

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS (ADVISORY) COMMITTEE
HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 27 JANUARY 2015
COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - THALL

Members Present:

Matthew William Rowe (Chair)
John Pulford MBE
Patrick (Barry) O'Connor
Salina Bagum
Councillor Gulam Kibria Choudhury
Councillor Amy Whitelock Gibbs
Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Joshua Peck
Councillor Andrew Wood

Observers:

Elizabeth Hall – Independent Person
Ezra Zahabi – Reserve Independent Person

Other Councillors Present

Councillor Peter Golds

Apologies:

Councillor Mohammed Mufti Miah

Officers Present:

Meic Sullivan-Gould – Interim Monitoring Officer
Elizabeth Dowuona – (Temporary Senior Committee Services Officer)
David Knight – (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

Councillor Joshua Peck declared a personal and prejudicial interest under Agenda Item 7.1 “Code of Conduct for Members - Complaints and

Investigation Monitoring” on the grounds that information contained in the report related to a complaint he had raised.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

Matters Arising

Item 2

1. Minutes of 8 September 2014 - Declaration of Interests

It was noted that Co-opted Independent SAC Members had received the aforesaid registration of interest forms, which they were all required to complete to register their interests.

2. Item 3.1 Code of Conduct for Members – Complaints and Investigation Monitoring

It was agreed that Legal and Democratic Services would organise a training session for **all** Members as soon as possible to train all SAC members at the start of the Municipal Year thereby increasing the pool of members available to sit on the sub-committees

Item 3.2 Covert Investigation Under The Regulation Of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

It was noted that the action “that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to request a brief report providing information/ figures relating to surveillance without RIPA authorisation on public land and Council land” was still outstanding.

Item 3.4 Complaints And Information Governance Annual Report 2013/ 2014

The action that “That elected SAC members consult their political groups and consider individually what they considered to be the important functions of an elected Member and the outcome be presented to the next SAC meeting to inform a review of Member timesheets and the capturing of relevant information on the Authority’s website was outstanding.

It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer send a note out to all Political Group Leaders regarding the information requested with a copy to all Standards Advisory Committee Members.

Action by: Meic Sullivan-Gould (Interim Monitoring Officer, LPG)

**Item 3.4 Complaints And Information Governance Annual Report
2013/ 2014**

That the action “That Officers be requested to take account of SAC member comments/ suggestions to improve the existing website and inform future development priorities” was outstanding.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS - COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATION MONITORING

Meic Sullivan-Gould (Interim Monitoring Officer) introduced and highlighted key points in the report, which outlined the Council’s arrangements for dealing with complaints of breach of the Code of Conduct for Members. The arrangements required that the Monitoring Officer submit quarterly reports (or less frequently if there were no complaints to report) to the Standards Advisory Committee on the number and nature of complaints received and action taken.

The arrangements, revised by full Council on 18 September 2013 also included a required that in cases where the Monitoring Officer had extended the time period of investigations into complaints from two months to three months the Monitoring Officer report on the reasons for the delay to the Advisory Committee

The Committee noted that there had been no new complaints and that all outstanding complaints were awaiting the convening of an Investigation and Disciplinary Sub-Committee. It was noted that attempts to secure an acceptable date for an Investigation and Disciplinary Sub-Committee had to date failed in November and December 2014.

There was a lengthy discussion where Members expressed various concerns. The following points were noted:

- That with reference to Complaint References IDSC/01/2013 and IDSC/07/2013 listed in the report, the reasons for the delay were not reported to the Advisory Committee and it was important for this to be done in future.
- That it was disappointing to note the reasons for the delays in the backlog of cases requiring consideration at the Investigation & Disciplinary Sub-Committee stage and that this indicated that Members of SAC were failing in their duty to ensure a speedy outcome. On complaints by not placing a high priority on those meetings.
- That some Members found that day time meetings offered during the canvassing of their availability was in-practical due to work commitments and suggested that a greater portion of those meetings be held in the evening and over a period, rather than arranging an all-day meeting to clear the backlog.

- That some Members were unclear about the processes involved in arranging the meeting and were unaware that Members contacted on their availability had been nominated by their political group leaders, that securing a date and time of the meetings depended on the number of members available at those times.
- That new SAC membership would require training in relation to its sub-committees and associated processes which would delay further the conclusion of outstanding complaints.
- Clarification was sought as to the rationale for only training some SAC members in relation to its sub-committees and associated processes;
- That it would have been appropriate to make arrangements to train all SAC members at the start of the Municipal Year thereby increasing the pool of members readily available to sit on the Committee and its Sub-Committees, ensuring that every Member was fully equipped to function in their various roles and ensuring the efficient use of resources in training Members at the same time.
- That it was necessary for all Members of SAC, including Co-opted Members and Deputies to be trained, as a matter of urgency,
- Following discussion on the availability of officers, it was agreed that the proposed training be arranged by officers before the end of February 2015 and that it went ahead as long as there were at least two elected Members present.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That the complaints and investigation monitoring information contained Appendix 1 of the report be noted.
- (ii) That training be arranged for all members of the Committee in order to increase the pool of Members readily available to sit on the investigation and Disciplinary Sub-Committee to consider the backlog of complaints cases of breach of the Code of Conduct for Members.

Action by: Meic Sullivan-Gould (Interim Monitoring Officer, LPG)
David Knight (Committee Officer, LPG)

4.1 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS - INVESTIGATORY CASEWORK

Meic Sullivan-Gould, Interim Monitoring Officer, reported that there were currently no outstanding investigations relating to complaints that had been referred for investigation under the Council's arrangements for dealing with complaints of breach of the Code of Conduct for Members.

However, there are four outstanding complaints where investigations had been completed but the outcome of the investigation had not been considered by an Investigation and Disciplinary Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED –

That Members of the Advisory Committee resolve to participate as soon as possible in meetings of the Investigation & Disciplinary Sub-Committee so that all outstanding complaints were dealt with in accordance with the procedural requirements of the Council's arrangements for dealing with complaints of breach of the Code of Conduct for Members.

Action by: All Members and Deputy Members of the Standards Advisory Committee

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting for the consideration of the Section Two business on the grounds that it contains information defined as Exempt in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972.

7. EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

Chair, Matthew William Rowe
Standards (Advisory) Committee