

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

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Chair's Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Committee's work in the 2020/21 Municipal Year, in what was the Committee's tenth 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 2020/21.

This is my fifth annual report since taking on responsibility for this Committee. I am happy to report that Councillors and Co-opted Members continue to uphold high ethical standards. The pandemic has brought new challenges for Councillors, and seen a shift in what our residents need and expect from us as elected representatives. Despite the substantial challenges faced over the past 15 months, I am proud to say that we continue to put their needs at the heart of what we do, while maintaining a robust sense of what those seven principles of public life mean for ourselves and Hackney.

It is yet again regrettable that the opposition group decided not to take up its place on the Standards Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year. The Committee functions in an independent and non-party political way, and ethical standards are a

matter for all Councillors. It will continue to retain the place for the opposition party for the duration of the administration in the hope that it will be taken up.

Councillor Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the Committee for 2020/21 and Deputy Mayor

Membership

For 2020/21, membership of the Committee was as follows:

Executive members:

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor (Chair)

Cllr Carole Williams, Cabinet Member, Employment, Skills & Human Resources

Non-executive members:

Cllr Soraya Adejare

Cllr Humaira Garasia

Cllr Katie Hanson

Cllr Anna Lynch

Cllr Sem Moema

Cllr Jessica Webb (Vice-Chair)

There remained one vacancy for the Conservative Group

Non-voting co-opted members:

Adedoja Labinjo

Onagete Louison

Nicola Hanns

Aoife Scannell

(plus two vacancies).

Independent Person

Jonathan Stopes-Roe

The table below outlines Members' and co-optees' attendance at meetings of the Standards Committee meetings during the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Member	14/07/2020	17/02/2021
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble	P	P
Cllr Soraya Adejare	P	P
Cllr Garasia Humaira	P	P
Cllr Katie Hanson	P	P
Nicola Hanns	P	A
Adedoja Labinjo	A	P
Onagete Louison	P	P
Cllr Anna Lynch	P	P
Cllr Sem Moema	P	P
Aoife Scannell	P	P
Jonathan Stopes-Roe	P	P
Cllr Jessica Webb (Vice Chair)	P	P
Cllr Carol Williams	P	P

Key:

P = Present

A = Apologies for absence

N = Not required to attend

Terms of reference 2020/21

The Standards Committee operated within the following terms of reference for the 2020/21 Municipal Year. This was noted at the Standards Committee meeting on 14 July 2020.

The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high ethical standards at the Council. The Standards Committee is responsible for the following functions:

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.

Members' Code of Conduct

Following the local elections in May 2018 all Members on their election to office, and co-optees on their appointment, were 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 Councillors and co-optees need to have a good understanding of the Code in order to provide effective support.

There was no training delivered during 20/21 regarding the Code of Conduct, other than what is considered mandatory for newly elected Councillors (following the local election in May 2021, all newly elected received this training)

A Task and Finish Group was established by the Standards Committee to review the Local Government Association (LGA) model code of conduct. This had been produced to support the recommendations in the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) report on local government ethical standards, published in 2019. The Task and Finish Group has maintained a watching brief as the code was drafted, consulted on and finalised. It is now in the process of reviewing the latest supporting materials published by the LGA, and anticipates making a recommendation to Full Council in late 2021 regarding any required amendments to Hackney's own code of conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members.

Review of Register of Declaration of Interests Forms

The Council launched a revised declaration of interests form for all Councillors in Autumn 2020. These revisions were the outcome of work undertaken by the Standards Committee in November 2019 to ensure the form and guidance reflected current best practice. The cyber-attack in October 2020 briefly impacted the electronic availability of all Councillor declaration of interest forms, though services acted swiftly to ensure that the paper copies were scanned into the system and available for reference in event of a query. The declaration forms have now been updated, and have been available online for public inspection since early 2021.

Complaints about Member Conduct

Jonathan Stopes-Roe continued to serve as the Council's Independent Person on ethical governance matters, prior to his retirement from the role at the end of his term of office. Arrangements for the recruitment and appointment of a new Independent Person have been undertaken for 2021/22.

Since July 2020, there were complaints received about three Councilors which the Monitoring Officer considered.

The first complaint was regarding a potential breach of the code and consisted of twenty-one individual complaints received between October to December 2020 regarding the conduct of one subject member. The complaints were all relating to the subject member in respect of one particular issue. The Monitoring Officer consulted with the Independent Person with regard to each of the twenty one complaints, in mid December 2020. It was the Monitoring Officer's decision that collectively the twenty one complaints should be referred to a Standards Assessment Sub-Committee for consideration.

A Standards Assessment Sub-Committee was convened for mid January 2021 after ascertaining the availability of Members/Co-opted Members. The subject member and the complainants were advised of this decision in mid December 2020.

Following the resignation of the subject member from their office of Councillor on 31 December 2020, the scheduled meeting of the Standards Assessment Sub-Committee for mid January 2021 did not take place. The complainants were informed accordingly that due to the subject member's resignation no further action would be taken with regard to any potential breach of the code, and that when a Councillor resigns from their position as an elected member, the member Code of Conduct no longer applies to that individual, and therefore no further action will be taken with regard to potential breaches and any possible courses of action against the former Councillor.

With regard to the two other complaints received concerning two individual members, both were received in mid/ late December 2020. As part of the preliminary assessments of both complaints by the Monitoring Officer, the Monitoring Officer met with the Independent Person in late January.

Following discussions with the Independent Person, the Monitoring Officer decided that with regard to one complaint received that no further action be taken against the subject member, and with the other complaint the Monitoring Officer agreed to seek an informal resolution on the complaint issue with the subject member concerned.

Each subject member was advised of the decision of the Monitoring Officer, together with each of the Complainants.

Dispensation Requests

Under the Council's dispensation procedure, the Standards Committee is responsible for considering requests for dispensations on the grounds that it is in the interests of residents or that it is otherwise appropriate to grant dispensation for some other reason.

In February 2021, the Standards Committee granted a dispensation for Cllr Rennison, Cllr Nicholson and Cllr Coban on the basis of their appointment as non-executive directors of London Energy Limited. The Committee resolved that this dispensation should be granted as it was in the interests of persons living in the Hackney area.

Recruitment of an Independent Person and Co-opted Members to vacancies on the Standards Committee

The Standards Committee agreed a recruitment process for appointing two Co-opted Member vacancies at its meeting on 14 July 2020.

Work began in advance of the end of the 2020/2021 municipal year to advertise for vacancies which would arise as result of the term of office of two existing Co-opted Members – Adedoja Labinjo, and Onagete Louison – ending in May of 2021. The recruitment process remains ongoing.

A further recruitment process for a new Independent Member was approved at the Committee meeting on 17 February 2021.

In agreeing to the recruitment process an advert appeared on the Council's website in late March 2021 for a period of approx seven weeks. A closing date was set for 21 May, and following assessment of applications the interview panel convened. The outcome of this process falls outside of the administrative year 2020/21, though Full Council appointed a new Independent Person at its meeting on 30 June 2021.

Chair's Conclusion

The Standards Committee has now been in operation for ten years following its establishment by Council. Both officers and Councillors remain dedicated to maintaining high ethical standards in Hackney and supporting Councillors and co-opted Members in doing so. Our Committee is pleased to see that the current

framework is operating successfully and we believe that Council Members and Co-opted Members continue to demonstrate high ethical standards.

Our 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 would like to thank all of the Co-optees on the Committee for their assistance and hard work on the Committee during the 2020 / 2021 Municipal Year. I would also like to record my thanks to Mr Stopes-Roe for his invaluable contribution as the Independent Person during his term of office.