

STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE,

10/02/2022

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

**NOTES OF AN INFORMAL MEETING OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2022

VIRTUAL TEAMS MEETING

Members Present in Attendance Virtually:

John Pullman MBE (Chair)

Fiona Brown (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Abdal Ullah

Councillor James King

Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Councillor Mufeedah Bustin

Officers Present in Attendance Virtually:

Janet Fasan – (Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)

Matthew Mannion – (Head of Democratic Services)

Jill Bayley – (Head of Legal Safeguarding)

Justina Bridgeman – (Democratic Services Officer, Committees)

Co-optees Present in Attendance Virtually:

Denzil Johnson

Amanda Orchard

Nafisa Adam

Apologies:

Mike Houston (Co-Optee)

Rachel Tiffin (Observer)

Councillor Rabina Khan

Patricia Attawia (Democratic Services Team Leader, Civic & Members, Governance)

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1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

1.2 MEETING STATUS

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, informed The Committee that due to positive Covid tests and attendee availability issues within Council offices; it was agreed that this discussion be held virtually on an informal basis, rather than at The Town Hall as a formal Committee meeting. The Members of the Committee would still be able to discuss all the reports and propose actions for officers to consider. Confirmation of the minutes of the last meeting would have to be deferred until the next formal Committee meeting.

The Chair introduced Amanda Orchard as the new Independent Person (IP), who works as an adjudicator for investigations, disciplinaries and appeals within several local authorities. Matthew Mannion introduced Justina Bridgeman as a new member of Democratic Services on a six-month secondment.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

NOTED

1. That the minutes of the subcommittee, 25 November 2021 were agreed and could be submitted to the next meeting for approval.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Draft Standards Advisory Board Report to Council

Jill Bayley, Head of Legal Safeguarding and Deputy Monitoring Officer, gave the committee an overview of the Annual Report submitted at the 25 November 2021 meeting for consideration. The Committee were requested to outline any corrections requiring amendments, as well as any additions to the Work Programme. As the report is in draft form, highlighted sections still require updates, specifically:

- Code of Conduct for Members – Complaint Monitoring (pt. 13)
- Member Induction (part 41) - *to be discussed: see item 3.2*
- Member / Officer Relations Protocol (pt. 34) – *to be discussed: see item 3.3*
- Gifts & Hospitality (part 18) – *to be discussed: see item 3.5*
- Standards Advisory Committee Work Planning for 2022-23 (pt. 43)

The Chair welcomed the report and asked that any comments be fed back to officers. It was also noted that an updated report would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting before being submitted to Council.

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NOTED

1. That the report be noted and that any additions or amendments be submitted to officers.

3.2 Member Induction Programme 2022

Matthew Mannion gave The committee background details on the proposed programme, which had been updated since the previous version was presented at the last meeting, for further consideration. The draft was also submitted to the General Purposes Committee on 10 January 2022 to induct new Councillors after the May elections. The programme focuses on Statutory requirements, service area introductions, timetables and ensuring training and development needs are met. Any comments should be cascaded to Matthew via email. The final programme would be signed off by the General Purposes Committee on 22 March 2022.

The Chair then went through the programme in depth and noted:

- LBTH has no authority to enforce DBS checks on new candidates, although checks are undertaken on Members working with vulnerable residents. The Committee could consider recommending more checks on Members if the Committee feels it appropriate.
- The Committee welcomed reference to The Code of Conduct throughout the programme.

In general the committee welcomed the report and the comprehensive plan set out.

NOTED:

- The Standards Advisory Committee recommended The Chair, Vice Chair, and IP's attend the following induction sessions:
 - Ethics and Probity.
 - Promoting Equalities and Diversity.
 - Overview and Scrutiny.
 - A tour of the New Town Hall.
 - It was requested that officers ensure these dates are diarised once approved by GPC.

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RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.3 Member / Officer Relations Protocol – Update Report

Jill Bayley, Head of Legal Safeguarding and Deputy Monitoring Officer, presented the draft report. This followed previous agreement by the committee that the protocol be reviewed. It had previously been discussed with a working group and progress to date was now being presented to the committee for discussion.

Part of the discussion had involved looking at other styles of protocol elsewhere, including a much briefer version. However, it was felt that this was not appropriate for Tower Hamlets.

Attached to the report were updated and track changed versions of the protocol for review.

Fiona Browne vice-chair noted that the structure of the report appeared disjointed in relation to the code of conduct principles, roles, and instructions. Clarity is required to make protocol navigation easier. The Chair requested amendments be forwarded for review to the working party, then back to The Committee for final authorisation.

NOTED

1. That the report be noted.

3.4 Guidance for Members and Officers on Outside Organisations

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, outlined the report which presented updated guidance for Members who were appointed to external organisations, such as charities, as part of their role as a Member.

Comments from the committee were welcomed. The Committee were also asked to consider whether a working group should be formed. The document looks at Member expectations, organisations and legal duties as a director and trustee of an outside body.

The Chair welcomed comments. Councillor James King recommended that clarity on Members roles should be reiterated in the guidance introduction section (*i.e. section 1.3*). Councillor King also suggested further details on Member expectations and the power to expel from outside bodies be included.

Amanda Orchard noted that the guidance on Service should include ensuring Members needed to be clear on whether they were present on a personal or council capacity when

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voting on particular issues. More emphasis should be made on Members who repeatedly fail to attend meetings without any mitigating circumstances, and a process of expulsion should be considered.

The committee welcomed the proposal of a working group to discuss the guidance in more detail, then requested amendments be forwarded for review at the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting.

NOTED

1. That the report be noted.

3.5 Gifts and Hospitality – Quarterly Report

Matthew Mannion presented the regular update report on Gifts and Hospitality declarations made by Members, on behalf of Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic & Members), who sent her apologies. The Chair queried why Mayor Biggs accepted a gift from The Embassy of the People's Republic of China, whilst Cllr Islam donated the same gift to the Speaker's Charity. A correction was noted (*attached in a supplementary agenda paper*).

The committee were asked to note that items related to The Speakers Ball, were not declared within the 28-day deadline, due in part to the year-end festivities.

The Chair suggested that the importance of declaring gifts and hospitality within the deadline should be stressed to new Members during induction. This will also be highlighted in the Annual Report. Although continual late declarations will be noted, there are no sanctions currently in place. This should be considered for new Members going forward and any further comments be cascaded for review.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

4. WORK PLAN

Matthew Mannion presented details of the work plan of the municipal year so far. Discussions will take place regarding items the committee feels appropriate for 2022/23 and any further comments should be cascaded for review. Fiona Browne requested that evaluation of the induction and training programmes are included in the work plan. It was noted that this could also be included in the annual report on Member training that is usually presented at the October meeting.

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RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

None noted.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Nil items.

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

None noted.

The meeting ended at 7.29 p.m.

Chair, John Pullman
Standards Advisory Committee