

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2009

**COMMITTEE ROOM, 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)

Mr Satnam Bains (Vice-Chair)

Ms Suzette Barry (Independent Member)

Councillor Stephanie Eaton

Sister Christine Frost (Independent Member)

Councillor Alexander Heslop

Councillor Shirley Houghton

Councillor Ann Jackson

Mr Eric Pemberton (Independent Member)

Mr Muhammad Habibur Rahman (Independent Member)

Officers Present:

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

John Williams – (Service Head, Democratic Services)

Louise Fleming – Senior Committee Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2008 were agreed and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

MATTERS ARISING

Members asked when the proposed consultation with Members regarding the format of the timesheet would be taking place and were advised that it would be before the next meeting of the Standards Committee in April. Members also queried whether to receive the monitoring report at each meeting of the Committee, rather than 6-monthly. It was suggested that the Committee consider the frequency of future reports as part of the discussion in April.

The Committee was informed that the three Members who, at the last meeting, had not completed their time sheets were now up to date following discussions with their Group leaders.

A briefing note was tabled for Members which provided details on measures taken by the Council in respect of dog fouling, which had been requested by the Committee at its last meeting. Mr Eric Pemberton raised some concern that the measures in place were not working as he had witnessed numerous incidents of dog fouling in the Borough. The Committee was advised that the issue was not within its remit and that the Council's complaints procedure would be the correct way to deal with the matter. Councillor Alex Heslop agreed to make a formal members enquiry.

Members requested an update on the progress of the guidance for residents on planning matters. The Committee was informed that the Interim Corporate Director for Development and Renewal had been advised of the Committee's comments, but that no progress had been made. The issue would be raised with the new Corporate Director and the outcome would be reported back to Members. Ms Freeman, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) and Monitoring Officer, also advised the Committee that she would report to the next meeting the information from Mr Parsons, Service Head Procurement & Corporate Programmes, which Members had requested in respect of compliance with the Ethical Governance Protocol.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Ethical Governance Training - Progress and Update Report

Members noted a report on progress with training on ethical governance/standards. It was intended to complete the training by the end of March 2009 and send Members a self-assessment to evaluate the benefit of the training.

4.2 Review of procedure for handling complaints about Member conduct

Ms Isabella Freeman, Assistant Chief Executive (Legal Services) and Monitoring Officer, presented a report which proposed amendments to the Procedure for Handling Complaints about Member Conduct to clarify the process in light of recent experience and emerging best practice.

Members asked a number of questions relating to the procedure for notifying Committee members of complaints made against Councillors and what constituted evidence in an initial assessment of a complaint. Ms Freeman advised that there was a procedure for dealing with anonymous complaints, and that Members would not be notified in the first stage, as the complaint would remain confidential until a decision of the Assessment Sub-Committee had been made. Ms Freeman also advised that there was no definition of what constituted evidence in the Code, however any allegations would be reported to the Sub-Committee, along with as much additional information as was available without investigation at the assessment stage.

Members expressed concern over the time available to read through the documentation and asked whether it would be possible to be sent confidential information in advance. Ms Freeman informed Members that practice among other Monitoring Officers was not to send out confidential information relating to an allegation prior to the Sub-Committee, and this would be continued at this stage. Only the Assessment Sub-Committee would have the information, and not until it meets and is quorate. However, Members would be given as long as required at the meeting to read through the information.

RESOLVED

- (i) that the amended Procedure for Handling Complaints about Member Conduct, as set out in Appendix A to the Committee report, be agreed;
- (ii) that the Terms of Reference of the Assessment and Review Sub-Committees be amended to reflect the revised paragraphs 11 and 16 of the amended Procedure for Handling Complaints about Member Conduct; and
- (iii) that the local assessment criteria be amended to read

“If there is not enough evidence available to justify a decision to refer the matter for investigation”.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other urgent business.

The meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.

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