



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 4 November 2009 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: John Mann (Chair), Rochelle Gelman (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Bessong and Colwill

Apologies were received from: Councillor J Moher

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meetings

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meetings held on 25 March, 25 August and 13 October 2009 be approved as accurate records of the meetings.

3. Review of Members' Expenses

The report from the Director of Communication and Diversity set out travel expenses claimed by members over the period from April 2008 to April 2009, under the provisions of the Brent Members' Allowance scheme.

Members gave detailed consideration to the list of claims and noted that in some instances it appeared that some journeys were to the same location but there were wide variations in the amounts for which claims were made. A suggestion was made that group tickets or car shares be arranged recognising that this would not be a practical solution in all cases. Members were also concerned that in a few instances the detail of the nature of the expense claimed was very vague and as such hindered scrutiny.

The Committee suggested that presentation of the information on expenses be reviewed to clearly set out a greater level of detail and that forms be readily available so as to encourage speedy completion. Members considered that while it was probable that all claims were reasonable, it was important for this to be evidenced and for the process to be transparent.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report on the review of members' interests be noted;

- (ii) that consideration be given to reviewing the presentation of information on expenses so as to set out a greater level of detail.

4. Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer (including the Review of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality and the Register of Members' Interests)

Kathy Robinson (Senior Lawyer, Legal and Democratic Services) introduced this report which provided an update on member conduct issues during the period May 2008 and April 2009, the work of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer. She drew attention to the key changes that had been made to the ethical standards framework and the referral of responsibility for hearing complaints to the Standards Committee in the first instance. There had been relatively few complaints regarding members, monitoring officer notes were produced regularly and it was the intention to widen the networking event to other boroughs outside West London. On members' interests, some non-compliances had been identified, for example, some members had failed to update their records of their personal interests such as membership of outside bodies. Reminders were being issued. Finally, Kathy Robinson drew attention to the declaration of members' gifts and hospitality.

The committee gave detailed consideration to the register of gifts and hospitality, noted that in some instances the estimated value was listed as not known and were advised that councillors were now required to estimate the value of a gift/hospitality. It was also noted that some members received gifts/hospitality as a result of their interests outside their role as elected councillors which made it difficult to establish whether there was a need for gifts/hospitality to be declared. Some discussion took place on an entry of a gift of clothing from a council contractor and members requested information on the circumstances. Members were reminded that there was no bar and in most cases no difficulty in members accepting a gift or hospitality provided it was properly declared. Such a gift or hospitality might however amount to a personal interest and possibly a prejudicial interest in relation to a matter before the councillor at a committee at a later date.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Annual Report from the Monitoring Officer be noted;
- (ii) that further information be provided on the circumstances surrounding the gift of kit from Veolia.

5. Sub-Committee membership changes

None.

6. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was due to take place on 20 January 2010.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

JOHN MANN
Chair