

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.05 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 30 JANUARY 2020

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, 1ST FLOOR, TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5
CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG**

Members Present:

John Pulford (Chair)
Fiona Browne
Mike Houston
Councillor James King
Councillor Abdal Ullah
Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE (Substitute for Councillor Sufia Alam)

Apologies:

Nafisa Adam (Co-Optee)
Councillor Sufia Alam (Member)
Councillor Mufeedah Bustin (Member)
Councillor Rabina Khan (Member)
Elizabeth Marshall (Independent Person)
Rachael Tiffin (Reserve Independent Person)

Officers Present:

Janet Fasan	– (Divisional Director, Legal, Governance)
Kerry Middleton	– (Head of External Communications)
Patricia Attawia	– (PA to the Speaker and Councillor Support Team Manager)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted that Nafisa Adam, Vice Chair, had given her apologies for the meeting.

He reported that she had recently provided some general feedback and he was hoping the Committee would be happy to endorse it. He would also alert the Mayor to the comments.

Nafisa's Feedback:

"During my 4-year tenure the membership has changed a lot, and in the past meetings have felt onerous and turbulent at times.

I feel that since Asmat Hussain [Corporate Director, Governance] and Matthew Mannion [Head of Democratic Services] came on board, John took

over as Chair, and the change of the Councillors last year the meetings are now very professional with a harmonious atmosphere. The strategic planning really adds value and makes being a co-opted member much more engaging - long may it continue!"

RESOVLED

1. That the comments be endorsed.

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

RESOLVED

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17 October 2019 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Social Media Policy Update

Kerry Middleton, Head of External Communications, introduced the update on the Council's Social Media Policy. She reminded Members that a discussion on the draft policy had taken place at the Committee meeting on 25 April 2019. Those comments had been taken into account as part of the general consultation on the policy.

A final version of the policy had now been prepared and was presented for information to the Committee. The policy had also been introduced to Members in workshop sessions held the previous week.

The Council was planning to launch internal advertising to alert officers and Members to the new policy.

The Committee strongly welcomed the report and then discussed its contents. As well as a few minor suggested amendments, the Committee noted a number of issues, including:

- The importance the Committee in Standards in Public Life placed on dealing with issues arising from use of social media.
- Issues when Members may or may not be seen as communicating in their role as a Member and whether the different roles Members had would cause a difference in how they should handle social media.
- The value for Members in knowing the Council responds quickly to residents via its social media channels.
- The need for good online security.
- Whether additional information could or should be provided to Members through the Member Hub and training/briefing sessions.

Officers thanked Members for their contribution and agreed to take comments away to consider.

RESOLVED

1. To note and welcome the report.
2. To ask officers to consider the comments made at the meeting and to adjust the documents if required.

3.2 Development of the Members Hub and Members Bulletin

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services and Patricia Attawia, PA to the Speaker and Councillor Support Team Manager, introduced a report providing the Committee with an update on work to develop the Member Hub and Member Bulletin.

They explained that the Hub had proven extremely valuable since it was launched for the May 2018 local elections and other Councils had also looked to copy the idea. However, it was important to continue to develop the website to keep it up to date and useful to Members. A number of ideas were being explored including:

- Bringing in more automatically, or quickly updating, content.
- How to link the Hub better with the Bulletin, the main council website and sites for partner organisations and the voluntary sector.
- Creation of surveys or other ways to explore what information Members find the most useful.

The Committee also noted that officers were looking to revamp the Member Bulletin email newsletter to bring it up to date, make it more useful and to link it better with the Hub.

Members welcomed the development work and highlighted how useful they found the Hub in particular. It was noted that, although the opening rates for the Bulletin were not that high, they were good compared to many email newsletters.

RESOLVED

1. That the report and update be noted.

3.3 Code of Conduct for Members - Complaint Monitoring

Janet Fasan, Divisional Director, Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the regular update report monitoring complaints under the Member Code of Conduct.

She reported that there had been three complaints since May 2019 with the most recent one being in October 2019. For that complaint it was considered

that there wasn't enough evidence to warrant a formal investigation but the Monitoring Officer did still decide it was worth investigating the complaint as far as it could reasonably be taken including writing to the Member concerned.

The Chair welcomed the report and that there were lower numbers of complaints than there had been a number of years previously.

The fact that the Monitoring Officer had carried out reasonable investigation on the most recent complaint even though there wasn't sufficient evidence for a full formal investigation was also welcomed.

RESOVLED

1. That the report be noted.

3.4 Register of Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update

Janet Fasan, Divisional Director, Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the regular update on reporting of gifts and hospitality offered to Members.

She noted that Democratic Services had particularly pushed for declarations from the recent Speakers Ball and it was pleasing that all Members had properly recorded hospitality offers for that event although it was noted that two Councillors (Councillor Sabina Akhtar and Amina Ali) had taken longer than 28 days to make their declarations.

A discussion followed during which Members discussed how best to consider if a gift was given to them in a personal capacity rather than as a Member. It was noted that the best advice was that if a Member was unsure it was always best to declare gifts and hospitality if only for transparency.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

3.5 Dispensations under section 33 of the Localism act 2011

Janet Fasan, Divisional Director, Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, introduced the regular update report on Dispensations granted to Members under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011.

She noted that as well as the general dispensations set out in the report, a specific dispensation had been granted for all Members at the recent Council meeting to allow Members to debate a motion requesting government support for a pay increase for local government officers. It was explained that the Member Allowances scheme provided that should officers receive a percentage pay increase then Members would also receive that uprating and that therefore they had a pecuniary interest.

It was further noted that there was a general dispensation granted to allow Members to debate their Member Allowances Scheme but it was not currently wide enough in scope to cover situations like the one set out above. It was suggested that it would be sensible to widen the scope of the dispensation to cover such situations.

Members discussed the report and agreed to the request to vary the general dispensation as set out above.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the general dispensations be amended to make it clear that Members were able to discuss matters relating to local authority staff pay without need for a specific dispensation.

4. WORK PLAN

The Committee considered their Work Plan. The following amendments were noted:

- A draft of the Committee's Annual Report to Council should be presented to the April Committee meeting for initial discussion.
- To request the Communications Team present information on how often the complaints against Members form on the website was used and how it was advertised.
- That at the relevant point a further report on the Strengthening Local Democracy project would be presented.

Officers were also requested to look back to past agendas to see if there were reports presenting new policies where it would be useful to have a progress update to the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the work plan be noted.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Nil items.

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

Nil items.

The meeting ended at 7.18 p.m.

Chair,
Standards Advisory Committee