



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE Wednesday, 3 November 2010 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair), Angela Ruotolo (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Beck

Apologies were received from: Councillors Colwill and Gladbaum

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None made.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 March 2010 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Sub-Committee membership changes

None.

4. Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer (Including the Review of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality and the Register of Member's Interests)

The committee considered the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report for the period May 2009 to April 2010 which provided an update on member conduct issues and the work of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer during that period. The Borough Solicitor's representative, Kathy Robinson, reminded members that the two year appointment of independent members had ended in May 2010 and that following advertisements and interviews, four independent members had been appointed, instead of the usual three. This would enable on-going training to take place. It was felt that the Code of Conduct was now fairly well embedded into members' behaviour and the most significant area of work over the past year were the complaints against two councillors. Monitoring Officer Advice Notes going back to 2003/4 were readily available and new guidance issued when required. Members continued to receive an annual conduct letter. Finally, Kathy Robinson drew attention to the details included in the gifts and hospitality register and invited comments.

Members raised questions on the criteria to be used when declaring a gift or hospitality, particularly when the precise cost was unknown or difficult to gauge. They were advised that the purpose of declaring was to help in the consideration of whether a member had an interest in a matter at a meeting and often it was a matter of judgement. If in real doubt, members could always seek advice from the

Borough Solicitor. On the work programme, the committee noted that the Localism and Decentralisation Bill due to be published shortly was likely to abolish the Standards Board for England and it was not clear how this would affect the work of this committee and the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

5. **Review of Members' Expenses - April 2009 to April 2010**

The London Borough of Brent Members' Allowance scheme made provision for the payment of travel expenses to members. The Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager drew members' attention to Appendix 1 to the report which outlined expenses claimed over the period from April 2009 to April 2010 which was also published on the council's website.

Members discussed the question of travel expenses and noted that there sometimes were significant differences between journeys by car and those by public transport. The Members' Allowance Scheme as set out in the council's constitution was silent on the mode of transport to be used for journeys for which expenses were to be claimed. The committee suggested that the political group offices should encourage members to take the cheapest mode of transport and to share car journeys wherever possible. In order to increase transparency it was also felt that members should be encouraged to make separate claims for each trip. It was hoped that drawing this matter to the attention of the Chief Executive and party leaders would be sufficient to bring about a change in practice.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that when making travel expense claims members should be encouraged to investigate and take cheapest mode of transport available, share car journeys wherever possible and to submit separate travel expense claims for each journey.

6. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was due to take place on 19 January 2011. Members also noted that a member training event was due scheduled for later in the month on the Code of Conduct and related matters.

The meeting closed at 7.40 pm

JOHN MANN
Chair