

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 15TH JULY, 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, George Gross and Onagete Louison
- Officers in Attendance:** Gifty Edila (Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services) and Robert Walker (Governance Services Officer)
- Also in Attendance:** Jonathan Stopes-Roe (Independent Person)

1 Apologies for absence

- 1.1 An apology for absence was received from Adedoja Labinjo.

2 Declarations of interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.
- 2.2 The Chair explained that, as requested by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 16th February 2015, at the first meeting of each committee the respective chair was asked to read out a script reminding Members of the importance of declaring interests and encouraging them to seek advice when unsure.

3 Minutes of the previous meetings

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** that:
- i) the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 16th February 2015; and
 - ii) the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 20th May 2015;
- be approved as true and accurate records.

4 Standards Committee Terms of Reference

- 4.1 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, introduced the terms of reference.
- 4.2 **RESOLVED** that the terms of reference be noted.

5 Standards Committee Annual Report 2014/15

- 5.1 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, introduced and provided an overview of the draft Standards Committee Annual Report 2014/15. The Committee was asked to consider the Annual Report and endorse it for submission to Full Council on 25th November 2015.
- 5.2 Councillor Hayhurst stated that he was unclear on when Members should declare securities, and queried whether there was any particular guidance on this point and whether officers had compiled a list of frequently asked questions from Members. Gifty Edila, in response, advised that there was guidance available for Members on how to complete register of interest forms. Gifty Edila stated that this guidance did not include any FAQs however, she noted this point and would consider this for future if necessary.
- 5.3 With regard to Councillor Hayhurst's question on declaring securities, Gifty Edila agreed to discuss this point with Councillor Hayhurst outside of the meeting however, it was her understanding that if a Member held securities over £25,000 in an organisation that had a branch in the borough then this should be declared.
- 5.4 Following a further question from Councillor Hayhurst, Gifty Edila advised that she would ask the Assistant Director of ICT to frequently send Members reminders referring them to the Protocol on Members' Use of ICT. This would include an email with a summary of some of the key points of the Protocol.
- 5.5 Julia Bennett queried the reasons why Elizabeth Coates-Thummel resigned from the Committee and whether these should be included within the Annual Report. Following discussion, the Committee agreed to amend the Annual Report, in line with paragraph 7.3 of the minutes of the meeting held on 16th February 2015, to include a brief summary that Elizabeth Coates-Thummel resigned in part due to changes to the Committee's remit following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and amendments to the Committee's terms of reference.
- 5.6 **RESOLVED** that the Annual Report for 2014/15 be endorsed for submission to Full Council, subject to an amendment as detailed in paragraph 5.5 above.

6 Standards Committee Draft Work Programme 2015/16

- 6.1 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, introduced the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2015/16.
- 6.2 The Chair asked if the Committee wished to amend the Work Programme or request any additional items. Following a suggestion from George Gross, the Committee agreed to amend the Work Programme to include a statement that the Committee was responsible for considering complaints made under the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 6.3 **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme for 2015/16 be approved, subject to the amendment agreed in paragraph 6.2 above.

7 Any other business

Update – Councillor convicted under the Localism Act 2011

- 7.1 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, updated the Committee on the criminal conviction of a former leader of Dorset County Council for failing to declare a pecuniary interest at a meeting. Gifty Edila provided an overview of the Court's judgement and a note was tabled at the meeting, which had previously been circulated to all Members of the Council.
- 7.2 The Committee noted the update.

Requests for dispensation

Councillor Linden left the meeting at this juncture and for the duration of the remainder of the meeting. Councillor Webb chaired the Committee for the remainder of the meeting.

- 7.3 Gifty Edila, Corporate Director of Legal, HR and Regulatory Services, introduced a report which was tabled at the meeting requesting dispensation to be granted to Councillors Linden and Plouviez to enable them to work on the Dalston Special Policy Area (SPA), located in both Dalston and Shacklewell wards, as part of the Council's Licensing Policy Review. The Committee was asked to approve the request for dispensation on the ground that it was considered appropriate to do so.
- 7.4 Gifty Edila explained that the Standards Committee had previously granted dispensation to Councillors Linden and Plouviez at its meeting on 21st January 2013 to work on the previous development of the Dalston SPA. However, this dispensation had expired. Gifty Edila stated that Councillors Linden and Plouviez were both responsible for developing the SPA in their respective roles as Cabinet Member for the licensing service and Chair of the Licensing Committee. Gifty Edila did not consider that either of the Councillors had a direct interest in the Dalston SPA. However, both Councillors lived and owned properties in Shacklewell ward and, although their properties were located outside of the SPA, as a precautionary measure they had decided to seek dispensation as the SPA may impact on the area and their properties.
- 7.5 In response to a question from George Gross, Gifty Edila advised that the request was to provide Councillors Linden and Plouviez with dispensation to work on the Dalston SPA generally and was not limited to attendance at formal meetings.
- 7.6 Following questions from Onagete Louison and Councillor Potter, Gifty Edila explained that if the Committee refused to grant dispensation the Councillors could continue to work on the Dalston SPA however, they may be exposed to accusations that they would indirectly benefit from any changes. If the Councillors decided not to participate, then there would be an impact on the leadership of the development of the SPA given their roles as Cabinet Member and Chair of the Licensing Committee.
- 7.7 Councillor Webb commented that she believed the Councillors interest in the Dalston SPA was remote and was not a direct interest but welcomed the application for dispensation to avoid any possible criticism. Councillor Hayhurst also commented that he felt the interest was very remote.

7.8 George Gross asked whether the dispensation would apply retrospectively. Gifty Edila advised that the dispensation could not be retrospective but, if approved, would be a statement that the Committee considered that the Members participation on the issue of the Dalston SPA was not in breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

7.9 **RESOLVED** that:

- i) Councillor Sophie Linden be granted dispensation until 4 days after the May 2018 local elections to participate in the work developing the Dalston SPA as part of the Council's Licensing Policy Review; and
- ii) Councillor Emma Plouviez be granted dispensation until 4 days after the May 2018 local elections to participate in the work developing the Dalston SPA as part of the Council's Licensing Policy Review.

Reason

Dispensation was granted on the ground that the Standards Committee considered it appropriate to do so.

Requests for Members to sign forms

7.10 Councillor Potter explained that since becoming an elected Member she had received a number of requests from members of the public to sign applications, such as passport applications and references. Councillor Potter queried if there was any guidance for Members on signing forms.

7.11 Gifty Edila advised that no guidance had been produced for Members but she would consider whether a guide should be developed. Gifty Edila asked for Councillor Potter to let her know of any specific examples. With regards to passport applications, Gifty Edila advised that any Members signing a form for a member of the public needed to ensure that they had known the applicant personally for at least two years.

Duration of the meeting: 6.30 - 7.25 pm

Contact:

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