

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS (ADVISORY) COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 25 APRIL 2019**

**ROOM C3, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE  
CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG**

**Members Present:**

John Pulford MBE (Chair)  
Nafisa Adam (Vice-Chair)  
Fiona Browne  
Mike Houston  
Councillor Rajib Ahmed  
Councillor Puru Miah

**Observers:**

Elizabeth Marshall – Independent Person

**Apologies:**

Councillor Amina Ali (Member)  
Councillor Mohammed Ahbab Hossain (Member)  
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan (Member)  
Councillor Rabina Khan (Member)

**Officers Present:**

Holly Bell – (Trainee Solicitor)  
Asmat Hussain – (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring  
Officer)  
Kerry Middleton – (Head of External Communications)  
Mark Norman – (Legal Adviser & Deputy Monitoring Officer)  
Carmen Hurst – Senior Communications Officer - Projects  
  
Matthew Mannion – (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)  
Antonella Burgio – (Democratic Services Officer)

**1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)**

Subject to minor typographical corrections, the minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2019 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

### **3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **3.1 Social Media Policy**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of External Communications and the Senior Communications Officer – Projects, which provided an overview of the refreshed Social Media Policy for Councillors and council employees. The Committee was informed that a policy was already in force. However, arising from the report published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) out of its review of local government ethical standards, the policy was being refreshed and enhanced to better assist members and officers to understand how social media may be used appropriately and effectively.

An updated draft was tabled at the meeting which had been re-formatted to better convey which elements related to policy and which were guidance.

Responding to Members' questions, the following information was also provided:

- The policy was intended to provide a framework for all uses of social media by Councillors and employees as impacts of use in a private capacity may affect a person in his/her delivery of a public role. The reach of social media was global, therefore it was necessary to consider the potential for harmful impacts such as financial, reputational or career impacts.
- There have been no breaches of the social media policy in recent times. None-the-less the policy update and training proposed would be beneficial in view of case law in this area.

Noting the spread and reach of social media in the community; the Committee considered that the approach adopted was appropriate. Members discussed the report and, arising from the discussion, the following actions were requested:

- Training on the use of social media should be included as part of Member and employee induction to ensure clarity around its use and managers should be involved in this aspect of staff induction.
- Refresher social media training should be offered to existing Members upon approval of the policy.
- An infographic guide should be devised to facilitate easy access to advice.

Following the discussion, Members were advised of the following actions which would be taken:

- A Member workshop would be delivered to help members to understand and implement good social media usage.
- The feedback offered by the Committee would be incorporated into the draft policy prior to submission for approval.

**RESOLVED**

1. That the discussion of the draft Social Media Policy attached as Appendix 1 be noted.
2. That following the incorporation of Member feedback, the adoption of the policy be recommend to the Corporate Leadership Team.

**ACTION BY:** M Norman, Legal Adviser, and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
K Middleton, Head of External Communications

**3.2 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaint Monitoring**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which summarised the number of complaints received concerning potential breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members in the period 23 May 2018 to 31 March 2019. He informed the Committee that fewer complaints had been lodged than in the previous municipal year. He also clarified that the complaint lodged on 27 February was recorded an incomplete at the time of publication. However, consultation with the Independent Person took place in April and it was assessed that no further action was necessary. The complaint was therefore closed.

Arising from the discussion of the report the following information was also noted:

- Concerning the complaint lodged on 11 October 2018, the Committee was informed that the Councillor had undertaken the training directed and that this had been completed on time.
- Concerning the complaint lodged on 17 December 2018, the matter had been referred to the Head of Audit and Risk Management for investigation since it concerned an allegation of potential fraud. However, upon conclusion of the investigation, the outcome would be reported to Standards Advisory Committee.

**RESOLVED**

That the content of the report and the discussion of the information contained in Appendix 1 be noted.

**3.3 Committee on Standards In Public Life - Report on Local Government Ethical Standards**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which summarised the findings and recommendations of the CSPL review of local government ethical standards. He noted that primary legislation would need to be amended should the Government wish that certain of the recommendations of the report be implemented.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer invited the Committee to consider the good practice identified by CSPL and how the council's arrangements compared with these. The Committee noted that:

- Of the 15 best practice (BP) recommendations that were identified, the council already complies or partly with recommendations; 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15.
- BP recommendations 11 and 12 did not apply to the council as it had no parish councils.
- Actions to ensure compliance with recommendations 1, 13 and 14 were in hand and would be reported at a future meeting.
- CPSL would expect information from councils on the implementation of the BP recommendations.

Having considered the main recommendations and BP recommendations, the Committee requested the following:

- That CSPL be notified about concerns regarding the limited renewal of Independent Person appointments. It was felt that a longer term or more flexibility for renewals should be permitted in order to ensure that the talent pool is not exhausted.
- That a standard clause in relation to BP2 should be added to the revised code of conduct requiring Members to comply with any formal standards investigation.

The Committee was advised that the actions requested by Members and those identified out of the BP recommendations would be taken forward and an update report brought back at the end of the year.

#### **RESOLVED**

- That the content of the report be noted.
- That the feedback and recommendations of the Committee be taken forward as indicated in the minute to this item.

**ACTION BY:** M Norman, Legal Adviser and Deputy Monitoring Officer

### **3.4 Publication of Candidates Home Addresses and Disclosure of Sensitive Interests**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which informed Members of revisions relating to the requirements around the publication of home addresses for candidates at local elections and to new Government guidance on the publication of sensitive interests.

The Committee noted that the revisions stemmed from a commission by the Prime Minister which had arisen from concerns around personal abuse and risk of harm experienced by those standing for, or holding, public office.

The Committee noted the information provided and indicated that there were no matters related to this subject that they wished to discuss.

### **RESOLVED**

That the revisions and guidance outlined in the report be noted.

### **3.5 Updating the Disqualification Criteria for Councillors and Mayors**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which provided a summary of a Government consultation on proposals to revise the disqualification criteria for councillors and mayors (including elected mayors). The proposed revisions were intended to bring these criteria into line with sentencing guidelines in the Courts.

The Committee noted that the approach was consistent with Council's best practice in the Member Code of Conduct. Members also noted that Tower Hamlets was not among the councils that had participated in the consultation. The Committee asked officers to pursue lobbying on this matter on behalf of the council.

### **RESOLVED**

- That the Government proposals contained at Appendix 1 be noted.
- That the action requested above be taken forward by officers.

**ACTION BY:** M Norman, Legal Adviser and Deputy Monitoring Officer

### **3.6 Register of Members' Gifts and Hospitality**

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report which provided an update on declarations of gifts and hospitality in the period 1 October 2018 to 31 March 2019. The Committee was informed that, since the previous report, performance had improved in that a greater number of declarations had been registered in the required timescales. These improvements were attributed to Member Ethics and Probity training delivered earlier in the year.

The Committee discussed the data and raised the following matters:

- Members felt that registrations of gifts and hospitality, including those declined, continued to be under declared and that there were late declarations. They recommended that this should be pursued as part of the ongoing Ethics and Probity training for Members.
- Declarations of gifts and hospitality should be reported quarterly in line with best practice recommended by CSPL.
- Noting that reminders to register declarations were sent via the Members' Bulletin, a Member enquired if data on the 'open rate' could

be provided. The request was noted and it was suggested that a report on how the bulletin may be more effectively utilised be brought to a future meeting. The Committee supported this proposal.

- Members enquired about the monitoring arrangements for employees' declarations. They were informed that this matter was reported through the Audit Committee.

### **RESOLVED**

1. That the content of the report be noted.
2. That the feedback and recommendations of the Committee be taken forward as indicated in the minute to this item.

**ACTION BY:** M Mannion, Head of Democratic Services

### **3.7 Work Plan**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that the work plan outlined the work that had been undertaken during the year and was provided for information. A new work plan would be brought forward in the new municipal year.

The Committee discussed the plan and noted the following proposals:

- A Standards (Advisory) Committee Annual Report authored by the Chair with input from the Independent Person would be presented to Full Council at the meeting on 17 July 2019. The Chair was invited to attend this meeting.
- It was intended that the work of the Committee be mainstreamed in the council. As part of this, the Monitoring Officer invited the Chair to attend Annual Council on 15 May 2019.
- It was proposed that work to better communicate the work of the Committee would be undertaken with Corporate Communications.
- It was intended that the matter of the vacant Co-optee positions on the Committee would be addressed after work on the Terms of Reference and the wider work on the Constitution had been completed. The Chair suggested that the Co-optees presently appointed could support the task of finding suitable applicants by communicating the future recruitment within their networks.

1. That the work plan be noted.
2. That the feedback and recommendations of the Committee be taken forward as indicated in the minute to this item.

**ACTION BY:** M Norman, Legal Adviser and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
A Burgio, Democratic Services Officer

**4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 7.26 p.m.

Chair, John Pulford MBE  
Standards (Advisory) Committee