


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p><b>Standards (Advisory) Committee</b></p> <p>24<sup>th</sup> November 2016</p>	 <p><b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted</p>
<p><b>Report of:</b> Graham White, Acting Corporate Director, Law, Probity and Governance</p>	
<p><b>Members' Attendance, Timesheets and Declaration of Interests: Monitoring Report</b></p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Beverley McKenzie and Matthew Mannion
Wards affected	All

### Summary

This report updates the Committee on a range of matters related to Councillors' attendance at formal meetings and training events, completion of timesheets and the register of interests.

### Recommendations:

The Standards (Advisory) Committee Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the information set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 in relation to Councillors' submission of timesheets, attendance at formal meetings and training events, and completion of the register of interests during the previous and current municipal years;
2. Note the updated position from the Governance Review Working Group with regards to the requirement for Councillors to submit monthly timesheets and confirm the ongoing requirement of the SAC for Members' to submit monthly timesheets.
3. Consider whether there is a need to ask the Chair to write to any Councillor(s) in connection with any of the monitoring information;
4. Note the recommended updates to the reporting items on the timesheet as set out in Appendix 4, and
5. Confirm the request to receive further monitoring reports at six monthly intervals.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since April 2004 the former Standards Committee and now the Standards Advisory Committee have received regular monitoring reports on the completion of Members' timesheets and attendance by Members at Council and other formal meetings.
- 3.2 Over that period, the Committees have discussed how to build on this good practice by incorporating additional information in the reports and presenting the information in the most suitable way to enhance transparency and accountability. These agreed changes and these are incorporated in this report.

#### **4. MEMBERS' TIMESHEETS**

- 4.1 Tower Hamlets Councillors have, since April 2002, completed monthly timesheets detailing the time spent on council duties, split into categories such as surgeries, casework, attendance at meetings/external bodies etc.
- 4.2 Members' timesheets are posted on the Councillor details pages of the Council's website which also contain information on the ward represented, committee/external appointments, surgery arrangements, contact and other details. Councillors are personally responsible for the accuracy and timely submission of their timesheets.
- 4.3 Completion of timesheets is not a statutory requirement and does not affect the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances paid to Members. However, the London Councils Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors have emphasised the need for an accountable and transparent allowances scheme. In their 2001 report, the Independent Panel identified the tasks and responsibilities which they believed were the essential remit of a Councillor. In proposing a Basic Allowance to apply to all Councillors, they assumed a contribution of 40 hours per month on top of a "voluntary commitment" of 20 hours for each Member. Tower Hamlets has voluntarily developed the timesheet system to enhance transparency.
- 4.4 The Standards Advisory Committee and its predecessor Standards Committee have placed great importance on the timely and accurate completion of timesheets and the monitoring arrangements have placed Tower Hamlets at the forefront of best practice in this area as very few other local authorities have any such formal monitoring system in place. The Committee will note that new Committee software is now being used to upload the timesheets. This will have a number of benefits including a facility for direct input of timesheets by Members.

#### **The current position – completion of timesheets**

- 4.5 In relation to the submission of timesheets the current position, as at 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and set out in Appendix 1 attached, is that 5 Members (11.1% of the total) have completed their timesheets up to and including September 2016. Thirty-nine Councillors (86.67%) are more than three months in arrears. An updated schedule will be tabled at the meeting, if necessary.
- 4.6 At the Governance Review Working Group, the Group Leaders discussed the on-going requirement to submit timesheets. An informal agreement was reached to suspend the requirement and each group would inform their Members accordingly. Discussion arose from the Labour Group indicating the timesheets supported the transparency agenda and they wished for them to be maintained. Some Councillors have continued to submit timesheets and all timesheets received have continued to be published on the Council's web pages.

- 4.7 The Labour Group further recommended some changes to the items reported on the timesheets, as well as requesting the auto population of Council meetings. Online submission of timesheets is now available to all Members and the subjects reported have been updated to reflect the request of the Labour Group. Further discussions are ongoing with the software provider to determine the level of auto population that is available. The Committee may wish to note the changes to the timesheet as seen in Appendix 4.
- 4.8 The Committee may wish to comment on the discussion of the Members regarding the requirement to submit timesheets and the continuing requirements of the SAC.
- 4.9 The Committee may wish to follow previous practice and ask the Chair to write to those Members who are significantly in arrears and/or their political group Leaders, drawing their attention to the need to maintain an up to date record.

## **5. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

- 5.1 As with timesheets, attendance at committee/panel meetings is not a statutory requirement - the law simply says that if a Councillor fails to attend any Council or other qualifying meeting for a period of six months, he/she shall cease to be a Member of the local authority - and it is accepted that many important Council duties take place outside formal meetings. Nevertheless, attendance at meetings to which he/she has been appointed does represent a key part of a Councillor's work and the combination of attendance and timesheet monitoring information in this report provides a useful picture of a Councillor's activity for the purpose of accountability.

### **The current position - attendance at meetings**

- 5.2 The record of attendance by Councillors at formal constitutional meetings from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 is attached in Appendix 2 (a) and (b). The report lists where a Councillor was present, absent or gave apologies. In addition, where a Councillor attended a meeting of which they were not a Member either to submit comment or simply to view, this is marked as 'In Attendance'.

## **6. MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND ATTENDANCE AT MANDATORY TRAINING EVENTS**

- 6.1 The Committee has previously requested that information be included in the report on two matters that are key to Councillor accountability and ethical governance – (i) Members' completion of the register of personal interests, and (ii) attendance at mandatory training events including seminars on the Code of Conduct and specific training for Councillors appointed to the quasi-judicial committees. This information is summarised in Appendix 3 attached and further explanatory information is below:-

### **Updates to the register of Members' interests Attendance at training events**

- 6.2 Members are required to complete a register of their interests within 28 days of becoming a Councillor and subsequently they must notify any change to this within 28 days of becoming aware of the change. Members receive six-monthly reminders to update the

register with any changes. The attached schedule lists the date of each Councillor's latest update to their register entry and a reminder exercise is about to be undertaken.

- 6.3 As a matter of good practice and for the purpose of clarity, Members are asked to provide a nil return if there are no changes to register at the six-monthly reminder. However failure to do so would not represent a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 6.4 The Committee has also sought assurance regarding Councillors' attendance at relevant mandatory training events such as those on the Code of Conduct and the specific sessions arranged for members of the Development, Licensing and Appeals Committees and the Appointments Sub-Committee. This information is now incorporated into the schedule at Appendix 3, together with the total number of attendances at other (non-mandatory) in-house Member seminars during the year to date.

## **7. OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## **8. LEGAL SERVICES COMMENTS**

- 8.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced new arrangements to govern the Standards of Conduct for local authority members and co-optees. Seven guiding principles of conduct are set out:- selflessness; integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; honesty and leadership.
- 8.2 The information in this report supports these guiding principles and, in particular, enhances performance and openness in relation to members performance of their council duties.

## **9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERTIONS**

- 9.1 There are no specific implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from the proposals in this report.

## **10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 This report has no immediate implications for Crime and Disorder.

## **11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no risk management implications.

## **12. STRATEGIC ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT (SAGE)**

- 12.1 There are no SAGE implications arising directly from this report.

## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

(Revised: November 2016)

- NONE.

**Appendices**

- NONE

**Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)****List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- NONE

**Officer contact details for documents:**

- N/A