

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY, 2015

- Councillors Present:** Councillor Sophie Linden in the Chair  
Cllr Ben Hayhurst, Cllr Sally Mulready,  
Cllr Clare Potter and Cllr Jessica Webb (Vice-Chair)
- Co-optees Present:** Julia Bennett, Adedaja Labinjo and Elizabeth Coates-Thummel
- Apologies:** George Gross and Onagete Louison
- Officers in Attendance:** Gifty Edila (Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services), Gregory Lane, Christine Peacock (Assistant Director ICT) and Robert Walker (Governance Services Officer)
- Also in Attendance:** Jonathan Stopes-Roe (Independent Person)

### 1 Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence are listed above.

### 2 Declarations of interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### 3 Minutes of the previous meeting - 17 July 2014

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2014 be approved as a true and accurate record.

#### Matters arising

- 3.2 Under matters arising, Elizabeth Coates-Thummel referred to the issue she raised under item 1 at the previous meeting, in respect to who should chair the Standards Committee, and asked whether there would be opportunity to discuss this matter further.
- 3.3 The Chair explained that as there were no further Committee meetings in the 2014/15 Municipal Year she believed that the issue of who should chair the Committee should be considered by Members prior to the Council's AGM, when appointments to the Committee would be made for the following Municipal Year. The Chair advised that, as her as a Cabinet portfolio included ethical governance matters, this would consequently also be a matter for the Mayor to consider given that he determined Cabinet Member portfolios.

#### 4 Guidance for Members on the Use of ICT - 4th Annual Report

- 4.1 Chris Peacock, Assistant Director of ICT, introduced the 4<sup>th</sup> annual report on Guidance for Members on the Use of ICT. Chris Peacock explained that she was pleased to report that there was good compliance with the Guidance.
- 4.2 The Committee was advised that, as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report, there was one incident during the current Municipal Year where a laptop was lost on public transport. This matter had been reported to the transport authorities and investigated by the information security team, who believed that the laptop did not contain any personal data but could not say conclusively that there had not been a data security breach as the laptop was never recovered. Including this incident, it was noted that there had been 11 laptops lost over 2014/15 across all Council staff and Members.
- 4.3 Chris Peacock explained that following the 2014 local elections, 21 new Members were elected to the Council and 14 of these new Members had opted to be provided with Council issued ICT equipment. The Council had also retrieved equipment from those Members who had stood down at the election or were not re-elected. This equipment was data cleansed and then allocated for re-use, spares or disposal as appropriate.
- 4.4 Chris Peacock also explained that the Council had recently rolled out new computer software for Council officers and that the Council was now looking at what ICT software and equipment should be provided to Members to ensure that they had the necessary tools to undertake their duties. Cllr Ann Munn was undertaking a Member-led review of this issue and Members would be surveyed to understand their views and needs. Christine Peacock advised that, depending on what new tools were provided to Members, it may be necessary to subsequently update the Guidance for Members on the Use of ICT, which was issued in 2011.
- 4.5 There was then a discussion of the report. Following a question from Councillor Hayhurst, Chris Peacock advised that the Council could remotely data cleanse devices provided that they had been fitted with an application that enabled the Council to do so.
- 4.6 Councillor Hayhurst also urged the Council, as part of its review of ICT services for Members, to consider providing councillors with mobile phones. The Chair advised that this was not an issue for the Standards Committee but that this should be communicated through the pending survey of Members.
- 4.7 In response to a question from Councillor Webb, Chris Peacock noted that there were instances where emails were incorrectly blocked by the firewall however, staff were alerted when emails sent to them were quarantined and had the ability to check and release any emails which were mistakenly blocked. Chris Peacock also advised that the Council did not have resources to check all emails blocked but staff did do random surveys and responded to feedback from officers and Members.
- 4.8 Councillor Mulready urged the Council to do more to frequently remind Members, particularly those newly elected, of the Guidance on ICT to ensure

that Members did not inadvertently breach the Guidance. Chris Peacock noted this point and agreed to pick this matter up as an action following the meeting.

4.9 **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 5 Review of the Register of Members' and Co-optees' Declaration of Interests Forms

- 5.1 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services introduced the annual review of the Register of Members' and Co-optees declaration of interest forms. Gifty Edila advised that, in her role as Monitoring Officer, she undertook an annual review to check that Members and Co-optees were updating their forms and to also check for any omissions or inaccuracies based on her knowledge. Gifty Edila explained that, in addition to the annual review, she also checked register of interest forms whenever a new or revised form was submitted.
- 5.2 The Standards Committee noted that, as set out in section 6 of the report, all Members and Co-optees had completed a register of form, including all those newly elected Members. Gifty Edila advised that she had identified during the review that three Members had given their spouses name, even though this was not legally required to be disclosed, and that two Members had omitted their membership of outside bodies to which they were appointed to by the Council. These Members had been contacted and advised to update forms.
- 5.3 Gifty Edila advised that she was pleased to report that Members were frequently updating their forms in a timely fashion and explained that officers were continuing to support them in completing their forms through training sessions and through specific advice provided on request. It was noted that a reminder would be sent in May 2015 inviting all Members and Co-optees to review their forms to check them for accuracy and to offer further training on the Code of Conduct and declaring pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests.
- 5.4 Councillor Hayhurst queried whether Members could be sent their register of interests forms when asked to complete a 3<sup>rd</sup> party related transactions form. Gifty Edila explained that the 3<sup>rd</sup> party related transaction forms were managed by the finance directorate and had to be completed at the end of each financial year by Members. However, Gifty Edila agreed to liaise with relevant officers from the finance team to request that Members were reminded to review their register of interests form when being asked to complete a 3<sup>rd</sup> party related transaction form.
- 5.5 Following a question from Councillor Webb, Gifty Edila explained the process for Members updating their register of interest forms. Gifty Edila advised that Members were welcome to initially send a draft form via email for her to check however, as register of interests forms were a legal document, Members were required to sign and date any amended form.
- 5.6 **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 6 Member Induction, Training and Development Programme: Progress Update

- 6.1 Greg Lane, Head of Governance Services, presented the report on Member Induction, Training and Development to the Committee, which focused particularly on training provided to Members following the 2014 local elections. Greg Lane explained that over 20 in-house training sessions were provided for Members following the local elections, which included directorate introductory sessions and introductory sessions for particular service areas. The core aims of the programme were to ensure that Members were equipped with knowledge of how the Council operated, in order to fulfil their respective roles on Council committees and as community leaders, and to support high ethical standards.
- 6.2 An appendix to the report outlined all training sessions provided to Members since May 2014 and also set out what sessions would be provided to Members over 2015. Greg Lane advised the Committee that this training programme had incorporated feedback from Members, including those Members who had stood down in May 2014, and comments from Cabinet and Hackney Management Team.
- 6.3 Greg Lane explained that feedback had been invited after all training sessions and overall Members had rated training sessions held since May 2014 as good to excellent. Members had also commented that they would appreciate further training on the Code of Conduct, leadership and ward forums, licensing and planning. Members would however, be surveyed later in February 2015 to review if their training needs had changed.
- 6.4 Greg Lane also advised that, following a request made previously by the Standards Committee, the Council had been developing e-learning training modules for Members which would be rolled-out to Members in due course. It was hoped that these e-learning courses would supplement training sessions and provide Members with a flexible and convenient way to develop their learning and knowledge.
- 6.5 There was then a discussion of the report. Julia Bennett welcomed the report and its detailed information on the scope and attendance at training. Julia Bennett queried whether there were any new Members whose attendance at training sessions had been low. Gifty Edila advised that she had been receiving regular updates on attendance at training sessions following the local elections and explained that the general picture was that there had been very good attendance by new Members as well as by those re-elected Members, who were often attending to support their colleagues. Gifty Edila also emphasised that all Members and substitutes of the Licensing Committee and Planning Sub-Committee were required to undertake relevant training before taking their seats on these bodies and that there had been good attendance at Code of Conduct training sessions.
- 6.6 In response to questions from Elizabeth Coates-Thummel and Adedoja Labinjo, Gifty Edila advised that once the e-learning course had been tested it would be available to all co-optees and that they would be informed once the modules were live.

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- 6.7 Councillor Mulready encouraged the Council to undertake a comprehensive assessment of how Members could be supported in the event that they became incapacitated or disabled whilst in office and consider what training could be provided on this issue. Gifty Edila agreed that this was an important matter and advised that Greg Lane and Members Services would be instructed to draft a paper looking at how the Council could support Members in instances where they became incapacitated and how Members were supported generally, covering issues such as maternity and paternity support. It was noted that Standards Committee was not the correct body to oversee this paper but the Committee was advised that officers would report to the Chair, in her role at the relevant lead Cabinet Member.
- 6.8 Councillor Clare Potter commented that, as a new Member, generally she found the training programme to be excellent and provided her with a good understanding of how the Council worked. Councillor Webb also welcomed the first aid training provided as part of the training programme.
- 6.9 Members of the Committee suggested that the training programme should also include disability awareness and equalities training.
- 6.10 The Chair commented that she believed it would be useful for Members of the Licensing Committee and Planning Sub-Committees to discuss Code of Conduct issues to ensure that all Members were aware of the requirements of the Code and felt able to raise any queries or concerns that they may have. The Chair agreed to suggest this to the chair of the Licensing Committee and Gifty Edila advised that she would raise this point with the chair of the Planning Sub-Committee and the Assistant Director of Planning.
- 6.10 **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **7 Any other business**

### **Thanks to Elizabeth Coates-Thummel**

- 7.1 The Chair informed the Committee that Elizabeth Coates-Thummel was resigning from her role as a co-optee. The Chair explained that Elizabeth Coates-Thummel had been a co-optee of the Committee since 2008 and formally thanked her for her contribution.

### **Role of the Committee**

- 7.2 The Chair raised the issue of the future role of the Committee. The Chair explained that she believed it was necessary for the Council to maintain a Standards Committee however, she was aware that often the Committee did not have a lot of business to consider and was only noting reports and very rarely had complaints to consider. The Chair was particularly aware of the impact this would have on Co-optees who would have to travel to the Council for short meetings where little business was considered.
- 7.3 Elizabeth Coates-Thummel advised that the reduced role of the Committee, following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and changes to the Committee's terms of reference, was a factor that contributed to her deciding to resign. However, Elizabeth Coates-Thummel explained that she was not aware of any solution to this issue.

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- 7.4 Councillor Webb agreed that there was not necessarily any solution that could change the workings of the Committee. Councillor Webb spoke of how the Localism Act 2011 had imposed a new ethical governance structure on local government and had altered a regime that had previously been operating effectively in her view. From her experience, other local authorities who also received low numbers of complaints were also struggling to identify a clear role and work pattern.
- 7.5 Adedoja Labinjo queried whether it was worthwhile contacting other local authorities to see how their ethical governance arrangements were functioning. Gifty Edila advised that she met with monitoring officers from other councils frequently and the general picture was that only those councils which received high numbers of complaints were busy. Gifty Edila emphasised that the Localism Act 2011 imposed a duty to promote high ethical conduct amongst Members. Consequently, Gifty Edila believed that, other than the Committee overseeing the provision of training to Members and having oversight of Members compliance in submitting their register of interests forms, there was little other work the Committee could undertake.
- 7.6 The Chair noted the views made during the discussion and explained that this would be an issue that would continue to be monitored.

**Duration of the meeting:** 6.30 - 7.22 pm

**Signed**

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**Chair of Committee**

**Contact:**

Robert Walker, Governance Services