheets was a valuable process and important in monitoring the work of Councillors.
- Submitting Timesheets should be a policy for all Councillors or else it was not worth doing.
- Tower Hamlets was unusual in requiring Members to submit Timesheets.

It was suggested that a cross-party decision was required as to whether Timesheets were going to be supported or not. It was therefore proposed to refer the issue to the Governance Review Working Group with the request that they take a view and report it back to the Standards (Advisory) Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

2. That the Governance Review Working Group consider the use of the Member Timesheet system and report back to the Standards (Advisory) Committee.

4.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 8.37 p.m.

Chair, Eric Pemberton
Standards (Advisory) Committee