

Committee Standards	Date 12th January 2012	Classification UNRESTRICTED	Agenda Item No.
Report of Service Head, Democratic Services	Title Members' Attendance, Timesheets and Declaration of Interests: Monitoring Report		
Originating Officer(s): John Williams	Wards affected ALL		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on a range of matters related to Councillors' attendance at formal meetings and training events, completion of timesheets and the register of interests. Some amendments to the format and content of the report have been made and additional information included, as previously requested by the Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee:

- (i) Note the information set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 in relation to Councillors' submission of timesheets, attendance at formal meetings and training events, and completion of the register of interests during the current municipal year;
- (ii) Consider whether there is a need to ask the Chair to write to any Councillor(s) in connection with any of the monitoring information; and
- (iii) Agree to receive further monitoring reports at six monthly intervals.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since April 2004 the Standards Committee has received regular monitoring reports on the completion of Members' timesheets and attendance by Members at Council and other formal meetings.
- 3.2 At recent meetings the Committee has discussed how to build on this good practice by incorporating additional information in the reports and presenting the information in the most suitable way to enhance transparency and accountability. In April 2009 the Committee agreed a number of proposed changes to the monitoring regime and these are incorporated in this report.

4. MEMBERS' TIMESHEETS

- 4.1 Tower Hamlets Councillors have, since April 2002, completed monthly timesheets detailing the time spent on council duties, split into categories such as surgeries, casework, attendance at meetings/external bodies etc.
- 4.2 Members' timesheets are posted on the 'Meet your Councillor' pages of the Council's website which also contain information on the ward represented, committee/external appointments, surgery arrangements, contact and other details. Councillors are personally responsible for the accuracy and timely submission of their timesheets.
- 4.3 Completion of timesheets is not a statutory requirement and does not affect the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances paid to Members. However, the London Councils Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors have emphasised the need for an accountable and transparent allowances scheme. In their 2001 report, the Independent Panel identified the tasks and responsibilities which they believed were the essential remit of a Councillor. In proposing a Basic Allowance to apply to all Councillors, they assumed a "contribution" of 40 hours per month on top of a "voluntary commitment" of 20 hours for each Member. Tower Hamlets has voluntarily developed the timesheet system to enhance transparency.
- 4.4 The Standards Committee has placed great importance on the timely and accurate completion of timesheets and the monitoring arrangements have placed Tower Hamlets at the forefront of best practice in this area as very few other local authorities have any such formal monitoring system in place. In accordance with the Committee's previous request, the table at Appendix 1 now includes, in addition to a snapshot of timesheets completed as at the date of the Standards Committee meeting, information on when each timesheet was submitted and a figure at the bottom of each column showing the average number of total hours recorded on each of the timesheets submitted in respect of that month.

The current position – completion of timesheets

- 4.5 In relation to the submission of timesheets the current position, as at 3 January 2012 and set out in Appendix 1 attached, is that 9 Members (17.64% of the total) have completed their timesheets up to and including December 2011. 18 Councillors (35.29%) are more than three months in arrears. An updated schedule will be tabled at the meeting, if necessary.
- 4.6 The Committee may wish to follow previous practice and ask the Chair to write to those Members who are significantly in arrears, drawing his/her attention to the need to maintain an up to date record.

5. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

- 5.1 As with timesheets, attendance at committee/panel meetings is not a statutory requirement - the law simply says that if a Councillor fails to attend any Council or other qualifying meeting for a period of six months, he/she shall cease to be a Member of the local authority - and it is accepted that many important Council duties take place outside formal meetings. Nevertheless, attendance at meetings to which he/she has been appointed does represent a key part of a Councillor's work and the combination of attendance and timesheet monitoring information in this report provides a useful picture of a Councillor's activity for the purpose of accountability.
- 5.2 The Committee has previously agreed that detailed information on attendance at informal and discretionary meetings such as scrutiny working groups and LAP events was not required, but that greater prominence should be given to monitoring attendance at the formal Council committees.
- 5.3 In April 2009 the Committee asked that where a Councillor has failed to attend a formal meeting but has submitted apologies in advance, this should be noted in the report. The attached schedule has been amended to incorporate these changes.

The current position - attendance at meetings

- 5.4 The charts at Appendix 2 show the record of attendance by Councillors at formal constitutional meetings during the current municipal year (i.e. from 18 May 2011 to date).

6. MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND ATTENDANCE AT MANDATORY TRAINING EVENTS

- 6.1 The Committee has previously requested that information be included in the report on two matters that are key to Councillor accountability and ethical governance – (i) Members' completion of the register of personal interests, and (ii) attendance at mandatory training events including seminars on the Code of Conduct and further specific training for Councillors appointed to the quasi-judicial committees. This information is summarised in Appendix 3 attached and further explanatory information is below:-
- 6.2 **Updates to the register of Members' interests:** Members are required to complete a register of their interests within 28 days of becoming a Councillor and subsequently they must notify any change to this within 28 days of becoming aware of the change. Members receive six-monthly reminders to update the register with any changes. All Councillors were advised of the requirements immediately following their election on 6 May 2010 and the attached schedule lists the date of each Councillor's latest update to their register entry.

- 6.3 As a matter of good practice and for the purpose of clarity, Members are asked to provide a nil return if there are no changes to register at the six-monthly reminder. However it is important to note that failure to do so would not represent a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Gifts and hospitality register

- 6.4 The Committee has previously requested information on the recording of gifts and hospitality received by Members.
- 6.5 The Code of Conduct provides that a Councillor shall have a personal interest in any business of the authority that relates to the interests of any person from whom he/she has received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25. Any such gifts or hospitality must be registered and, if they were received during the previous three years, must be declared at any relevant meeting. Gifts and hospitality are now recorded as part of the main register of Members' interests form.
- 6.6 **Attendance at training events:** The Committee has also sought assurance regarding Councillors' attendance at relevant mandatory training events such as those on the Code of Conduct and the specific sessions arranged for members of the Development, Licensing and Appeals Committees and the Appointments Sub-Committee. This information is now incorporated into the schedule at Appendix 3, together with the total number of attendances at other (non-mandatory) in-house Member seminars during the year.

7. OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

- 8.1 The Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001 details principles which are to govern the conduct of Members of relevant authorities in England and police authorities in Wales. The Schedule sets out a number of general principles, including that Members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities. The schedule is attached as an appendix to the revised Code of Conduct for Members adopted by Tower Hamlets Council on 11 September 2007.

9. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

- 9.1 There are no specific implications for One Tower Hamlets arising from the proposals in this report.

10. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific anti-poverty issues arising from the proposals in this report.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no risk management implications.

12. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT (SAGE)

12.1 There are no SAGE implications arising directly from this report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection
Reports by the Independent Panel on the Remuneration of Councillors in London	John Williams 020 7364 4204 Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London, E14 2BG
Councillors timesheets and attendance files	