

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.32 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2021

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present at the meeting:

Councillor Rabina Khan

Members in Attendance Remotely:

Councillor Rajib Ahmed
Councillor Abdal Ullah

Co-opted Members Present at the meeting:

John Pulford MBE (Chair)
Fiona Browne (Vice-Chair)

Co-opted Members In Attendance Virtually:

Mike Houston
Denzil Johnson

Apologies:

Nafisa Adam (Co-optee)
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin
Councillor James King

Officers Present at the meeting:

Janet Fasan (Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion (Head of Democratic Services)

Officers in Attendance remotely:

Jill Bayley (Head of Legal Safeguarding)
Patricia Attawia (Democratic Services Team Leader, Civic & Members, Governance)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 30 September be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings subject to the correction of a spelling error in the attendance list.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Code of Conduct Complaint Monitoring

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the latest monitoring report on complaints under the Member Code of Conduct. Appendix 1 listed the 7 complaints in the list (including 5 received since the last meeting).

All complaints were from the public as opposed to complaints from Members against each other. The Independent Person had been consulted in all cases.

The Committee were taken through each complaint in turn and a number of issues were raised including:

- How are complainants kept informed on the progress of their complaints, especially when they take a long time and whether further thought should be given to managing engagement with complainants.
- Whilst a couple of cases were still ongoing, most had been closed including with no further action required in some cases.
- Where cases close because the complainant stops responding, they can potentially be re-opened if the complainant re-appears.
- There was one further case which was not on the appendix which related to use of Council resources for party political purposes. The Member had been written to and asking them to take action. Further progress on this case will be reported later.

The Chair welcomed the update. He then reported that a Member had asked him to highlight that the Committee would be closely monitoring Member behaviour in the run up to the local elections. He asked that Members be reminded through the Member Bulletin of their rights and responsibilities.

Fiona Browne highlighted a recent standards seminar she had attended which had raised a number of interesting points including around the speed issues/complaints escalate especially on social media and how public expectations/views on standards are seen to have dropped, so public satisfaction with democratic processes falls.

There was also clear support for reintroducing tougher sanctions but that at the same time the more effective remedy was to work hard to encourage

respect for everyone involved in political work to support good behaviour and member/public engagement.

Finally, the Chair asked that the Appendix to the Complaint Monitoring report be redesigned to make better use of the space on the page.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.2 Draft Member Induction Plan 2022

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced a report on plans to support Member Induction following the May 2022 elections. This followed an initial discussion at the last meeting.

He explained that with a large number of new Councillors expected, it was important to ensure a programme was set up to support them in learning their new roles. This would mainly involve a number of subject area seminars but would also include sessions on use of systems, ICT, how the democratic processes worked and similar. Co-optees would be invited to seminars that were relevant to their area of work.

The draft plan was being circulated to officers and Members for consultation as well as coming to this Committee. The final Induction Plan would be signed off by the Corporate Leadership Team and the General Purposes Committee.

A number of particular issues were noted:

- Member feedback was strongly supportive of slowing down the Member Induction process in general but that ICT kit/Member Enquiry access etc needs to be up and running very quickly.
- It was important to integrate 'why' and 'how' questions involved in general training, for example linking code of conduct rules into general seminars.
- Would it be possible to record modules for those who couldn't attend in person?
- Member safety was very important and should be covered early in the programme.
- A political group buddy programme could be useful although it was noted that providing officer buddies had been tried previously without much success.
- Should co-opted Members also be involved in social media training? In particular for Standards co-optees who may be involved in complaints against Members.
- Should Members of the Conservation and Design Advisory Panel be involved in Planning Committee training?
- Remember to include a corporate and committee structure in initial training. Showing decision and information flows.
- Important to provide guidance to Councillors on all their roles.

The Committee were thanked for their feedback.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.3 Register of Gifts and Hospitality - Quarterly Update

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Member) introduced the quarterly update on Member gifts and hospitality. She highlighted that there had been 13 declarations listed, up from 2 last time which was an indication that social events were beginning to start up again following the pandemic lockdowns. More declarations could be expected in the run up to Christmas.

A reminder had recently been sent round to Members through the bulletin and all Members had provided an update in the last six months.

The Chair noted the increase and thanked Patricia Attawia for her update.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.4 Dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the regular update report on Dispensations granted to Members under the Localism Act 2011. She reported that, apart from the standard, blanket, exemptions listed, no individual dispensations had been granted since the last report to the Committee or indeed in the year before that.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.5 Review of the Effectiveness of the Standards Advisory Committee

Jill Bayley, Head of Legal Safeguarding and Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the report on progress in relation to the review of the effectiveness of the Standards Advisory Committee.

She explained this was a brief update highlighting a new survey that had been sent to Members asking for their views on the effectiveness of the committee. There had been extremely limited responses to date. There were no significant comments to take forward. This would at least suggest that there wasn't a high level of dissatisfaction with the work of the Committee.

The Chair commented that Members were very busy and if they didn't have strong concerns they may not respond. Councillor Rabina Khan noted that at Council she had heard positive comments to the work of the Committee and that personally she had found being on the committee to be a very valuable experience. When the new Code of Conduct had recently been presented to Council there had also been no negative comments on the work of the Committee.

Finally, the Chair noted that it was important to make sure the work of the Committee was signposted during the Member Induction programme.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

4. WORK PLAN

The Committee reviewed its workplan and noted a number of points including that:

- The new Code of Conduct had been approved by Council and would come into effect in May.
- The draft agenda for the February meeting was listed including the draft annual report to Council and an update on Member Induction planning.
- A report on Practical Guidance on Members handling confidential information was due.
- A report should be available on progress on the new Member / Officer relations protocol.
- A number of other reports were also listed. Discussions would continue on an appropriate number for the agenda.
- Officers would also work to close off as many of the listed 'actions' as possible before the end of the municipal year.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

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 7.20 p.m.

Chair, John Pulford
Standards Advisory Committee