

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**STANDARDS COMMITTEE****15 July 2015****COUNCIL****25 November 2015****CLASSIFICATION:****Open****WARD(S) AFFECTED****All Wards****Gifty Edila, Corporate Director, Legal, HR and Regulatory Services**

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report gives an overview of the work and activities of the Standards Committee over the past year and provides information on the monitoring of the Members' Code of Conduct.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the Standards Committee considers the Annual Report for 2014/15, as attached at Appendix 1, and endorse it for submission to Council.**
- 2.2 **That Council notes the Standards Committee's Annual Report for 2014/15, as attached at Appendix 1.**

3. RELATED DECISIONS

- 3.1 This is the third Annual Report of the new Standards Committee established by the Council on 1 July 2012. Previous Annual Reports were noted by Council at its meetings on 26 June 2013 and 22 October 2014.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 This report sets out the work and activities of the Standards Committee over the previous municipal year and therefore does not contain any potential financial implications.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, HR AND REGULATORY SERVICES

- 5.1 The Council has a legal duty under the Localism Act 2011, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of Members and co-opted Members in public office.
- 5.2 The Council therefore established a Standards Committee to help promote and uphold high standards of conduct amongst Members and co-opted Members.

6. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

- 6.1 This Annual Report is submitted to Council in line with best practice for the Council to maintain an overview of the work of the Standards Committee. This is the third Annual Report of the Standards Committee established by the Council following implementation of the Localism Act 2011 and the introduction of related ethical governance arrangements.

- 6.2 In upholding high standards the Committee monitors and makes recommendations on the Members' Code of Conduct and considers complaints made under the Code.
- 6.3 The Standards Committee during 2014/15 undertook work in the following areas, which are explained in further detail in Appendix 1 of this report:
- Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct and related training following the 2014 Local Government elections;
 - Monitoring the Members Induction Programme following the 2014 Local Government elections;
 - Review of the Register of Interests; and
 - Consideration of a report on the Guidance for Members on Use of ICT.

Gifty Edila
Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Standards Committee Annual Report 2014/15

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**STANDARDS COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**

1. Introduction from Councillor Sophie Linden, Chair of the Committee and Cabinet Member for ethical governance matters

This report provides an overview of the Committee's work in the 2014/15 Municipal Year, in what was the Committee's third 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 2014/15 as well as looking at future work and challenges.

I am pleased to report that Members and co-opted members continue to uphold high ethical standards and that the new ethical governance framework introduced in July 2012 is well embedded.

At its first meeting of the Municipal Year on 17 July 2014, the Committee agreed its work programme and held one other meeting on 16th February 2015.

It is regrettable that the opposition parties have decided again not to take up their place on the Standards Committee for the 2015/16 Municipal Year. The Committee functions in an independent and non-party political way. It will continue to retain the places for the opposition parties in the hope that they will be taken up.

2. Membership

For 2014/15, membership of the Committee was as follows:

- Cllr Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor, ethical governance portfolio holder and Chair of the Committee;
- Four non-executive Council Members – Councillors Ben Hayhurst, Sally Mulready, Clare Potter, and Jessica Webb (vice Chair) (plus one vacancy); and
- Five non-voting co-opted members – Julia Bennett, Elizabeth Coates-Thummel, George Gross, Adedoja Labinjo and Onagete Louison.

Cllrs Linden and Webb were elected as chair and vice-chair of the Committee, respectively, for 2014/15 at the meeting on 17th July 2014.

The table below outlines Members' and co-optees' attendance at Standards Committee meetings during the 2014/15 Municipal Year. As ever, Members and co-optees had a large number of alternative commitments such as other public meetings, ward commitments, representing the Council on outside

bodies and work commitments, and were therefore not always available to attend every meeting of the Committee. However, there was high attendance at Committee meetings during 2014/15.

Member	Meeting date	
	17/07/2014	16/02/2015
Cllr Sophie Linden (Chair)	P	P
Cllr Jessica Webb (Vice Chair)	P	P
Cllr Ben Hayhurst	A	P
Cllr Sally Mulready	P	P
Cllr Clare Potter	P	P
Julia Bennett	A	P
Elizabeth Coates-Thummel	P	P
George Gross	A	A
Adedoja Labinjo	P	P
Onagete Louison	A	A

Key:

P = Present

A = Apologies for absence

Elizabeth Coates-Thummel resigned from her role as a co-optee on the Committee at the end of the 2014/15 Municipal Year, in part due to changes to the Committees remit following introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and amendments to the Committee's terms of reference. The Committee would like to place on record it's thanks to Elizabeth Coates-Thummel who joined the previous Standards Committee in 2008 as an Independent Member, and who also served on the Independent Remuneration Panel.

3. Terms of reference 2014/15

The Standards Committee operated within the following terms of reference for 2014/15 Municipal Year –

1. To review and maintain oversight of the Council's ethical framework and procedures and make reports and recommendations accordingly;
2. To review and maintain oversight of the conduct of Members and co-opted members of the Council and assist them in upholding high

ethical standards;

3. To advise Full Council and its Committees on the adoption of a Members' Code of Conduct, codes of practice and protocols relating to ethical governance matters;
4. To hear and consider complaints made against Members and co-opted members under the Code of Conduct, codes of practice or protocols;
5. To adopt procedures for considering complaints made under the Code of Conduct, codes of practice or protocols;
6. To consider whether to grant applications for dispensation to Members and co-opted members, in accordance with Members' Code of Conduct; and
7. To maintain oversight of ethical governance training provided to Members and co-opted members and make reports and recommendations accordingly.

4. Training on the Members' Code of Conduct

All Members on their election to office and co-optees on their appointment are required to sign a declaration confirming that they will abide by the Members' Code of Conduct. It is important for them to have good knowledge of the requirements of the Code. Similarly, officers who work directly with Members and co-optees need to have a good understanding of the Code in order to give Members effective support. The Committee received reports during the 2013/14 Municipal Year on the proposed induction programme and maintained oversight of training during the 2014/15 Municipal Year in order to ensure that all Members, but particularly those newly elected following the local elections held on 22nd May 2014, received appropriate training.

The Committee was briefed at its meeting on 17th July 2014 and was advised that a Code of Conduct training session was held on Monday, 9th June 2014, and was attended by 22 Members. The Committee was also updated that all Councillors had duly completed and returned their Declaration of Acceptance of Office forms along with their Declaration of Interests forms.

A further Code of Conduct training session was also held on 4th August 2014. Both training sessions were presented by Gifty Edila (Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services Directorate). Gifty Edila also has the statutory role as the Council's 'Monitoring Officer'. The Head and Deputy Head of Communications and Consultations also provided training at the sessions on the Council's protocols for communicating with residents, journalists and wider stakeholders.

The sessions covered:

- How the Council works – functions of the Council; legal framework; and decision making
- Members' Code of Conduct
 - History of ethical framework;
 - Legal obligations on the Council;
 - Legal obligations on Members;
 - Application of the Code;
 - The duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct – 7 Nolan Principles;
 - Predetermination;
 - The Register of Interests for Members;
 - Disclosable Pecuniary Interests;
 - Sensitive Interests;
 - Other Interests;
 - Granting Dispensations;
 - Participation in meetings;
- The role of the Independent Person for Standards
- The role of the Council's Standards Committee
- Sitting on Outside Bodies
- Process for handling alleged breaches of the Code
- Media handling and reputation management; use of social media; working with the Council's Communications Service

Of the 21 newly elected Members in May 2014, 19 had attended either the training session on 9th June 2014 or 4th August 2014. One other newly elected Member attended a one-to-one training session with the Monitoring Officer. Only 1 remaining newly elected Member did not take up any training on offer but was sent a copy of the training pack. The Chair shall be writing to this Member advising them of the importance of undertaking training on the Code of Conduct and encouraging them to attend a future session.

On consideration of a report on Member Induction, Training and Development Programme as whole at its meeting 16th February 2015, the Committee agreed to recommend that the Licensing Committee and Planning Sub-Committee should hold informal sessions to discuss Code of Conduct issues. This would enable Members to discuss any matters that may have arisen over the previous municipal year, as well as re-enforcing the particular need of Members of the Licensing Committee and Planning Sub-Committee to adhere to the Licensing and Planning Codes of Practice, respectively, as well as to the Members' Code of Conduct.

Committee and sub-committee chairs were also requested to remind Members, at the first meeting of the 2015/16 Municipal Year of their respective committee, to be mindful of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct and any relevant Code of Practice at all times. In particular, it was requested that Members be referred to the guidance published in each agenda and be encouraged to contact the Monitoring Officer for advice prior to a meeting, or the legal officer present at a meeting if necessary.

The Committee is pleased with the support and training provided to Members on the Code of Conduct and believes that it helps contribute to the high ethical governance standards demonstrated by Members of the Council. It is hoped that Members and Co-opted Members will attend refresher sessions during the next Municipal Year and the Committee will continue to monitor training on the Code of Conduct to ensure that high standards continue.

5. Member Induction, Training and Development Programme

The Committee received a report at its meeting on 16th February 2015 which outlined the training programme following the 2014 London Local Government Elections. The report provided an overview of training sessions provided including their content and attendance. The training programme aimed to deliver relevant training via a variety of delivery methods for both newly elected and experienced returning Members.

The training programme contained both mandatory and optional activities for Members and was designed to ensure that Members were equipped with the necessary skills and information with which to perform their roles and to ensure high ethical governance standards. The programme provided over 20 'in house' training sessions for Members between the May 2014 elections and February 2015. Most sessions were open to all Members whilst some sessions focussed on the needs of Members on specific Committees. For example, there was specific training provided on Licensing and Planning as Members of both these Committees are required to complete relevant mandatory training on quasi-judicial decision making prior to attending their first meeting. More general sessions were provided to give an overview of the Council directorates.

The Committee was pleased to note that feedback had been sought on all training sessions and that the response from Members had been positive, with sessions generally rated good to excellent.

In response to a request from Standards Committee, the Council has now also developed a range of e-learning courses for Members. This provides a flexible and convenient way for Members to develop their learning and knowledge on specific subject areas. The Committee welcomes this development which enables Members to access a range of courses from any computer in their own time and recognises the fact that Members have a large number of commitments. It also has the advantage that Members can also complete e-learning courses at their own individual pace and can supplement their learning.

The following e-learning modules have now been rolled out for Members:

- Equality Act 2010
- How the Council Works – Decision Making in Hackney
- Member and Officer Relationships
- Members Casework

- Members Code of Conduct
- Outside Bodies
- Standards and Member Complaints

The Committee was also informed of the proposed training programme for 2015/16 which would include sessions on public health, community safety, the voluntary sector, tours of town centres, housing estates and schools as well as aggression awareness. At the Committee's recommendation, training will also be provided to Members on equality and disability awareness. The Committee will continue to monitor training for Members as part of its 2015/16 work programme and will review feedback on the training and the e-learning modules.

6. Review of Register of Declaration of Interests Forms

The Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 requires all Members and voting co-optees to complete and return a declaration of interests form. The Council's declaration of interests form incorporates legislative requirements that Members declare their own pecuniary interests, as well as any pecuniary interests of their spouse or civil partner, or anyone living with them as if they were their spouse/civil partner. The Council also took the view, on recommendation of the Standards Committee, that Members should continue to declare any bodies and organisations of which they are members and any gifts or hospitality received in their role as a Member, and that non-voting co-optees should also complete and return a form.

The Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, who is also the Council's Monitoring Officer, is responsible under the Localism Act 2011 for establishing and maintaining a Register of Members and co-opted members interests and for ensuring that the Register is published on the Council's website. As part of this duty, the Monitoring Officer routinely monitors and reviews the declaration of interest forms completed by Members and co-optees in order to ensure they have been completed correctly.

To assist Members and Co-optees, Council guidance on completing declaration of interest forms was issued in July 2013. Following the mayoral and local elections on 22nd May 2014, all newly elected members were required to submit a declarations of interests form and all those re-elected were invited to check their form and submit a revised form if required. Letters were provided to all Members reminding them of the ongoing requirement to update their forms with 28 days of any change in their circumstances.

The Committee received a report at its meeting on 16th February 2015 and was pleased to note that the Mayor, all 57 Councillors and all co-optees of the Council had completed their forms within the required timeframe and that many Members regularly updated their forms as their circumstances changed.

It was noted that some forms, although largely accurate, had omitted to declare membership on outside bodies or had declared the names of their spouse/partner when such details were not required. Although these issues were not substantial, the Monitoring Officer wrote to all Members concerned in December 2014 asking them to amend their forms.

At the recommendation of the Committee, Members and co-optees were also reminded to check and update their forms when they were written to asking them to complete a 3rd Parties' Transaction Form.

The Committee will continue to monitor Members and co-optees compliance in completing declaration of interests forms over the 2015/16 Municipal Year, but is encouraged by the fact that forms have been returned and are frequently updated.

7. Complaints about Member Conduct

The standard of conduct by Members and co-optees of the Council has been consistently high and the Committee is particularly pleased that no complaints against Members were received during the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

Jonathan Stopes-Roe continues to serve as the Council's Independent Person on ethical governance matters and to support the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee in determining any complaints received against Members and co-optees.

8. Guidance for Members on Use of ICT – 4th Annual Report

The Committee received a report at its meeting on 16th February 2015. The Committee noted that there had been one breach of the Guidance for Members on Use of ICT during 2014/15 with one laptop lost on public transport. This matter was investigated by the information security team who believed that there was no personal data held on the laptop.

The Committee was also briefed on a forthcoming review of ICT software and equipment for Members, which was being undertaken to ensure that Members are equipped with the necessary tools to perform their duties. Following the outcome and implementation of findings from the review, it may be necessary to update the guidance for Members on Use of ICT.

9. Conclusion

The Standards Committee has now been in operation for three years following its establishment by Council. The Committee remains dedicated to maintaining high ethical standards in Hackney and supporting Members and co-optees in doing so. The Committee is pleased to see that the current framework is operating successfully and the Committee believes that Council Members and co-optees continue to demonstrate high ethical standards.

The Committee's ongoing focus will be to support Members to ensure that they are fully aware of the principles of the Code of Conduct and to monitor attendance at training and completion of Register of Interests' forms.

I thank the 5 co-optees of the Committee for their assistance and hard work on the Committee and the Independent Person, Mr Jonathan Stopes-Roe, for his contribution to our work. In particular, I would like to thank Elizabeth Coates-Thummel, who resigned from the Committee at the end of the 2014/15 Municipal Year, for her help and support since joining the Council as a co-optee in 2008.

The Committee thanks the Monitoring Officer and the Governance Services Officer for their assistance in the year.

Councillor Sophie Linden
Chair of Standards Committee