


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Standards Advisory Committee</p> <p>Wednesday 26 June 2024</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Linda Walker, Interim Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p>Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members)
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

This report updates the Committee on the Members' Register of Interests and declarations of gifts and hospitality submitted by Members since the previous report to the Committee on 7 December 2023.

The Standards Advisory Committee is receiving this report as it monitors compliance with the requirement in the Council Code of Conduct for Members to register and disclose their interests, and to declare any offer of a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25.

Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory Committee is recommended to:

1. Review, comment on and note the report
2. Review and endorse the decision to remove all Members' addresses from the Council website

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council is required by statute to adopt a Code of Conduct for Members. For the purpose of the Code, a Member includes the Mayor, elected Councillors and Co-opted Members of the Authority.
- 1.2 A Member is required under the Council's Code of Conduct (paragraph 50) to register and disclose their interests. This must be done within 28 days of becoming a member or being re-elected to office.

- 1.3 Members must ensure their register of interests is kept up to date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.4 A member is also required under the Council's Code of Conduct (paragraph 59) to register the offer of any gift or hospitality, whether accepted or not, with an estimated value of at least £25. They must include the person from whom it is received.
- 1.5 Repeated smaller gifts and hospitality which, when combined, would likely exceed £25 within any three-month period should also be declared.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 For those Members who have not made individual requests to have their addresses withheld from the website, the Council could reinstate them and require individual requests to be made to the Monitoring Officer. This could leave those Members open to abuse, violence or intimidation.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

Register of Interests

- 3.1 In order to maintain an accurate register of Members' interests, Democratic Services send quarterly reminders to all Members via the Members' Bulletin to ensure that their declarations are up to date.
- 3.2 Two of these reminders (January and July), request that Members respond to officers to confirm that their current register of interests is correct.
- 3.3 The reminder in January was followed by an email to all Members asking them to confirm that their register of interests was up to date. Responses were received from all Members, either notifying officers of changes or to confirm that there were none and the current register is correct.
- 3.4 A further reminder was sent in April via the Members' Bulletin.
- 3.5 Fortnightly reports have been provided by Committee Services detailing Members' declarations made at meetings, which have been checked against each Member's register of interests to ensure it is accurate.

Gifts and Hospitality

- 3.6 The email sent to all Members in January also included a reminder to ensure any offers of gifts and hospitality were declared.
- 3.7 During the period 16 November to 31 May, eight declarations were received. The details are set out in Table 1 below.

Name	Date received	Type	Accepted/declined	Date declared	On time	Provided by	Estimated value	Description
Mayor Lutfur Rahman	22.12.23	Gift	Accepted	19.01.24	Yes	Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Place, W1B 1JL	£25.00	Gift box of biscuits
Cllr Shafi Ahmed	25.01.24	Gift	Accepted	20.02.24	Yes	Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Place, W1B 1JL	£30	Special tea
Cllr Jahed Choudhury	26.02.24	Gift	Accepted	19.03.24	Yes	Mile End American Pool & Snooker, E1 4AA	£65	Snooker cue
Cllr Maium Talukdar	26.02.24	Gift	Accepted	20.03.24	Yes	Mile End Snooker Club, E1 4AA	£65	Snooker cue
Cllr Rachel Blake	04.04.24	Hospitality	Accepted	21.05.24	No	London Central Mosque Trust and Islamic Cultural Centre, 146 Park Road, NW8 7RG	£50	Iftar dinner at London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre
Cllr Rachel Blake	04.04.24	Hospitality	Accepted	21.05.24	No	1919 M Street NW, Ste 300	£50	Dinner with PPI and Congress delegation as a parliamentary candidate
Cllr Rachel Blake	14.04.24	Hospitality	Accepted	21.05.24	No	Society of London Theatre, 32 Rose St, WC2E 9ET	£525	Tickets for the Olivier Awards as a guest of the Society of London Theatre
Cllr Rachel Blake	15.05.24	Hospitality	Accepted	21.05.24	Yes	Save the Children, 1 St John's Lane	£40	Reception dinner for parliamentary candidates with Save the Children, Child Poverty Action Group, United against Malnutrition and Hunger

Table 1

- 3.8 Five declarations were received within the 28 day deadline, and three were received after this time.
- 3.9 The timetable for reminders over the next 12 months is set out in Table 2 below.

Timetable	
Quarterly reminder – Members' Bulletin and email requesting confirmation that registers are up to date and all gifts and hospitality have been declared	July 2024
Quarterly reminder – Members' Bulletin	October 2024
Quarterly reminder – Members' Bulletin and email requesting confirmation that registers are up to date and all gifts and hospitality have been declared	January 2025
Quarterly reminder – Members' Bulletin	April 2025

Sensitive Interests

- 3.10 The quarterly update to the Committee on 7 December referred to an increase in requests from Members to withhold their addresses from the website as a sensitive interest, because of a rise in abuse on social media and by email. This was due to heightened tensions in the borough related to the conflict in Israel and Palestine.
- 3.11 The week after the meeting the Monitoring Officer asked that all Members' addresses be removed from the website for their safety.
- 3.12 Members' safety has continued to be a concern with additional security being provided at some surgery venues, and advice on personal safety being circulated in the Members' Bulletin.
- 3.13 In response to concerns from elected members about intimidation in public life, Simon Hoare MP, Minister for Local Government, wrote to local authority Chief Executives in March this year, reminding them of the sensitive provisions in Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011. These provide for details about a registered interest to be withheld from the public register where there is a fear of violence or intimidation if they are disclosed, and the Minister encouraged monitoring officers to look sympathetically at accommodating requests (Appendix 1).
- 3.14 The Government also announced additional funding to ensure elected representatives will have a dedicated named police contact for raising concerns and liaising on security. Details of the named police contact for Tower Hamlets was circulated in the Members' Bulletin of 22 March 2024.
- 3.15 The Interim Monitoring Officer is of the view that the security and safety concerns which resulted in the original decision to remove all Member home addresses from the website remain and so at this time all home addresses remain redacted. This will be kept under review.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Removing all members' addresses is helpful in demonstrating protective measures are available to all members, regardless of their views in any particular area.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members of the authority. The same section requires local authorities to adopt a code of conduct dealing with the conduct expected to elected and co-opted members of the authority when they are acting as members.

7.2 Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer of a local authority to establish and maintain a register of members' interests.

7.3 Appendix B of the Code of Conduct for Members (set out in Part C of the Constitution) sets out details of the interests which must be registered and the timescales for doing so.

7.4 Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011 permits the withholding of sensitive interests where the member concerned and the monitoring officer consider that disclosure of the interest could lead to the Member or a person connected with the Member being subject to violence and intimidation. Appendix B of the Code of Conduct for Members (Part C of the Constitution) permits the Monitoring Officer to withhold such sensitive interests from the register.

7.5 The matters set out in this report demonstrate the Council's compliance with the above legislation and the Council's Constitution.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE .

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Withholding details of councillors’ sensitive interests and home addresses: letter to local authorities.

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A