

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.05 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present at the meeting:

Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Member In Attendance remotely

Councillor Rabina Khan

Co-opted Members Present at the meeting:

John Pulford MBE (Chair)
Fiona Browne (Vice-Chair)

Co-opted Members In Attendance remotely

Nafisa Adam
Mike Housing

Apologies:

Denzil Johnson (Co-optee)
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin
Councillor James King
Councillor Abdal Ullah

Others Present at the meeting:

Janet Fasan – (Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion – (Head of Democratic Services)

Officers In Attendance remotely:

Patricia Attawia – (Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Member))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2021 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Update on the new Member Code of Conduct

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report on progress developing the new Member Code of Conduct. She reminded the Committee that previous versions had been presented at recent meetings and that the previous meeting in July had agreed a potential final draft of the new Code. The only outstanding matter was to await the Local Government Association's published guidance to see if any changes should be made following that.

The guidance had now been published and had been incorporated into the Code with links to the relevant sections of the guidance spread throughout the document. However, no substantive text changes were seen as necessary. With the agreement of the Chair, the draft Code had therefore been circulated to the political groups asking for comment.

Only limited feedback had been received (and any that was received was generally positive) and so it was now proposed, subject to the agreement of the Committee, to submit the final Code to Council for adoption.

It was suggested that Council should be asked to adopt the new Code from the May 2022 local elections to avoid causing confusion in the short period before the elections were due to take place.

Following discussion, the Committee welcomed the new Code and thanked the Members of the working group for their efforts in preparing the new version. It was unanimously agreed that the proposed Code should be approved and forwarded to Council for adoption.

RESOLVED

1. That the new Member Code of Conduct be approved and forwarded to Council for adoption, with the date of adoption to be set at Friday 6 May (following the 2022 local elections).

3.2 Member Learning and Development Update

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the annual update report on Member Learning and Development. He highlighted that the report covered three main areas:

- Listing training and development which had taken place over the last year and plans for the next few months.
- Begins the discussion on plans for the Member Induction programme after the 2022 local elections.
- Notes the new Member email bulletin had launched and how that can be developed in future.

The Committee discussed the report and noted a number of points including:

- There had only been a few responses to the Member survey on learning and development needs which was disappointing. It was agreed that officers would follow this up.
- It would be good to ensure that co-opted Members were invited to the relevant Member Induction training sessions.
- Whether some training, such as council finance, should be mandatory for Members in certain positions/roles.
- It was useful to attend the Member Induction sessions regardless of how long the Member had been serving.
- A draft of the new Induction plan will be brought to the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.3 Register of Gifts and Hospitality - Quarterly Update

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Member), introduced the regular update on Member declarations of gifts and hospitality. She informed the Committee that a reminder, emails and phone calls had recently been sent out to Members to check their declarations list. Only one Member had yet to provide an update within the last six months but the team would be continuing to chase after this meeting.

The Chair noted that there were only two declarations in the report due to Covid although it was explained that a few had been submitted more recently which would be listed in the next report.

The Committee discussed the report and, in particular, noted the modern tradition of a very fancy cake being donated for the Speaker's Reception.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.4 Review of the Member / Officer Protocol

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report proposing the establishment of a working group to review the Member/Officer Relations Protocol. She explained that this document was in effect a supplement to the Code of Conduct and now that the new Code was complete it was the appropriate time to review the Member / Officer relations protocol. The existing protocol was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chair noted that the Protocol was in need of an update and welcomed the opportunity to set up a working-group to look at it. During discussion it was noted:

- The protocol was now in an older 'style' compared to the new Code of Conduct.
- The Member to Member Relations Section should be improved.
- It wasn't clear in the protocol who had accountability for which decisions.
- The referenced Member Service Guide needed considering
- The section on Political Assistants should include a description of that role.
- It wasn't always appropriate for officers to seek informal resolution of issues with Members.
- It was worth considering the best way of dealing with issues around the Chief Executive role.

The Monitoring Officer thanked everyone for their contributions and agreed to establish the working group.

RESOLVED

1. That a working group be established to review the Member / Officer Relations Protocol and to report back to the Committee on the conclusion of its work.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Work Plan

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, took the Committee through their workplan.

He explained that two reports had not been included on the agenda for this meeting:

- Effectiveness of the Standards Advisory Committee – deferred to the next meeting.
- Update on Member Enquiries – this will follow on from a planned discussion at the General Purposes Committee.

For the next meeting there were a number of potential reports including on:

- Strengthening local democracy
- Member induction planning
- Guidance on serving on outside bodies

As well as a number of regular reports.

Discussions would take place with the Chair on an appropriate final agenda list.

Matthew Mannion also provided a couple of other updates:

- The General Purposes Committee would be receiving a report proposing to make the Constitution clearer that the Standards Advisory Committee has the ability to submit reports to Council on matters of concern should it so wish.
- Full Council the previous week had approved extensions to the appointments of four Co-optees (John Pulford, Fiona Browne, Mike Houston, Nafisa Adam) to 30 September 2025.

The Chair updated the Committee on a couple of matters:

- He had provided an update to July Council on the last year's Standards Advisory Committee Annual Report. He provided this through a virtual arrangement although the technology was not as strong as hoped.
- He and Elizabeth Hall, the Independent Person (IP), had met with the Chief Executive to discuss the recent Senior Leadership Review. The Chair and IP were happy with the response content and tone from the Chief Executive and welcomed his engagement with their concerns.

Janet Fasan, Monitoring Officer, updated the Committee that the Council had run an initial recruitment exercise for a new Independent Person but this had not been successful. A second round was being planned and the Communications Team were helping draft a more eye-catching advert.

Finally, the Monitoring Officer was asked to report back on the question of what role the Council had on monitoring the activities of election candidates, especially independent candidates.

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Nil items.

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

The meeting ended at 7.00 p.m.

Chair,
Standards Advisory Committee