

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 17 JUNE 2008

**COMMITTEE ROOM C1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Mr Patrick (Barry) O'Connor (Chair)

Mr Ibrahim Ali (Independent Member)

Ms Suzette Barry (Independent Member)

Councillor Lutfu Begum

Councillor Stephanie Eaton

Sister Christine Frost (Independent Member)

Councillor Alexander Heslop

Councillor Ann Jackson

Mr Eric Pemberton (Independent Member)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Tim O'Flaherty

Officers Present:

Isabella Freeman – (Assistant Chief Executive [Legal Services] and
Monitoring Officer)

Mark Norman – Investigating Officer

Alan Ingram – (Democratic Services)

John Williams – (Service Head, Democratic Services)

**1. ELECTION OF AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER AS VICE-CHAIR OF THE
COMMITTEE**

On opening the meeting, the Chair commented that there were currently only two Independent Members present and he would defer this item until more had arrived. The matter was considered following agenda item 5.4 but remains in the original numerical order for ease of reference.

He then invited the two new Independent Members to give a brief outline of their backgrounds. Mr Ibrahim Ali indicated that he now worked for a Housing Association and had previously held Social Worker posts in Tower Hamlets and other local authorities. Mr Eric Pemberton stated that he was retired but acted as Chair of LAP 8 and attended university.

After two further Independent Members had arrived, the Chair **moved** and it was :-

RESOLVED

That Sister Christine Frost be elected Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the current Municipal Year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Muhammad Habibur Rahman and from Sister Christine Frost for lateness.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Nil.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 15 April 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 ROLES AND FUNCTIONS, MEMBERSHIP AND DATES OF MEETINGS

Mr John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services, introduced the report which detailed the roles and functions of the Committee, its membership and dates of meetings.

Mr Williams added that the report incorporated changes to the Constitution made at the last Annual Council meeting, to the Committee's roles and functions, and reflected the increase in membership. Recruitment was underway to fill two Independent Member vacancies and one Councillor post was also vacant.

The principle of a three year term of office for Independent Members had also been agreed and, on that basis, the two newly appointed Independent Members (Mr Ibrahim Ali and Mr Eric Pemberton) would serve until 20th May 2011. It was also necessary to adopt a process of rolling retirement for the existing Independent Members, who had already served more than three years. In order to retain expertise and provide continuity, it was proposed that Sister Christine Frost and Mr Satnam Bains, who had been appointed in 2002, would retire in May 2009. Mr Barry O'Connor, Mr Muhammad Habibur Rahman and Ms Suzette Barry, who had been appointed in 2004, would retire

at the end of the 2010 Municipal Year. However, any retired Independent Members would be eligible to apply for further terms of office.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information in the report be noted.
- (2) That the proposals for establishing a three year term of office and a rolling programme of retirement for Independent Members as outlined above be approved and adopted.

5.2 LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINTS

Ms Isabella Freeman, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report updating the position regarding the implementation of arrangements for the local assessment of complaints of potential breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct. She outlined the proposals for establishing an Assessment Sub-Committee and Review Sub-Committee, in addition to the existing Hearings Sub-Committee, together with their memberships and respective duties.

Mr Mark Norman, Legal Officer, circulated a digest of the procedure for handling complaints and gave a detailed explanation of the stages involved.

Members then put questions relating to the sub-committees' membership arrangements to avoid conflict of interests; the possibility of involving the Police in some complaints; instances where referral to the Standards Board for England might be appropriate; the procedure for the appointment of investigating officers for complaints. Officers gave detailed replies thereto.

The Chair felt that the wording of the second sentence in paragraphs 9, 5 and 3 in Appendices One, Two and Three respectively should be amended to read: "Upon receipt of a complaint the Monitoring Officer, **in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, or, in his absence the Vice-Chair ...**" etc. This was **agreed**.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the proposed arrangements developed in line with the Standards Board Guidance for handling complaints against Members and for addressing associated issues be agreed and adopted as contained in the body of the report.
- (2) That the establishment of the Sub-Committees detailed in Appendices One, Two and Three of the report be agreed and adopted subject to inclusion of the amended wording put forward by the Chair.

5.3 AMENDMENTS TO THE PLANNING CODE OF CONDUCT

Ms Freeman introduced the report which set out the Planning Code of Conduct that had been amended to incorporate comments made at the meeting of the Committee held on 15th April 2008. She added that it was hoped to submit the revised document to the Council meeting on 25th June 2008, for approval.

Officers responded to questions put by Members regarding the necessity for declaring attendance at site visits; the need to avoid suspicion of predetermination; arrangements for dealing with improper conduct by Officers.

Councillor Jackson considered, and the Committee agreed, that it would be helpful if the Code also included information for Members on actions they could take and situations to avoid if they wished to participate in lobbying or representing their constituents' concerns with regard to particular planning issues.

The Chair thanked Officers for their work in revising the Code of Conduct to reflect the Committee's views.

RESOLVED

That subject to the comments above, the revised Planning Code of Conduct be approved and the Council be recommended to adopt the Code accordingly.

5.4 STANDARDS COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2008/09

Ms Freeman introduced the report proposing a work programme for the Committee in the Municipal Year 2008/09. She added that it may not be possible for the Ethical Standards self-assessment report to come forward to the October 2008 meeting, if all Members had not received training by then.

Ms Freeman confirmed that the Standards Board national conference was to be held in Birmingham in October 2008 and any Member wishing to attend should notify her.

Replying to a query regarding the quality of information on Members' timesheets, Mr Williams commented that a report on this matter was programmed for the October meeting of the Committee and he would be consulting Members in due course prior to reporting further.

RESOLVED

That subject to the above comments, the work programme be agreed as set out in the report.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

6.1 Complaints

Ms Freeman circulated a response provided by the Director of Housing Management addressing information requested by the Committee at its meeting on 15th April 2008 on the analysis of complaints. In response to further queries she indicated that:

- The possibility of including more detailed information about particular complaints would be examined with the Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team.
- The consideration of using the information obtained to help in the prevention of other complaints would also be addressed.
- The ALMO complaints procedures at Stages 1 and 2 would be the same as those used by the Borough and Stage 3 complaints would be referred to the Council's Corporate Complaints Officer for compliance.
- The Director of Housing Management would be further notified of the Committee's concerns regarding the high level of Technical Services complaints that were upheld; the need for application of performance requirements on contractors and appropriate penalties; information was needed on the number of repeat repairs; the need to ensure that tenants have the opportunity of providing their evaluation/assessment post repair works.
- This information would be reported back to the Committee along with the further information previously requested about recycling and the answering of complaints within the ten day period.

6.2 Queen's Birthday Honours List

The Chair pointed out that Sister Christine had received an award in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in consideration of her work for the people of Poplar and she was suitably congratulated by the Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.

Chair, Mr Patrick (Barry) O'Connor
Standards Committee