

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2023**

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

**Members Present in Person:**

Councillor Sabina Akhtar  
Councillor Amin Rahman  
Councillor Abu Chowdhury

**Members In Attendance Virtually:**

Councillor Shafi Ahmed  
Councillor Sirajul Islam

**Co-optees Present in Person:**

John Pulford MBE (Chair)  
Fiona Browne  
Elizabeth Marshall MBE

**Others In Attendance Virtually:**

Rachael Tiffen Independent Person

**Officers Present in Person:**

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

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)**

**RESOLVED**

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

### **3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **3.1 Update - Implementation of best practice recommendations by CSPL**

Janet Fasan, Director Legal and Monitoring Officer introduced the report that informed members of the Government's response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of Local Government Ethical Standards published in January 2019, and updated members on the progress of LBTH in implementing them.

Further to questions from the Advisory Committee, Janet provided further detail on:

- Recommendation 2: the process followed at LBTH to determine if addresses should be withheld from the register of interest and scope for discretion of the Monitoring Officer. Janet agreed to investigate whether the legislation allowed for more flexibility than is currently used and would report back.
- Recommendation 11: The choice not to offer legal indemnity for Independent Persons.
- Recommendation 23: Interpretation of the audit contact requirement referenced. Janet agreed to check the information published by the Council satisfies the recommendation.

Further to questions of officers, the advisory Committee:

- Indicated they felt the implications of the review and Council responses was wider than the Advisory Committee. Members suggested the recommendations and Council response should be forwarded to the Mayor and a summary be included in the weekly members bulletin.
- Expressed agreement with the response to recommendation 8 regarding fixed terms of office for IPs, but asked how the Council could best address risks of creating groupthink and reducing challenge and scrutiny by having IPs for longer terms.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The report be noted.

#### **3.2 Member Learning and Development Update**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report that provided an assessment of the Member Induction Programme which ran from the May 2022 local elections to the autumn and looked forward to plans for the Learning and Development programme over the next year. Matthew explained how the London Member Development Network had inputted into the development of the programme and how the Council remained an active partner in the network's discussions to refine and improve the provision of training and development.

Further to questions, Matthew provided the Advisory Committee with more detail on:

- Outstanding areas of concern regarding attendance. Only one Councillor had not attended the ethics and probity training to date. Officers were liaising with them to agree a suitable date.
- Mechanisms to encourage and recognise high levels of engagement and/or sanction those who repeatedly failed to attend training. The Advisory Committee questioned if group whips could play a role in this process.

Further to questions, the Advisory Committee:

- Noted that external training was also available to Councillors, for example through the LGA.
- Noted that Councillors likely sought to attend the training they felt was most relevant to their role and interests.
- Suggested that alternative training formats, utilising video technology and remote attendance, might increase participation.
- Noted and welcomed the feedback from Members regarding officers involved in the induction programme.
- Suggested Members be reminded that ongoing engagement in training and development represented one of the obligations of holding professional public office.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the report be noted.

### **3.3 Co-opted Member Attendance Rules**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report that proposed clear expectations on minimum attendance at Council and Committee meetings for co-optees.

Members of the advisory committee indicated they welcomed the proposals, but asked that appropriate flexibility be included to ensure that co-optees were not unfairly removed from their roles where they could demonstrate an exceptional or unavoidable reason for non-attendance.

**RESOLVED** that the Advisory Committee:

1. Agreed the proposed additional paragraphs for the Constitution in relation to co-optee attendance at meetings, subject to inclusion of appropriate wording regarding flexibility when exceptional or unavoidable reason for non-attendance could be demonstrated.
2. Agreed to delegate authority to determine the final wording of the addition referred to in resolution 1 to the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer.
3. Agreed to forward the text as amended to the General Purposes Committee for consideration.

### **3.4 Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Quarterly Update**

Patricia Attawia, Democratic Services Team Leader (Civic and Members) introduced the report that updated the Committee on the Members' Register of Interests and declarations of gifts and hospitality submitted by Members since September 2022. Patricia asked Members to note that the description of the penultimate row of the table at paragraph 3.12 should read 'dinner'.

Further to questions from the Advisory Committee, Patricia confirmed that the Council operated a nil return process for gifts and hospitality.

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services noted that oversight of Related Party Transactions, which was referred to in the report, would in future be undertaken by the Council's Audit Committee.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The Advisory Committee noted the report.

### **3.5 Dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011**

Janet Fasan 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.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The dispensations granted by the Monitoring Officer as set out in Paragraphs 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 of the report be noted.

## **4. WORK PLAN**

Matthew Mannion introduced the report on the Advisory Committee's work plan for 2022/23. Matthew invited suggestions from members of the Advisory Committee to inform the 2023/24 work plan. The Advisory Committee noted that the final meeting of the 2022/23 year had been scheduled for April 2023 and this would include the next 6-monthly review of complaint monitoring.

Further to point 5 from the actions list, 'Discuss with Chair how best to undertake reviewing how complaints are responded to', Janet summarised the work undertaken since the item was added to the action list. Due to risks of disclosure of sensitive information, it was determined that the proposal not be progressed. Some members indicated IPs could review response letters. Janet explained how IPs are involved in the preparation of response letters to complainants, but would not customarily see the letters themselves.

**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 (IF NEEDED)**

Not required.

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

None.

The meeting ended at 7.35 p.m.

Chair,  
Standards Advisory Committee