

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Friday, 13 September 2013

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held in the Basinghall Suite -
Guildhall, EC2 on Friday, 13 September 2013 at 12.00 pm

Present

Members:

Edward Lord (Chairman)
Nigel Challis
Revd Dr Martin Dudley
Felicity Lusk (External Member)
Alderman Julian Malins

Officers:

Lorraine Brook	-	Town Clerk's Department	
Edward Wood	-	Comptroller & City Department	Solicitor's
Emily Rimington	-	Comptroller & City Department	Solicitor's

(Mr Neil Asten and Ms Anju Sanehi (Independent Persons) were also present at the meeting.)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Oliver Lodge (Deputy Chairman), Deputy Robin Eve and Alan Graham (external Member). Apologies were also received from the Comptroller & City Solicitor and Chris Taylor (Independent Person).

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

There were none.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2013 were approved as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

Terms of reference – Employee Code of Conduct

The Committee was advised that due to a clash with the Chief Officer's Away-Day, the Director of HR had been unable to attend today's meeting. Consequently, with the Chairman's consent, this matter would be considered at the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

AOB – Internal mechanisms

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Chairman of the General Purposes Committee, rather than the Senior Alderman, oversaw Members' conduct issues (Aldermanic) and on that basis Alderman Sir David Wootton had been invited to attend a future meeting. Likewise, the Chief Commoner had confirmed that he would attend a future meeting of the Standards Committee.

Co-opted Membership

The Committee was advised that an appointment campaign was underway with a view to appointing to the existing two vacancies and also a third vacancy which would arise in October at the end of Ms Lusk's term of office. The appointment panel would therefore be meeting in October to shortlist for the three vacancies. The Panel's recommendation would then be endorsed by the Committee before approval was sought by the Court of Common Council. In light of the reduced number of Co-opted Members and the implications for quoracy, it was felt that the 8th November 2013 meeting should be rescheduled.

RESOLVED: - That the next scheduled meeting of the Standards Committee on 8th November 2013 be cancelled and a meeting be scheduled in mid-December 2013.

4. REVIEW- GIFTS & HOSPITALITY

The Committee considered a joint report of the Town Clerk and the Comptroller & City Solicitor relative to a review of those items of gifts and hospitality that had been registered by Members since April 2013, following the introduction of new local registration arrangements.

The Committee noted that very few items of gifts and hospitality had been registered since April and some concern was expressed regarding the low number, particularly as some Members were known to have attended certain events and received hospitality which was most likely to be in excess of the £250 registration threshold. As such items had not been registered, the Chairman suggested that the voluntary registration arrangement was not sufficient. The Committee then considered alternative options to ensure that all relevant gifts and hospitality were registered such as the introduction of a negative confirmation statement which would be completed each year by all Members to demonstrate that no gifts and hospitality (over the appropriate thresholds) had been received within the 12 month period. It was agreed that whilst corruption was not suspected, the voluntary arrangements were insufficient and consequently revised local arrangements should be introduced, with the Court of Common Council's Consent.

RESOLVED: - That –

- (i) a mandatory registration arrangement for gifts and hospitality be introduced, following approval by the Court of Common Council;

- (ii) gifts and hospitality, on the basis of the existing thresholds, be registered with the Town Clerk's Department within 28 days of receipt;
- (iii) an annual statement be completed by all Members confirming the receipt or non-receipt of relevant gifts and hospitality during the 12 month period; and
- (iv) the Standards Committee conduct a review of the register of gifts and hospitality twice per year to ensure that such declarations are scrutinised on an on-going basis.

5. **DISPENSATIONS - REVISED REQUEST FORM AND GUIDANCE TO MEMBERS**

The Committee received a joint report of the Town Clerk and the Comptroller & City Solicitor relative to the guidance that was available to Members about requests for a dispensation to speak and/or vote on matters where they have a disclosable pecuniary interest. The revised form for requesting a dispensation had been updated in light of the Committee's earlier discussion at its meeting on 14th June 2013 and some concerns that were raised regarding the need for sufficient detail about each request to enable the Committee to reach an informed decision.

In respect of paragraph 9 of the report and references to a written request for a dispensation that had been received from Mr Greg Lawrence, the Committee was advised that this request would not be considered at this meeting but would instead be considered by the new Dispensations Sub Committee in due course.

Some Members suggested that there should be provision on the form to allow Members to specify in all cases if a request was urgent. At present this would be obvious if a dispensation was requested for or from a specific date, but not if a dispensations was simply requested until the Ward elections in 2017.

In light of the various forms that Members were expected to complete in respect of the governance framework (annual statement of gifts and hospitality, Members' Declaration form), Members asked that the options for circulating a consolidated form, preferably in electronic format, be explored by the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED:- That –

- (i) the revised form and guidance, subject to the inclusion of provision on the form in which Members could specify if a request was urgent, be approved;
- (ii) an annual reminder be circulated to all Members regarding the granting of dispensations; and
- (iii) the options for creating and circulating a consolidated form that addressed the various governance requirements be explored by the Town Clerk.

6. **DISPENSATIONS SUB COMMITTEE**

A report of the Town Clerk relative to the establishment of a Dispensation Sub Committee was considered by the Committee.

It was noted that the Sub Committee would need to meet in the near future in order to consider the written request for a dispensation that had been received from Mr Greg Lawrence.

It was agreed that where possible all requests for a dispensation would be considered within 28 days.

RESOLVED:- That the composition and terms of reference of the Dispensations Sub Committee, as set out in the report, be approved.

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

There were none.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**
Urgent request for a dispensation – Ann Holmes

A written request from Ann Holmes for a dispensation to speak at the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Committee on 17th September 2013, in objection to an application before the Committee, was tabled and considered by Members.

The Committee was advised that, in the absence of a dispensation, the Localism Act prohibited Ms Holmes, as an elected Member of the authority, from participating in the discussion of item 5a Barts Square at the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Committee on 17th September 2013. Consequently, she was seeking a dispensation to be afforded the same rights as a member of the public to speak at the meeting and raise an objection to that specific planning application. In noting that Ms Holmes had a disclosable pecuniary interest, the Committee considered whether the request to speak in objection to the application was in the public interest. The Committee felt that on this occasion, denying Ms Holmes the opportunity to raise the objection at the Planning and Transportation Committee meeting would deprive residents of the benefit of Ms Holmes' knowledge of the area. A key part of the platform on which she stood for election had been her commitment to work for improvements in the Barts Square application. The Committee also gave weight to the fact that Ms Holmes was not a Member of the decision-making Committee in question and was only seeking to be given the same right to speak as a member of the public, not any greater right to speak.

On this basis the Committee approved the request for a dispensation for Ms Holmes to be afforded the same rights to address the Planning and Transportation Committee on 17th September 2013 as a member of the public.

RESOLVED:- That Ms Ann Holmes be granted a dispensation to speak, as an objector, at item 5a – Barts Square Planning Application which would be

considered by the Planning and Transportation Committee on 17th September 2013.

The meeting ended at 12.47 pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: Lorraine Brook
tel.no.: 020 7332 1409
lorraine.brook@cityoflondon.gov.uk