



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE Tuesday 9 December 2014 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Dixon (Chair), Councillor Kabir (Vice-Chair) , Councillors Davidson (substitute for Councillor Warren), Krupa Sheth and Thomas and Co-opted Member Sheila Darr

Also present: Councillor Mahmood

An apology for absence was received from: Councillor Warren

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 March 2014

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 March 2014 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Review of the Member Development Programme and members' expenses

Rhiannon Leary (Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager) presented the report that outlined the member and learning development sessions delivered to members since May 2014 and the upcoming sessions for the quarter January to April 2015. The committee heard that overall the sessions had received positive feedback and the last session on school place planning on 3 December 2014 had been well attended, with 17 members present. Members noted that feedback from the Member Development Charter Award assessors had indicated that there was an excellent chance of achieving Charter Plus, regarded as the gold standard for good practice in the field of member development. The committee noted the attendance records for the respective training sessions. Rhiannon Leary advised that there had been changes to members' expenses and this was set out in the report. Members also noted the Member Learning and Development Steering Group terms of reference included in appendix two of the report.

During members' discussions, it was remarked that the sessions to date offered high quality training, although not every member signed the attendance sheet for

the sessions that they had attended. A member enquired whether there had been moves to introduce new members to the council's partners, such as going on a tour of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) estates and of the borough in general. He suggested that the council liaise with the relevant housing providers for new members to visit the estates in areas such as Chalkhill and Stonebridge. A member asked whether all members who needed to undertake mandatory training, such as those on the Planning Committee and the Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Committee, had done so. A member queried to what extent the Member Learning and Development Steering Group informed what sessions would be provided to members and was the intention to achieve Charter Plus being promoted. Another member commented that members from other boroughs had been impressed upon hearing about the council's Member Development Programme.

In reply to the issues raised, Rhiannon Leary advised that members' attendance at sessions was usually spotted and recorded even if the member had not signed the attendance sheet. She advised that the regeneration coach tour of the borough in July 2014 had given the opportunity for new members in particular to find out more about the borough, whilst showing members around the various estates managed by the council's partners would also be looked at as part of the Member Development Programme in the next quarter.

Thomas Cattermole (Head of Executive and Member Services) confirmed that all members who required mandatory training had undertaken this. He confirmed that the council had successfully been re-accredited with the Member Development Charter Award in January 2014 and this was attributable to the efforts of members, the Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager and the Chief Finance Officer, along with the key role played by the Member Learning and Development Steering Group. Thomas Cattermole stated that serious consideration should be given to achieving Charter Plus in order to build on the high standards in the area of member development. He added that the council was not complacent with regard to member development and the large proportion of new members meant that training needed to be ongoing.

RESOLVED:

that the report on the review of the Member Development Programme and members' expenses be noted.

5. Review of the Protocol for Member/Office Relations and the Local Code of Corporate Governance

Kathy Robinson (Senior Lawyer, Legal and Procurement) presented the report and advised that the role of the Standards Committee involved routinely reviewing various codes and protocols. The review of the Protocol for member and officer relations promoted high quality conduct and she referred to the proposed changes as set in appendix one of the report. Members heard that the Protocol was a document of principle on member and officer behaviour and did not seek to address every conceivable situation. Kathy Robinson then drew members' attention to the proposed changes to the Local Code of Corporate Governance as set out in appendix two of the report. She explained that the Code was mainly concerned about the council's behaviour overall and in promoting good governance. The

Code was aspirational and set a benchmark for good governance and other local authorities Codes were also fairly similar

During discussion, a member enquired whether member and officer relations could be discussed at the Employees' Joint Consultative Committee. He commented that relations between members and officers was particularly important in matters relating to issues such as planning and licensing. Another member referred to the Members Code of Conduct and sought further clarification about the relevant grounds for members making complaints about other members and asked for an example of what would constitute a breach of leadership. He also requested that he be emailed the Members Code of Conduct. Another member commented that advice notes on the various codes were also useful. With regard to the revised Local Code of Corporate Governance, a member commented that the six principles were very clear and was fuller and more comprehensive than the previous one.

Sheila Darr (Co-opted Member) commented that respect for others was a particularly important and powerful principle in the Members Code of Conduct and this needed to be taken into account when considering leadership issues.

In reply, Kathy Robinson advised that the interface between members and officers and their role in the council was distinct from employer and employee relations. The role of the Employees' Joint Consultative Committee was to discuss general employer/employee relations as opposed to individual cases. With regard to the Members Code of Conduct, Kathy Robinson advised that the Localism Act set out the principles that should be included and it was up to individual local authorities to produce a code from this. There were also supplementary codes and protocols for planning and licensing. With regard to leadership, Kathy Robinson advised that lead members should act with integrity and respect and she agreed to email Councillor Davidson the Members Code of Conduct and stated that she would circulate all codes to members if they felt that this would be useful. With regard to the Local Code of Corporate Governance, Kathy Robinson advised that this had been updated following recent revised guidance from the Government. Members noted that the recommendations in the report would also need approval at Full Council on 19 January 2015.

Thomas Cattermole added that the Protocol for member and officer relations also provided useful guidance for both parties in relation to more complex issues such as confidentiality.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the changes made to the Protocol for member/officer relations as set out in appendix one of the report be endorsed; and
- (ii) that the changes made to the Local Code of Corporate Governance as set out in appendix two of the report be endorsed.

6. Annual report of the Monitoring Officer

Kathy Robinson presented the annual report on behalf of the Monitoring Officer which set out the work of the Standards Committee between December 2013 and December 2014. The composition of the Standards Committee was now politically

balanced and also included an independent member as required by legislation and also because it was important that the committee received external input. Members noted that complaints against members would involve not only the Monitoring Officer but also an independent person and the council was currently recruiting to this role. Members heard that under previous arrangements, all complaints whether major or minor were referred to the Standards Committee. Under changes to legislation, the Standards Committee was not required to meet as often.

During members' discussion, it was asked whether a serious complaint would be referred to the Standards Committee and what subsequent action would be taken and within what timelines. Another member commented that it would be useful to have more information about the process in respect of complaints against a councillor. Clarification was sought as to whether a member was required to declare any gift that they received.

Sheila Darr commented on the importance of timescales in relation to complaints against councillors and the processes that were to be undertaken to be explained to members.

In reply to the issues raised, Kathy Robinson advised that in respect of a serious complaint against a councillor, an independent person would look into the matter and make a decision as to whether to investigate further. If it was decided that further investigation was required, an independent investigator would be appointed to produce a report making recommendations to the Standards Committee which would then decide whether it would follow the recommendations. If the matter was felt particularly serious, a hearing may also be arranged. Members noted that local procedures set out the timeframe and Kathy Robinson agreed to provide the committee with details of this and also a description of the process of handling a complaint against a councillor. Kathy Robinson advised that advice notes issued throughout the year from the Monitoring Officer also reminded members about various codes and protocols, including when these were updated and guidance was also subsequently issued to ensure members understood what was expected from them. Members noted that all receiving of gifts should be declared and that there should also be careful consideration as to whether it was appropriate to accept the gift and would it potentially harm perception of objectivity or give the impression of potential bias if it was accepted.

RESOLVED:

that the annual report from the Monitoring Officer be noted.

7. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Standards Committee was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 25 March 2015 at 7.00 pm.

8. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm.

L DIXON
Chair