

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 22 JUNE 2023

**COMMITTEE ROOM - TOWER HAMLETS TOWN HALL, 160 WHITECHAPEL
ROAD, LONDON E1 1BJ**

Co-optees Present in Person:

John Pulford MBE	Chair
Fiona Browne	Vice Chair

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Amin Rahman
Councillor Abu Chowdhury

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Sabina Akhtar
Councillor Sirajul Islam

Apologies:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed
Councillor Sabina Akhtar
Mike Houston
Elizabeth Marshall
Amanda Orchard
Rachael Tiffen

Officers Present in Person:

Patricia Attawia	(Democratic Services Team Leader, Civic & Members, Governance)
Janet Fasan	(Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion	(Head of Democratic Services)
Joel West	(Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. TO ELECT A CHAIR FOR 2023-24

Joel West, Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee), requested nominations for the position of Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee from amongst the Co-opted Members for the municipal year 2023/2024. Fiona Browne proposed John Pulford for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Amin Rahman.

There were no further nominations.

The Standards Advisory Committee;

RESOLVED

1. That John Pulford was elected as Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee for the municipal year 2023-24.

3. TO ELECT A VICE-CHAIR FOR 2023-24

The Chair requested nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee from amongst the Co-opted Members for the municipal year 2023/2024 and proposed Fiona Browne for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Abu Talha Choudhury.

There were no further nominations.

The Standards Advisory Committee;

RESOLVED

1. That Fiona Browne was elected as Vice-Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee for the municipal year 2023-24.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2024 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Standards Advisory Committee Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings 2023/24

Joel West, Democratic Services Team Leader (Committees) introduced the report that sets out, for noting, the Advisory Committee's Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings for the year and asked it to approve the establishment of its Sub-Committees to consider complaints

relating to breaches of the Member Code of Conduct. Joel advised of a minor error in the report: references to meeting start time should read 6.30pm.

Further to questions from members, officers advised that the terms of reference (Appendix 1 to the report) would be reviewed to consider whether explicit reference should be made to the Advisory Committee's role "To monitor and review Member and Officer Procedures for registering interests and declaring gifts and hospitality" as included in its rules of procedure (Appendix 4 to the report).

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes its Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and dates/times of meetings as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report.
2. Agrees to establish the following sub-committees for the municipal year 2023/24, to be convened as required on an ad-hoc basis with membership drawn from amongst the Members of the Standards Advisory Committee, including in each case a minimum of three members:-
 - Investigation and Disciplinary Sub-Committee
 - Hearings Sub-Committee.

5.2 Member Attendance Update

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report that provided an update on Member and Co-optee attendance at formal Council and Committee meetings.

Further to discussion on member attendance the Advisory Committee asked that:

- Officers explore whether an attendance requirement or expectation can be included the Code of Conduct for Members.
- A note to be sent to group whips flagging members where attendance is below 50%
- Terms of reference and similar annual administrative reports to each committee include a paragraph on expectations for attendance.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.

5.3 Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members) introduced the report that updated the Committee on the Members' Register of Interests and declarations of gifts and hospitality submitted by Members.

Further to questions from members, Patricia and Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services:

- Explained the difference between related party transactions and declarations of gifts and hospitality. The former came under the scope of the Council's Audit Committee.
- Advised that many Iftar invitations were likely accepted in this period, but the nature of such events was such that the value of anything received would have been below the £25 declaration threshold. Members of the Advisory Committee confirmed this, noting that Iftar events were 'cheap and cheerful'.
- Asked the Advisory Committee to note that regular reminders are sent to Members of the Council asking them to declare gifts and hospitality, including during Ramadan and that the next regular six-month check up on every Member's Register of Interests was taking place in July.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.

5.4 Dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011

Janet Fasan, Director Legal and Monitoring Officer introduced the report that informed the Advisory Committee of dispensations in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI's) under section 33 of the Localism Act 2011. Janet noted there had been no dispensations issued since the previous report to the Advisory Committee.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.

5.5 Proposed revised Member Officer Protocol

Janet Fasan, Director Legal and Monitoring Officer introduced the report that, following earlier consideration and consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Standards Advisory Committee, proposed a draft updated Member Officer protocol for views and comment. Janet explained that substantial amendments had been made to the protocol since earlier iterations which address concerns and suggestions previously raised by the Advisory Committee.

Further to questions from members, Janet explained that the code applied to all officers, including political assistants and Mayors Office staff.

Further to questions, the Advisory Committee:

- asked that the words "specific named" be removed from the 'as a member' part of section 5 of the draft protocol;
- welcomed the revised formatting and appearance of the draft, which members felt was much improved from previous versions; and

- asked that the final draft be shared with Advisory Committee members prior to its submission to full Council for approval.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Noted the draft updated Member /Officer Protocol subject to the comments as above.
2. Authorised the Monitoring Office in consultation with the Chair of the Advisory Committee to make any changes to the protocol to give effect to the comments above.
3. Authorised the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Advisory Committee to make any further changes deemed necessary before submission to Council/Committee for Member agreement as required.

6. WORK PLAN

RESOLVED

1. That the work plan is noted.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Janet provided the Advisory Committee with an update on the recruitment of the vacant co-optee position. Following the most recent round of recruitment, three applications were received of which only one was considered suitable. The advert will be re-run, including in publications which targeted the local community. The Council's SPP team would be asked to publicise amongst community groups to increase diversity of the applicant pool.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

A resolution to exclude the press and public was not required.

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

None.

The meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.

Chair,
Standards Advisory Committee