

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.02 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2019**

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5  
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG**

**Members Present:**

John Pulford (Co-Optee) (Chair)  
Nafisa Adam (Co-Optee) (Vice-Chair)  
Mike Houston (Co-Optee)  
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin  
Councillor Rabina Khan

**Apologies:**

Fiona Browne (Co-Optee)  
Councillor James King (Member)  
Councillor Abdal Ullah (Member)  
Elizabeth Marshall (Observer)  
Racheal Tiffin (Observer)

**Officers Present:**

Janet Fasan	– (Divisional Director, Legal, Governance)
Asmat Hussain	– (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)

**1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

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

**RESOLVED**

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20 June 2019 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

### **3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **3.1 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaint Monitoring**

Janet Fasan, Divisional Director, Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the report providing the regular update to the Committee on recent complaints against Members in respect of the Code of Conduct.

She reported that only two complaints had been received since the last report to the Committee.

The first case related to a flyer which had been distributed. Following discussion with the Independent Person it had been determined that there was no issue to investigate and the case had been closed.

In the second case, which related to declarations of interest, it was determined (again following discussion with the Independent Person) that the Councillor was acting in a personal capacity and not as a Member of the Council and so the case had also been closed.

The Committee considered the report and discussed how the Council assured itself that all complaints were being processed correctly and that all cases were being reported to the Committee. The Monitoring Officer reported that the Council's audit function would regularly undertake audits of the complaints process and she agreed to ask them to undertake a new audit and to report the findings up to the Committee.

There was also a discussion in respect of people complaining about Members via social media. It was explained that for a complaint to be considered it would normally need to be submitted via the standard form and that the Communications team would direct social media users to that form when appropriate. It was agreed that Communications be asked to report to a future meeting on how this activity is undertaken and the frequency of online issues arising.

Subject to the above requests for information the Committee:

#### **RESOLVED**

1. To note the report.

#### **3.2 Member Learning and Development Update**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report. He reminded Members that the Committee had received a report in October 2018 which had specifically looked at the Member Induction programme following the May 2018 elections. This report brought the committee up to date with training which had taken place since that time as well as planned training sessions for the next few months.

During discussion a number of points were noted:

- The first appendix was split into two parts, the first showing training arranged for specific members or as part of the formal member training programme, the second part showed member briefing sessions arranged by various council directorates and services.
- Attendance information was also provided.
- The second appendix set out planned member development training sessions for the rest of the municipal year and many of these had been specifically requested by Members.
- The groups would be made aware of the attendance details provided to the committee.

During discussion it was agreed that:

- Future reports would provide more clarity on the types of training delivered, such as in respect of mandatory training or externally provided training and associated costs.
- It was important to ensure that co-optees were invited to relevant training sessions.

Subject to the above actions, the Committee then:

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the report be noted.

### **3.3 Register of Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the regular update report on Member declarations of gifts and hospitality. In particular he highlighted the appendix which set out the details of all the declarations which had been made.

As discussed at the last meeting, in order to highlight the importance of making these declarations, Democratic Services had sent reminders to all Members and the Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee had specifically referenced the issue when he addressed the July Council meeting with his annual report.

Officers were now planning to use the upcoming Speaker's Ball to remind Members of the need to declare interests when they attend such charity functions if they are provided with a free ticket by an individual or organisation as that person/body would have had to pay for the ticket in the first place.

The Committee welcomed the actions officers were taking to highlight the importance of making these declarations as they remained concerned that not all offers of gifts or hospitality were being declared.

The Committee then,

**RESOLVED**

1. That the report be noted.

**3.4 Strengthening Local Democracy**

Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report informing Members about the Council's Strengthening Local Democracy project. The project had a number of aims but the key one was looking to see how the Council could strengthen support for Councillors in undertaking their various roles (such as Ward Councillor, community representative and similar).

She explained that, following work by officers through the first half of 2019, General Purposes Committee had approved a Ward Councillor support framework for action by the Council. She highlighted that this was a living document and would continue to develop over time.

During discussion, the Committee noted that:

- The Council had chosen a simple, officer led process to develop the framework as it was seen as an efficient way of collating ideas locally for a targeted project. However, it was noted that some Councils had undertaken more extensive reviews led by external experts and officers were keeping under consideration whether this could be a useful addition at a later date.
- The review had been targeted at particular issues and so had not covered other areas such as which type of governance model (such as the Mayoral model) the Council should be using.
- A number of Councils were developing interesting democratic engagement models such as the 'Place' model seen in Scotland and at Kirklees Council.

The Committee welcomed the report and asked that it continue to be provided with updates at appropriate intervals.

**RESOLVED**

1. That the report be noted.

**4. WORK PLAN**

The Committee discussed the Work Plan. A number of additions were proposed:

- To expand the report from Communications to include information on how Member Code of Conduct issues are dealt with and also looking at Councillor online safety and the support the Council is able to provide.
- To provide an update on the Strengthening Local Democracy project at a later meeting.

**RESOLVED**

1. That, subject to the above additions, the report be noted.

**5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There Chair provided two updates to the Committee:

1. That he had presented his first Annual Report to the Council at its meeting on 17 July 2019. The report had been well received.
2. The Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life had published an open letter to all public office holders on the importance of maintaining high standards and implementing the Nolan Principles.

**6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Nil items.

**7. ANY OTHER EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 7.02 p.m.

Chair, John Pulford  
Standards Advisory Committee