

Standards Committee – 19 January 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held at the Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 19 January 2012, at 7pm.

PRESENT: Diana Gibbs, Jane McNeill, Godfrey Stadlen and Alison Vydulinska
Councillors George Allan and Kate Groucutt

Godfrey Stadlen in the chair

88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

None.

89 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None.

90 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

None.

91 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2011 (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

92 STANDARDS AND ETHICS INDICATORS (Item 5)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

93 REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY (Item 6)

RESOLVED:

(a) That the report be noted.

(b) That it be noted that the Corporate Director of Resources had undertaken to write to councillors to remind them of the need to declare gifts such as store vouchers from Islington United Charities.

94 ANNUAL MEMBERS' SURVEY 2011 (Item 7)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

95 LOCALISM ACT 2011 – THE AMENDED STANDARDS REGIME (Item 8)

RESOLVED:

That the following views expressed during discussion of the questions in the report of the Corporate Director of Resources, be taken into account by the Corporate Director in developing a draft code and related

procedures for consideration by the council and notified to Council:

2.1.1 – Should the Council retain the Code of Conduct in as close a form to that currently in use as is possible, given the statutory changes?

- Islington's current Code seemed to work well. Although there would be a narrower set of principles for inclusion in the new Code, those relating to good behaviour should be retained as far as possible.
- The language and interpretation of the Code by members needed to be addressed, so that the content was clearly understood
- A shorter version than at present would probably mean that people would be more likely to read it

2.1.2 – Should the Council retain the Standards Committee, or delegate its functions to the Audit Committee?

- A new Standards Committee should be established, as it helps with the public's confidence in the way in which councillors' behaviour is monitored. The Audit Committee already has a large workload, with two co-optees who have financial experience. The 5:2 ratio of councillors to independent members would seem reasonable for a new Standards Committee.
- The Administration wished to see what other authorities were proposing to do: cost would be a factor. One suggestion had been that a Standards Sub-Committee of the Audit Committee might be established, which would meet as and when necessary.

2.1.3 If the Council retains the Standards Committee, should it co-opt one or more of its existing independent members as non-voting co-optees?

- It would be important to have co-opted members on a new Standards Committee. If a Committee is established, there needs to be clarity in the distinctions between the roles of the Committee, co-optees and Independent Person, so that there was no confusion amongst the public about those roles.

2.1.4 – (Subject to legal advice) Should the Council retain the services of one of the current independent members as the "Independent Person" under the Act?

This is not legally possible.

2.1.5 – Should the Monitoring Officer be given the power to seek to resolve complaints informally?

Yes.

2.1.6 – Should the Monitoring Officer be given the power to decide whether a complaint should be investigated and, if so, should this be after consultation with the Independent Person?

Yes . In addition, the Monitoring Officer should also copy the

Independent Person into the particulars of the case, together with reasons for any decision not to investigate further.

2.1.7 – Should the Monitoring Officer be given the power to decide, following a complaint being investigated, that the allegations are unfounded, without reference back to the Standards Committee?

Yes.

2.1.8 – On which, if any of the grounds for granting a dispensation from a prohibition on voting should the Monitoring Officer be given power to grant such dispensations? If there is to be such a power, should its exercise be restricted to cases of urgency?

Concur with the provisions detailed in paragraph 3.28 of the report.

2.1.9 – Should the Council include provision in its standing orders requiring a member who has a disclosable pecuniary interest to withdraw from the room during consideration of the business in respect of which the interest arises?

Yes. Although the Act only prohibited members with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest from participating in business, it would be good practice for them to be required to leave the room in accordance with (a new provision in) Standing Orders.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.

CHAIR