

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2023

**COMMITTEE ROOM - TOWER HAMLETS TOWN HALL, 160 WHITECHAPEL
ROAD, LONDON E1 1BJ**

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed
Councillor Sabina Akhtar
Councillor Sirajul Islam
Councillor Abu Chowdhury

Co-optees Present in Person:

John Pulford MBE (Chair)
Fiona Browne (Vice Chair)
Elizabeth Marshall MBE

Co-optees In Attendance Virtually:

Faham Sinan-Katamba

Apologies:

Councillor Amin Rahman
Rachael Tiffen Independent Person

Officers Present in Person:

Patricia Attawia (Democratic Services Team Leader, Civic & Members, Governance)
Jill Bayley (Head of Legal Safeguarding)
Janet Fasan (Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion (Head of Democratic Services)
Joel West (Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023 be approved as a correct record of proceedings subject to adding the attendance of Faham Sinan-Katamba as an observer and noting apologies of absence from Elizabeth Marshall.

Further to minute 6.1, Janet Fasan, Director Legal and Monitoring Officer explained that work was underway to align Part D of the Constitution with the Code of Conduct for Members (in Part C) to clarify roles of the Monitoring Officer, Independent Persons and sub committees of the Advisory Committee with regards to complaints into breaches of the Code of Conduct.

3. WORK PLAN

The Advisory Committee noted that, whilst all actions listed on the plan had been discharged, it would aim to set target dates for any future actions and asked that these be recorded on the work plan accordingly.

RESOLVED that the work plan is noted.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Member Learning and Development Yearly Update

This report and the following report (Achieving the Member Learning and Development Charter Mark) were considered together by the Advisory Committee and the combined minute is presented here.

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report that presented the regular Member Learning and Development Programme report setting out data from 1 January 2023 onwards following on from the last report. Matthew also explained the rationale behind the ambition to achieve the Member Learning and Development Charter Mark.

Further to questions from Advisory Committee on both reports, Matthew explained:

- Clarity on the overall budget for training, development and the Charter Mark would be known when the Council's 2024/25 budget is approved.
- Higher-quality and dedicated training often requires use of external training providers so is necessarily more expensive than in-house provision, an increased budget should allow for external training where it will add value.
- The report on Achieving the Member Learning and Development Charter Mark had been/was planned to be presented to a range of stakeholders such as other Council committees, internal officer groups etc. It was hoped to gather as much feedback as possible.
- Consideration was also being given to a co-optee focussed training and development programme that would identify a role profile for co-optees and relevant training opportunities.

Further to questions, the Advisory Committee made the following comments and observations relating to both reports:

- The Learning and Development Steering Group, which allows elected member involvement in the direction of learning and development activity was welcomed as a useful forum.

- Attendance by members at training may sometimes reflect their seniority and experience. Experienced and long-serving members are less likely to need training in any given year and this will reflect in their attendance statistics.
- Identifying skills and performance development needs can be challenging as some members are reluctant to admit a development need. Creating a safe space for Councillors to reflect on performance would be valuable.
- The Council's political group structures could assist officers creating a training prospectus that is relevant to members needs.
- Training that is different and exciting is more likely to secure good attendance. Interactive training was particularly welcomed.
- Provision of more details on the content of training sessions could help to address low turnouts. Sometimes members are unable to understand what will be included from the title alone.
- Consideration should be given to launching a 'buddy-up' system for new members.
- Training and development plans must recognise and work within the constraints on elected member time if it is to be effective.
- Offers of accredited training may be more attractive as members would be able to demonstrate their qualifications in future if they are not re-elected.

Members noted and endorsed the draft Member Learning and Development Strategy 2023-2026 (appendix 1 to Item 4.2) and indicated they would submit any final comments to officers before it was signed off.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.

4.2 Achieving the LGA Member Learning and Development Charter Mark

This item and the previous item, Member Learning and Development Yearly update, were considered together. For details of the discussion on this item, please see the minute for Item 4.1, Member Learning and Development Yearly update.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.
2. Endorses the proposal to seek Member Learning and Development Accreditation.

4.3 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaint Monitoring and Associated Matters

Jill Bayley, Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the report that updated the Advisory Committee on the quarterly monitoring information for complaints and investigations relating to alleged breaches Council's Code of Conduct for Members. Jill summarised the progress of the complaints listed. Jill also explained that two of the complaints had been included in the report for information of members of the Advisory Committee, despite not meeting the criteria for a live complaint, as full reports/forms had yet to be supplied by the complainant.

The Advisory Committee noted that an updated version of Appendix 1 (Complaints and investigation monitoring information) had been published as a supplement to the original agenda.

Further to questions from Advisory Committee, Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer and Jill explained:

- The current two-month target for complaint completions was often not met and would benefit from review. Most complaints exceeded the target, due in large part to delays waiting for responses from complainants or members.
- Political group leaders are not routinely informed of the details of complaints against members of their group.
- How the views of the Independent Person are taken into consideration by the Monitoring Officer in reaching their decision on action following a complaint.

RESOLVED that the Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the content of the report and the information contained in the updated Appendix 1 to the report.

4.4 Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members) introduced the report that updated the Advisory Committee on the Members' Register of Interests and declarations of gifts and hospitality submitted by Members since the previous report to the committee. Patricia explained how she and her team worked to encourage and capture declarations from members. She also asked the Advisory Committee to note there had been an increase in requests to remove certain information (in particular home-addresses) from registers of interest by Members in the previous quarter, following an increase in online abuse.

RESOLVED that the Standards Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the report.

5. DISPENSATIONS UNDER SECTION 33 OF THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

Janet Fasan, Director Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report that informed the Advisory Committee of dispensations in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI's) under section 33 of the Localism Act 2011. Janet explained that, further to paragraph 3.4, one of the listed specific dispensations had been included in error as it related to the previous year and therefore the total number of such dispensations in this period should read as one (1).

RESOLVED that the Standards Advisory Committee:

1. Notes the update on dispensations as set out in Paragraphs 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 of the report.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

A resolution to exclude the press and public was not required.

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

None.

The meeting ended at 7.18 p.m.

John Pulford, Chair,
Standards Advisory Committee