

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

HELD AT TIME NOT SPECIFIED ON THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

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

Members Present: at the meeting:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed

Members in Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Sabina Akhtar

Councillor Sirajul Islam

Co-opted Members Present at the meeting:

John Pulford MBE - Chair

Fiona Browne

Co-opted Members in Attendance Virtually:

Rachael Tiffin - (Independent Person – IP)

Apologies:

Councillor Abu Talha Chowdhury

Councillor Amin Rahman

Mike Houston - (Co-optee)

Amanda Orchard - (Independent Person – IP)

Officers Present at the meeting:

Janet Fasan - (Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer)

Matthew Mannion - (Head of Democratic Services)

Officers in Attendance Virtually:

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

That the unrestricted minutes held on 23 June 2022 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record of proceedings.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader, Civic & Members Governance, introduced the report, which detailed Members declarations of interests and gifts and hospitality. This report follows the previous one received on 23 June 2022. She noted that:

- 45 Members submitted declarations of interest following the election within the 28-day deadline, with the last declaration submitted after.
- Reminders were sent to Members via the bulletin in August, with further reminders scheduled for November to ensure they were also submitting any changes as soon as possible.
- Newly appointed Scrutiny Co-optees are undertaking induction training and all relevant forms are scheduled for completion.
- One declaration for gifts and hospitality was submitted within the 28-day deadline, although further declarations from August will be made available at the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting.

The Committee thanked Patricia for the report.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.2 Guidance and training for Members serving on Outside Bodies

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report, which requested the committee consider improvements made to the guidance since to the February 2022 meeting. The amendments primarily related to appendix 1, the Introduction and General sections of the guidance.

(The numbers in brackets below relate to the paragraphs in the report submitted to the Committee)

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Janet;

- Explained that details of any Member who is removed (2.3), could be reported to the Standards Advisory Committee, and checks to monitor attendance could be undertaken. Guidance stipulates that Members are required to submit annual reports (2.10). Outside bodies have previously informed the council of non-attendance and requests to include these details in their reports can be made. Further consideration will be given on the best way to monitor Members annual reports and general attendance.
- Clarified that the guidance provided is general in nature and there is a risk that too many details regarding indemnity, governance and the purpose of individual appointments within organisations may change the way the guidance is read (1.5). Further understanding on how the nomination process can reflect the guidance will be discussed at a future Standards Advisory Committee meeting.

Fiona Browne, Vice-Chair, suggested that details on non-attendance could be added to the Members Code of Conduct. The Chair requested a wording amendment to clause 2. A suggestion was also made to insert a hyperlink to the Charities Commission CC3A (13), as well as a reference to Companies House.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

3.3 Update on review of Member Officer Protocol

The Committee was informed that work is ongoing, and a report will be brought back to the next Standards Advisory Committee scheduled for December 2022.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be brought back to the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting in December.

3.4 Update - Implementation of best practice recommendations by CSPL

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, apologised to the Committee as the report does not include the appendix detailing the

government's response to the recommendations. This will be brought back to the next Standards Advisory Committee in December.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be brought back to the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting in December.
2. That the report be noted.

3.5 Local Government Association report: Abuse and Intimidation of Members & Member Addresses

Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, introduced the report, initially published by the LGA on 28 June 2022. The committee were asked to consider the seven recommendations around Members safety and wellbeing. The council uses a range of methods to promote Member safety, including the Employee Assistance support network, as well as a risk assessment for Members attending surgery venues. Injunctions have been taken against members of the public who have caused distress to councillors.

Members are required by legislation to disclose their home address as part of the pecuniary interests protocol, which are made public (unless the Monitoring Officer agrees an exemption due to security issues). This requirement has been removed in relation to pre-election documentation. Details of the National Member Census were also included in the report.

Further to questions from members of the sub committee, Janet;

- Explained that the political parties are ultimately responsible for underrepresented groups, although further consideration will be made for whether there was any role for the Council.
- Noted that Members are dissuaded from undertaking home visits and guidance on this, and 'lone working' are available on the Members Hub and Members Bulletin respectively.
- Clarified that guidance is also available within the Code of Conduct regarding Members ending difficult conversations and their rights not to engage with residents. A site survey for all surgery venues is used to establish suitability, as is LGA guidance on safety at surgeries.
- Explained that any Member who feels intimidated or harassed via social media, should contact the Monitoring Officer to investigate.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

4. WORK PLAN

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, Governance, presented details of the work plan for the new municipal year 2022-23, confirming that further Member induction sessions will resume in October. Consideration in staggering the session times will be given. The Chair requested an update on attendee numbers for the Ethics and Probity training. This will be submitted at the next Standards Advisory Committee meeting.

As Scrutiny Co-optees have now been appointed, further details on the co-optee induction session with the Committee will be provided in due course. As there is only one Member complaint at this time, the committee agreed to move item 3 from 8 December meeting to the last meeting of the municipal year:

- Code of Conduct for Members: Complaint Monitoring and Associated Matters.

RESOLVED

1. That item 3: Code of Conduct for Members: Complaint Monitoring and Associated Matters be moved to the 23 March 2023 Standards Advisory Committee meeting.
2. An update on attendee numbers for the Ethics and Probity training be submitted to the 15 December 2022 Standards Advisory Committee meeting.
3. The report 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

None noted.

The meeting ended at 7.29pm

Chair, John Pulford MBE
Standards Advisory Committee