

## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, 1 July 2015**

**Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 12.00 pm**

### **Present**

#### **Members:**

Edward Lord (Chairman)	Deputy Alastair King
Oliver Lodge (Deputy Chairman)	Dan Large
Nigel Challis	Virginia Rounding
Mark Greenburgh	

#### **Officers:**

Gemma Stokley	Town Clerk's Department
Lorraine Brook	
Michael Cogher	Comptroller and City Solicitor
Edward Wood	Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department

**In attendance:** Neil Asten (Independent Person) and Chris Taylor (Independent Person) were also present at the meeting.

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

**In attendance:** Neil Asten (Independent Person) and Chris Taylor (Independent Person) were also present at the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Judith Barnes (Co-opted Member), Michael Hudson, Felicity Lusk (Co-opted Member), Anju Sanehi (Independent Person) and Tom Sleigh.

#### **2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no declarations.

#### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 May 2015 were considered and approved as a correct record.

### **MATTERS ARISING**

#### ***Item 6: Gifts and Hospitality – Ceremonial Officeholders***

The Town Clerk reported that Mansion House had sought clarification regarding certain webpage links earlier this week in order to be able to publish the Lord Mayor's register of gifts and hospitality online. It was reported that this would be 'going live' later this week. The Town Clerk added that there would also be links between the Lord Mayor's pages and the office holders existing register of interests.

In response to a question regarding the registering of gifts and hospitality for Sheriffs, the Town Clerk reported that there was no longer a stand-alone webpage dedicated to the Sheriffs on the City's website and that further work was therefore needed to establish where any register might be published, particularly in the case of the Non-Aldermanic Sheriff, where they were not otherwise an elected Member.

In response to a further question regarding the Chief Commoner, the Town Clerk reported that the officeholder was always an elected Member and therefore already had a register of interests published online. The Committee were informed that the officeholder was also supported by staff to ensure that their register was kept up to date. The Committee were therefore of the view that there was no requirement for a separate register to be published in this case.

A Co-opted Member suggested that the importance of maintaining an up to date register of interests should be included within the Job Description for the Chief Commoner going forward.

***Item 6: Update to the Members' Declarations***

The Chairman referred to an informal meeting that had taken place earlier in the day with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee. The Deputy Chairman summed up by stating that, on the whole, the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee was in agreement with the Standards Committee regarding declarations of gifts and hospitality. The Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee had made it clear that he believed he had always complied with the Code of Conduct and its Guidance and would continue to do so.

The Deputy Chairman went on to state that, in the interests of transparency, members of the Standards Committee had underlined the need for the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee to err on the side of caution in terms of declaring gifts and hospitality and to possibly consider publishing his diary going forward.

The Committee were also informed that, as a result of the morning's informal meeting, it had been suggested that the Guidance to Members regarding compliance with the Code of Conduct be revisited and greater clarity given to certain points particularly those around cost/value for the benefit of all Members. The Chairman suggested that the Guidance (tabled) be reviewed under 'Any Other Business'.

***Item 8 – Members' Declarations – Co-opted Members***

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that a report on this matter would be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee and also to the Court of Common Council for information later this month. In response to questions, the Town Clerk stated that the Policy and Resources Committee had oversight of the organisation's governance arrangements and, historically, had had sight of these matters.

The Committee were informed that the report to be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee drew heavily on the report approved by the Standards Committee at their last meeting.

***Item 9: Complaints Review Process***

The Committee were informed that the Complaints Procedure would be brought to them for review at their next meeting in October.

***Item 10: Annual Report of the Standards Committee***

The Chairman reported that the Committee's Annual Report had been received by the Court of Common Council last week.

**4. ANNUAL UPDATE TO MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS - LATEST RESPONSES**

The Committee received a joint report of the Town Clerk and the Comptroller & City Solicitor providing Members with a further update on the annual update to the Members' Declarations.

The Chairman informed the Committee that all nine of the Members who had been written to and asked to update their register of interests had now done so within the specified deadline. There was, therefore, no need for any further action by the Committee.

The Town Clerk reported that two new Members had been elected within recent weeks and informed the Committee that it was hoped that declarations would be received by both and published online by next week. It was also noted that a further by-election would be taking place at the end of the week.

**RECEIVED.**

**5. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

**6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT  
Guidance to Members – Members' Code of Conduct**

The Chairman suggested that the Committee take this opportunity to review Paragraphs 19-27 of the Guidance to members in light of some issues highlighted at the informal meeting with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee earlier this morning and the general need to encourage a culture of transparency throughout the Corporation.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- It was suggested that some preamble be added before paragraph 19 stating that the guidance around what should and should not be declared should not preclude Members from making any additional, precautionary declarations in order to encourage an 'if in doubt, declare' approach going forward. It was also suggested that the 'public perception test' should be referred to within this preamble;

- It was suggested that paragraph 19 be amended to read “...that might reasonably be perceived to meet the thresholds set out in the Code”;
- With regard to paragraph 20, it was agreed that the final bullet point regarding approximate values should be removed from the guidance but that reference should still be made to cumulative thresholds. It was then suggested that the first bullet point be expanded to read “description of the gift or hospitality (i.e. tickets to a theatre performance) including, where relevant, its value”. Finally, it was suggested that a note should be added to the third bullet point under paragraph 20 stating that Members should specify both the individual or organisation paying for an event and the individual or organisation from whom the invitation was received, if different;
- Under paragraph 21, it was suggested that bullet point two (local government dinners) be removed from this list. It was also suggested that the final bullet point under paragraph 21 be removed;
- It was agreed that paragraph 22 be removed and that, instead, the new arrangements around the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs declarations should be incorporated;
- It was suggested that paragraph 23 should be strengthened to make it explicit that gifts and hospitality received by friends and family of a Member, by virtue of their being a Member, were also declarable. It was also suggested that Members’ attention should be drawn to the need to be mindful of where their private activities might cross over with or be perceived to cross over with their City of London activities;
- Under paragraph 25, it was suggested that the text in brackets after bullet point two be removed from the guidance. It was also suggested that ‘formal luncheons’ be added to the examples already listed.

The Chairman requested that Officers work up a new draft of the Guidance document to be reviewed by the Committee at their next meeting.

**The meeting closed at 1.05 pm**

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Chairman

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