



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

Standards Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Standards Committee** held on **Wednesday 22nd October, 2014**, Committee Rooms 3 & 4, 17th Floor, Westminster City Hall.

Members Present: Councillors Judith Warner (Chairman), Ian Adams, David Boothroyd and Tim Mitchell

Also Present: His Honour Geoffrey Rivlin QC (statutory Independent Person)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Ruth Bush and Councillor Louise Hyams

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Ruth Bush and Louise Hyams.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 No interests were declared.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30th April 2014 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

That the second line of the attendance details be amended to read "**General Purposes Committee Members:** Councillors Melvyn Caplan and Robert Davis"

4 MEMBER INDUCTION PROGRAMME REVIEW

- 4.1 Mr Doug Precey, Head of Cabinet Secretariat, introduced the report which detailed the induction programme that took place for Members following the May 2014 local elections and set out the additional training opportunities which had been provided since. The report also detailed the feedback received from Members on the induction programme, which had been sought to enable officers to firstly, learn lessons from the programme and secondly,

ascertain what further training and development Members require to participate fully and productively as City of Westminster Councillors.

- 4.2 In respect of the general scheduling of the induction, Members concurred with the feedback provided by their colleagues, as detailed in the report, that the arrangements for the induction should have been communicated much further in advance. Although the attendance rates detailed in the report for the respective sessions were satisfactory at around 40%, a higher attendance rate could have been achieved if there had been greater dialogue with Members to seek advice on the most appropriate timing for the sessions.
- 4.3 The Committee agreed that the induction was an improvement on the post-2010 local election arrangements. Members also agreed that whilst there was nothing fundamentally wrong with the delivery of the induction, there were a number of areas which could be improved.

Corporate Responsibilities

- 4.4 The initial 'corporate responsibilities' strand of the post-election induction programme included logistical and practical aspects such as signing declarations of office and other council administration tasks. The Committee agreed that, in addition to logistical aspects, this strand of activity should have included fundamental legal and governance training, such as the Members Code of Conduct sessions and any other information required to ensure Members understood their responsibilities as a member of the corporate body.

Ward and Community Training

- 4.5 The post-election induction programme also included departmental introductory workshops hosted by the Executive Management Team. These workshops incorporated a 'marketplace' setting that allowed Council departments to showcase the work they do and highlight their key achievements and current priorities.
- 4.6 Whilst the Committee recognised the benefits of learning about the excellent work being undertaken by the service areas, it agreed that it was more important that Members understood exactly how they can engage with services in order to perform their role as councillors and resolve issues on behalf of their constituents. It was this practical element which was fundamentally missing. This is not only crucial for newly elected Members who are getting to grips with the functions of the Council for the first time, but is also extremely beneficial for long-standing Members who find it very difficult to keep up-to-date with the correct Council contacts and engagement leads, who are constantly changing.
- 4.7 The Committee suggested that a bi-annual meeting between senior officers and Members could usefully be held, to discuss neighbourhood issues and ensure backbenchers are informed about the visions for the services which affect their wards.

- 4.8 The Committee also agreed that their ward support officers should have officer contact information to hand to enable them to advise Members as necessary. Support officers should also proactively ensure that all Members are provided with an up-to-date Council directory which accurately reflects the Council structure and provides key contacts in every service area. Members requested that Mr Precey ensures this happens as a priority.
- 4.9 In summary, the Committee agreed that this strand of any future induction programme should be focused on the practical neighbourhood-based functions of ward councillors, including how to raise issues in the right way and who to contact.

Subject-Specific Workshops and Training

- 4.10 The post-election induction programme included subject-specific workshops that were arranged on either a compulsory basis (e.g. Members Code of Conduct) or the roles of new Members on the Licensing and Planning Committees.
- 4.11 The Committee agreed that this training was too narrow and should have been broadened to include workshops on the functions of specific committees, Members' roles on specific committees (including Chairmanship) and knowledge about those committee remits and service areas.
- 4.12 The Committee agreed that scrutiny committee Members can only perform their function effectively if they are provided with the necessary knowledge and information to fundamentally understand the areas they are charged with scrutinising. Members provided anecdotal evidence of instances where colleagues had either raised local ward casework issues in formal committee meetings, or had focused too heavily on explanatory questions about services, when the time-limited public forum should be utilised for scrutiny purposes.
- 4.13 Councillor Ian Adams, in his dual role of Standards Committee member and Westminster Scrutiny Commission Chairman, agreed with Members' views and suggested that an evaluation be conducted to ascertain what aspects of scrutiny are working and which areas need to be improved. He further endorsed the views of the committee that those involved in scrutiny should be given the opportunity to learn about services in-depth at information sessions conducted outside of the formal committee meeting, to enable queries to be raised and knowledge of the service to be consolidated.
- 4.14 The Committee further noted that this focused committee-specific training should not be limited to scrutiny but should cover all formal Member-level committees, from Audit and Performance to Licensing and Planning. In respect of the Licensing and Planning Committees specifically, Members recognised that mandatory in-house training is provided for both functions before a Member may sit on either committee. However, Members noted that policy and legislation directly related to these functions changes and develops frequently. Therefore, Members should be provided with the opportunity to ensure their knowledge and understanding of these functions is up-to-date.

Members do not necessarily expect this to be provided by council officers. There are a number of external training events which Members could attend, if these were proactively identified and communicated to them.

Future Member Induction Programme Plan

4.15 In light of its discussion, the Committee agreed that any future Member induction programme could be improved by adhering to the following three-pronged induction plan:

- (1) **Corporate responsibilities:** to include any fundamental legal and governance training (such as Members Code of Conduct) and logistical tasks such as signing declarations of office.
- (2) **Ward and community training:** to include the practical neighbourhood-based functions of ward councillors, including how to raise issues in the right way and who to contact.
- (3) **Subject-Specific Workshops and Training:** to include training on the functions of various committees, Members' roles on specific committees (including Chairmanship) and knowledge about those committee remits and service areas.

Members Code of Conduct training

4.16 Peter Large, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, detailed the delivery of the three Code of Conduct training sessions and further one-to-one sessions, which were arranged upon request for those Members who either could not attend the scheduled sessions or wished to receive further advice. Mr Large reported that these sessions combined (the scheduled sessions and one-to-one training) achieved an exceptional attendance rate of 98% (with only one Member's training session outstanding).

4.17 Mr Large reminded Members that, in recognition of the importance of this training, the Standards Committee previously resolved to communicate the message to all Members that training on the Code is considered to be compulsory and the expectation exists that all Members would attend. Mr Large noted that it is a credit to the Members of the City Council and the respective party Chief Whips that almost every Member took note of this message and acted accordingly to secure their understanding of this fundamental subject.

Statutory Independent Person Commentary

4.18 His Honour Geoffrey Rivlin QC, the City Council's Independent Person, agreed with Mr Large and congratulated Members on this excellent attendance rate. Mr Rivlin explained that training is becoming increasingly important in all walks of life. As with any organisation, training is key to increasing professionalism and Members have a duty to the both the organisation and their constituents to ensure they have the required

knowledge and skills to represent their residents and perform their role effectively. Equally, the Council has a corresponding duty to ensure that Members are provided with training and development opportunities. The Committee concurred with Mr Rivlin's comments and agreed that there should be a properly formulated rolling training and development plan for Members on an ongoing basis – which is not limited to once every four years, post-local elections.

4.19 In respect of ethical training specifically, Mr Rivlin noted the feedback from Members detailed in the report and explained that, in his experience, such training is most effectively delivered using problem-based or case-study scenarios. He explained that utilising scenarios which directly relate to the work of Members would invoke discussion and get individuals thinking about how they will apply their training in practice, in committee meetings or elsewhere in the course of their work as councillors. The Committee endorsed Mr Rivlin's suggestion and requested that Mr Large incorporate case studies and scenarios into his future ethical governance training.

4.20 The Committee also agreed with Mr Rivlin that having a formalised mentorship scheme for newly elected Members, either on a party political basis, committee basis or by another allocation, would be beneficial. Members noted that both parties do have informal mentoring arrangements in place, but that this could usefully be revisited to ensure new Members are utilising their allocated mentor's expertise and knowledge when required.

4.21 RESOLVED:

Corporate Responsibilities

- (1) That any future Member induction programme include a core element dedicated to 'corporate responsibilities' with fundamental legal and governance training provided, in addition to any logistical administration tasks;

Ward and Community Training

- (2) That any future Member induction programme include a core element dedicated to the practical neighbourhood-based functions of ward councillors;
- (3) That to rectify the omission of the above-mentioned ward or neighbourhood based training, the Head of Cabinet Secretariat be requested to arrange further practical departmental training sessions which:
 - (a) focuses on the functions of the respective service rather than the achievements of the service;
 - (b) explains exactly how Members can raise and resolve local ward issues; and
 - (c) details who Members' key contacts are 'on the ground'.

- (4) That the Head of Cabinet Secretariat, in consultation with the Executive Management Team, be requested to explore the option of holding a bi-annual meeting between Members and senior officers going forward, to discuss neighbourhood issues and ensure backbenchers are informed about the visions for the services delivered across Westminster and, specifically, their wards;
- (5) That the Head of Cabinet Secretariat ensures all Members of the Council are provided with a refreshed officer contacts directory as a priority and as periodically necessary thereafter, to ensure Members' contact information is up-to-date;

Subject-Specific Workshops and Training

- (6) That the Head of Cabinet Secretariat, in consultation with the Chairman of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, be requested to commission an evaluation of the scrutiny function, to ascertain what aspects are working and which areas need to be improved;
- (7) That the Head of Cabinet Secretariat, in consultation with the Head of Committee and Governance Services, be requested to ensure that Members are provided with the opportunity to be trained on the functions and remit of the specific committees on which they sit, in consultation with Members and in accordance with their needs and requirements; and

Members Code of Conduct training

- (8) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be asked to incorporate case studies and scenarios into any future ethical governance and Code of Conduct training sessions.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 The Chairman had no further business to raise.

The Meeting ended at 7.48 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____