

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 10TH JULY, 2017, AT 6.30PM IN ROOM 102, HACKNEY TOWN HALL, MARE STREET, LONDON E8 1EA

- Councillors Present:** Deputy Mayor Anntoinette Bramble in the Chair
Councillor Katie Hanson, Councillor Ben Hayhurst, Councillor Clayeon McKenzie, Councillor Clare Potter and Councillor Jessica Webb (Vice-Chair).
- Co optees Present** Adedoja Labinjo
- Apologies:** Julia Bennett (co-opted member), George Gross (co-opted member), Onagete Louison (co-opted member) and Councillor Sally Mulready.
- Officers in Attendance:** Stephen Rix, Head of Litigation and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Michael Sheffield, Corporate Head of Audit, Anti-Fraud and Risk Management
Gareth Sykes, Governance Services Officer
- Also in Attendance:** Jonathan Stopes-Roe (Independent Person)

1 Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Co-opted members Julia Bennett, George Gross, Onagete Louison and Councillor Sally Mulready.

1 Declarations of Interest

2. There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting

- 3.1 The committee agreed the minutes of the extraordinary Standards Committee meeting held on 24 May 2017.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting

- 4.1 The committee agreed the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 15 February 2017. Members noted that pages 7 to 12 were a duplication of the 15 February 2017 meeting minutes and were included in error.

5 Whistleblowing - progress report

- 5.1 Michael Sheffield, Corporate Head of Audit, Anti-Fraud and Risk Management, introduced the Whistleblowing progress report. The Audit Committee had discussed the report on 20 April 2017 and received regular updates relating to whistle-blowing at its quarterly meetings as part of the Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report. Michael Sheffield explained that though the report was primarily focused on incidents of fraud and corruption, it was recognised that whistleblowing involved a lot more areas.
- 5.2 Part of Hackney Council's whistle-blowing arrangements was a dedicated 24 hours a day / seven days a week telephone hotline, managed by an external provider, Expolink. Besides fraud and corruption, the hotline also took calls about danger in the workplace, deliberate neglect of people in care and dumping damaging material in the environment. The whistleblowing policy applied across the Council. Expolink is an independent service which allows for anonymous reporting; whistleblowing concerns can be reported by other routes and these are often preferable from the investigatory perspective. Whistleblowing reports can be made by workers who are not LBH employees, for example, agency workers and staff working for Council contractors.
- 5.3 Councillor Katie Hanson queried whether the figures submitted (page 18 of the meeting pack) showed the number of people who had been successful in addressing their concerns through Expolink. Michael Sheffield replied that these figures for 2016/17 were the number of cases reported to the hotline.
- 5.4 Councillor Ben Hayhurst raised a query, in light of recent high profile incidents (directly and indirectly involving the Council), about the role of the Standards Committee in these cases and what kind of governance structure was in place. Committee members noted that with high profile incidents steps were taken internally to ensure council members were kept briefed. Committee members suggested whether for the future some form of governance protocol could be drafted for the Council to follow. Michael Sheffield advised that the Mayor and some Councillors had been advised of the high profile investigation at an early stage and subsequently.

Action:

Councillor Bramble would work with staff in drafting some form of protocol (preferably one side of A4) clearly outlining the governance process and structure for Hackney Council in the event of future high-profile incidents.

Action:

Councillor McKenzie, in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Housing Services, would speak to the Neighbourhoods and Housing department and his fellow cabinet members, about ensuring there is proper oversight and transparency in the event of future high-profile incidents.

- 5.5 Replying to a query from the Committee, Michael Sheffield explained that the whistleblowing process was designed to be anonymous and was designed as so not to be intimidating. The Expolink operatives are trained to elicit relevant information to the concern being raised, however, sometimes the details provided are insufficient to allow an effective investigation to take place.
- 5.6 The committee noted the report.

6 Standards Committee Terms of Reference

- 6.1 Committee members began by discussing the terms of reference in relation to their earlier conversation on drafting some form of governance protocol. Councillor Hayhurst queried where the governance protocol would fit in the terms of reference. Councillor Hanson reminded committee members that any discussion about the governance protocol and high profile incidents must not forget to bear in mind the importance of ensuing resident safety. Councillor Hayhurst queried whether any previous threshold had been set about the level of scrutiny. The chair added whether the council's reaction to high-profile incidents would be covered under some form of ethical governance. The deputy chair reminded the committee that this kind of work would not have been part of the Standards Committee's remit. The chair reminded members that it needed to be clear where the governance protocol sits in the council structure.
- 6.2 Councillor Hayhurst suggested that any protocol should have a facility to ensure that any confidential papers relating to a high profile incident were secure. The chair added that any protocol must have the right safeguards in place with a wider remit to include council members and members of staff.
- 6.3 The committee noted the terms of reference.

7 Standards Committee Draft Annual Report 2016-2017

- 7.1 The chair introduced the report, which provided an overview of the Committee's work in the 2016/17 Municipal Year, in what was the Committee's fifth year since its establishment by the Council following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011. This Annual Report outlines the key areas of work undertaken by the Committee during 2016/17 as well as looking at future work and challenges. This as the chair's first annual report since taking on responsibility for the Standards Committee last year. The chair was pleased to report that Members and co-opted members continue to uphold high ethical standards and that the ethical governance framework introduced in July 2012 is well embedded. The Chair was also pleased to report that the refreshed Members' training programme has recently been launched and I have received some positive feedback already from Members.
- 7.2 The chair regretted that the opposition parties have decided again not to take up their place on the Standards Committee for the 2016/17 Municipal Year. The Committee functions in an independent and non-party political way and it will continue to retain the places for the opposition parties in the hope that they will be taken up.
- 7.3 The chair thanked committee members for all their hard work over the last year. The chair thanked in particular Councillor and vice-chair Jessica Webb and independent member Jonathan Stopes-Roe.
- 7.4 Stephen Rix, Head of Litigation and Deputy Monitoring Officer, presented the draft annual report which outlined the work and activities of the Standards Committee over the past year and provided information on the monitoring of the council members' code of conduct. This was the fifth report since the committee was established in 2012. During 2016/17 the committee undertook work in a number of areas including:
- Annual Report on Compliance with Guidance on Members' Use of ICT
 - Review of the Register of Members' and Co-optees Declaration of interests
 - Review of the Members' Training and Development Programme
 - Safety arrangements for Member surgeries

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7.5 Councillor Hayhurst raised a query about the current Director of Legal post and whether there were plans underway to make the post permanent. The chair replied that steps were currently under way to employ someone permanent to the role.

7.6 The committee endorsed the annual report for submission to the 26th July 2017 Council meeting. Members also noted that a paper would be going to the July meeting seeking the reappointment of Jonathan Stopes-Roe to the Standards Committee.

8 Standards Committee Draft work programme 2017/18

8.1 Stephen Rix presented the Standards Committee's draft work programme which outlined the areas of work which the committee would be undertaking to ensure that it maintained effective oversight of members' conduct and ensured that high ethical governance standards were maintained.

8.2 The work programme for 2017/18 would cover the following areas:

- Standards Committee terms of reference
 - Standards Committee annual report
 - Standards Committee work programme
 - Review of the Register of Members' and Co-optees Declaration of Interests
 - Review of the Members' training and development programme
- Annual report on compliance with guidance on members' use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

8.3 The Standards Committee agreed the work programme for 2017/18.

Duration of the meeting: 6.30pm – 7.00pm

Signed

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Chair of Committee, Deputy Mayor Anntoinette Bramble

Contact:

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