

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS (ADVISORY) COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 18 MARCH 2014

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

Members Present:

Matthew William Rowe (Chair)	(Co-opted Member)
Grenville Mills	(Temporary Co-opted Member)
John Pulford MBE	(Co-opted Member)
Eric Pemberton (Vice-Chair)	(Co-opted Member)
Salina Bagum	(Co-opted Member)
Councillor David Edgar	
Councillor Zara Davis	
Councillor Sirajul Islam	
Councillor Abdul Asad	(Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Services)
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman	(Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee)

Observer:

Elizabeth Hall	Independent Person
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Officers Present:

Meic Sullivan-Gould	– (Interim Monitoring Officer, Legal Services, LPG)
John Williams	– (Service Head, Democratic Services, Law Probity and Governance)
Evelyn Akoto	– (Committee Officer)

MR MATTHEW WILLIAM ROWE (CHAIR) IN THE CHAIR

Apologies

Councillor Judith Gardiner

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no disclosable pecuniary interest.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

Mr Grenville Mills proposed the following amendments to the minutes;

- There should be clear distinction between references to 'members' of the Standards Advisory Committee and 'members' of the council.
- Agenda item 3.3 did not accurately reflect the concerns raised by the Committee with regards to Member timesheets. It was of grave concern that timesheets were not completed by a large number of Councillors. The Committee agreed that the following wording should be added to the minutes; 'the Committee reaffirmed the importance of timesheets and their timely submission'.

Mr Grenville sought clarification on the meaning of the 'silver group meetings'. The Service Head, Democratic Services explained that it was in reference to a Police command structure meeting with Council officers and partner agencies. The Service Head confirmed that he had drawn the Committee's comments regarding possible use of covert investigation for electoral offences to the attention of the Metropolitan Police representatives, whose responsibility it was to investigate such offences.

Matters Arising

Mr Grenville Mills enquired on the status of actions from the previous meeting. He referenced Agenda item 3.1 "Covert investigation under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; and asked when the proposed reports from Head of Legal Services (Community), was likely to come to the Committee. The interim Monitoring Officer undertook to inform the Head of Legal Services about the action points raised and suggested that he emailed the Committee via the Chair, instead of waiting until the next meeting.

The Chair **Moved** (taking account of the proposed amendment to the minutes from Mr Grenville Mills and the additional recommendation proposed by the Committee), and it was:-

Resolved

1. That, subject to the amendment set out at (a) below, the unrestricted minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Standards (Advisory) Committee, held on 14 January 2014, be agreed as a correct record of the proceedings, and the Chair be authorised to sign them accordingly.

- (a) Agenda item 3.3 “Review of Member Timesheets”, add the following wording, ‘the Committee reaffirmed the importance of timesheets and their timely submission’.
2. That a report be emailed to the Committee via the Chair with all relevant information pertaining to the matter arising on the minutes raised by Mr Grenville Mills.

Action by:

Evelyn Akoto, Democratic Services,
Meic Sullivan-Gould (Interim Monitoring Officer)

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaints and Investigation Monitoring

Meic Sullivan-Gould, the interim Monitoring Officer introduced the report, which informed the Committee on the number and nature of complaints received and action taken as a result. The interim Monitoring Officer emphasised the need for investigations to be proportionate to the incident, and also highlighted the costly nature of such investigations. As a result of this, the interim Monitoring Officer insisted on complaints being concise with evidence to support it, in order to take them forward.

The Committee discussed the importance of reviewing the current procedures to make them more efficient and faster in dealing with cases. Officers referred to the coming election and that it may not be the appropriate time to seek changes to processes. The Committee was informed that a fast track complaints procedure to deal with election offences had been created. .

Members of the Committee raised concerns on the Committee’s ability to effectively bring Councillors to account. Some members felt that since the Localism Act, power had been eroded from the Standard (Advisory) Committee and it was currently not fit for purpose. The Committee discussed the behaviour of some Members at Council meetings and felt that the Speaker should be given more power to control conduct.

It was agreed that there was a need to call a meeting after the local election, to look specifically at how current procedures could be made more effective.

In response to a question the interim Monitoring Officer confirmed that all elected officials signed up to the Code of Conduct and were therefore subject to the same processes. There was no distinction made between a Councillor and a Mayor, as they both are bound by the same rules and expectations.

The Committee agreed that the procedure needed to be reviewed and that the starting point was to begin with the Code of Conduct. It was suggested that

the new Committee could make recommendation at the first meeting and refer it to Council.

The Committee discussed the possibility of an external facilitator attending the next meeting to assist the group in reviewing best practice and putting forward recommendations on procedural change. A Member of the Council however recommended that to cut down cost, the Committee should go ahead with the planned meeting, and only call on external assistance if further help was needed.

The interim Monitoring Officer offered to send the Committee available links to current literature on this subject.

The Committee agreed that the first meeting after the election, on 15 July 2014, would focus on the code of conduct and timesheets.

Resolved

1. That the Advisory Committee note the complaints and investigation monitoring information contained in the report.
2. That the next meeting consider possible changes to the code of conduct and related procedures as set out above.

Action

Matthew Mannion, Committee Services Manager
Meic Sullivan-Gould, interim Monitoring Officer

3.2 Members' Attendance and Timesheets Monitoring

John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services, introduced the report and updated the Committee on a range of matters related to Members attendance at formal meetings and training events, the completion of timesheets and register of interests. The Service Head tabled an updated Appendix 1 and highlighted the following:

- Significant numbers of Members have not submitted their time sheets in a timely manner which continues to be an issue. However as it was the last meeting in the administration he suggested there would be little purpose in sending further reminder letters to Members.
- The Council was on target to introduce electronic timesheets after the local election.

The Committee noted that although it was not mandatory, it was however important to remind Members of the importance of filling in their timesheets. Councillors Edgar and Uz-Zaman each stated that they had recently submitted timesheets which were not reflected in the updated Appendix 1. Nevertheless the Committee agreed that the Members' attendance and

timesheet monitoring report was useful information, and therefore should continue to be submitted to the Committee.

The Committee discussed why some Members did not prioritise updating their attendance records. It was suggested that this behaviour may change if the electorate were able to easily view this information, for example, creating an on-line button that could request a Members' timesheet.

A Member enquired whether the new electronic timesheet could be synchronised to diaries, and asked that where possible, the electronic forms could be populated with automated information already held in the Council's system, such as Committee meeting and training attendance, including duration, freeing Members to complete essential information that was not stored.

Resolved

1. That the Committee note the information set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report in relation to Councillors' submission of timesheets, attendance at formal meetings and training events, and completion of the register of interests during the current municipal year;
2. That the Committee continue to receive monitoring reports on these matters.

Action:

John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

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

There was none.

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.

Chair, Matthew William Rowe
Standards (Advisory) Committee