



Standards Committee

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Standards Committee held on Wednesday October 14 2009 at 7.00 pm at Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Mark Roelofsen (Chair)
Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle
Councillor Paul Bates
Councillor Michelle Holford
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Mackie Sheik
Councillor Robert Smeath

OFFICER SUPPORT: Graham Love, Head of Democratic Services
Norman Coombe, Principal Lawyer, Governance Team
Ian Mark, Senior Lawyer, Governance Team
Andrew Weir, Constitutional Officer

1. APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillor James Barber and independent members Wendy Golding and Chris Gurney. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Robert Smeath and Dora Dixon-Fyle.

2. CONFIRMATION OF VOTING MEMBERS

The members listed as present were confirmed as the voting members.

3. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

The chair accepted the following items:

- Verbal presentation on the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees 2009 from Ian Mark, senior lawyer, governance team.
- Verbal update on member training from Norman Coombe, principal lawyer,

governance team.

- Verbal update on the Standards for England Standards Forum from Norman Coombe, principal lawyer, governance team.
- The revised minutes of the closed part of the meeting from March 25 2009 to be signed by the chair, as requested at the standards committee meeting on July 1 2009.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the open minutes of the meeting held on July 1 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair, subject to Peter Bibby being added to the list of apologies.

6. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The committee received an ethical governance update report from the principal lawyer, governance team.

Members heard that work was progressing in relation to updating the standards committee webpage, to bring together all standards related issues. The committee was also advised that forms regarding gifts and hospitality would be online in late November.

Members asked questions of officers, which officers answered.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Standards Committee noted the actions set out in the report.
2. That the committee noted that gifts and hospitality forms would be online by the end of November.
3. That a draft of the revised standards committee page, encompassing standards issues be circulated to committee members.

7. STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND REPORT ON PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS' ETHICAL STANDARDS

The committee received a report from the principal lawyer, governance team on the Standards for England report on public perceptions of local councillors' ethical standards.

Members questioned the figures from Standards for England in the report and agreed that it was difficult to draw any conclusions from the figures provided.

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the report.

8. AUDIT OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The committee received a report from the principal lawyer, governance team on the audit of whistleblowing policy.

The principal lawyer advised that an external audit had taken place and that the outcome of this audit would have to be looked at before recommending changes to raise awareness of the council's policy.

The committee heard that the council had a strong complaints procedure in place and that there were very few whistleblowing complaints.

Members questioned using the word 'whistleblowing' in relation to the external policy and procedures for members of the public, as it did not seem applicable.

RESOLVED:

1. That the committee noted the report.
2. That the word 'whistleblowing' be removed in relation to the policy and procedure for members of the public.

9. REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CIVIC AWARDS

The committee received a report from the head of democratic services regarding the review of arrangements for civic awards.

Members asked a number of questions of officers, to which officers responded. Members expressed their concern regarding the timetable for the awards process and asked that there be ample time to consider the awards.

RESOLVED:

1. That the committee noted the proposals to provide clarity on the role of standards committee in relation to decisions granting awards and the relationship with the

civic association's recommendations and considered the options set out in the body of the report.

2. That the committee agreed the following wording for an amendment to part 3M, paragraph 12 of the constitution:

'To consider recommendations for civic awards from the civic association or other nominating body and decide whether to grant an award and the appropriate level of any award.'

3. That the agreed amendment be referred to the constitutional steering panel.
4. That the committee agreed to a joint biennial meeting between standards committee and the civic association to review the award categories and eligibility criteria.
5. That the committee agreed to the proposal for the annual awards report to be drafted and presented by members of the civic association.
6. That the committee recommended to council assembly the creation of a new discretionary award recommended on merit by the Mayor.
7. That guidance be provided in the Mayor's protocol regarding the Mayor's award, including points regarding safeguards to ensure that the award is not party political, and be brought back to the committee for consultation.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

1. That the committee noted the work programme.
2. That items on whistleblowing, appointments to external bodies and civic awards be added to the work programme for the next committee meeting.
3. That the independent member selection process item be deferred for a year and that officers ensure that the information collected on this process be retained.

11. ANY OTHER OPEN BUSINESS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.

Annual assembly of standards committees verbal report

Ian Mark, senior lawyer, governance team addressed the committee and shared his feedback from the conference with the committee. Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle also shared her feedback from the conference.

As a result of the points made from the feedback from the conference, members discussed the purpose of the assessment sub-committee in the local filter process as well

as the way that the pre-filter process worked in Southwark.

Standards for England – the standards forum

Norman Coombe, principal lawyer, governance team advised the committee that Standards for England had set up an online forum for monitoring officers and members of standards committees to share ideas and experiences of the local standards framework.

The principal lawyer asked members permission to pass on their details to Standards for England in order to register members for the online forum. Members agreed to this.

Members' training

Norman Coombe, principal layer, governance team advised members that training for new members and refresher training for members who had already had previous training would be arranged.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED:

That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in category 1 of paragraph 10.4 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules of the Southwark Constitution.

The following is a summary of the decisions taken in the closed section of the meeting.

CLOSED MINUTES OF MARCH 25 2009

RESOLVED:

That the closed minutes of the meeting held on March 25 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

CHAIR:

DATED: