

## **THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN**

At a meeting of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER, 2020** at 6.30 pm in Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams. The meeting can be watched live via <https://councilmeetings.camden.gov.uk>

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT**

Councillors Richard Cotton (Chair), Henry Newman (Vice-Chair), Siân Berry, Thomas Gardiner, Maria Higson, Angela Mason, Luisa Porritt and Tom Simon

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT**

Councillors Roger Robinson

### **INDEPENDENT PERSONS PRESENT**

Maggie Redfern and Sue Terry

**The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Standards Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.**

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. GUIDANCE ON REMOTE MEETINGS HELD DURING THE CORONAVIRUS NATIONAL EMERGENCY**

##### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the remote meeting procedures set out in the agenda be agreed.

#### **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

##### **RESOLVED –**

THAT the Committee's terms of reference be noted.

#### **3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Roger Robinson.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PECUNIARY, NON-PECUNIARY AND ANY OTHER INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were no declarations of interest.

**5. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)**

The Chair announced that the meeting was being broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for six months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available upon request. Those who had asked to address the meeting were deemed to be consenting to having their contributions recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

**6. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)**

There were no deputations.

**7. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT**

There were no items of urgent business.

**8. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**9. GENERAL DISPENSATION FOR MEMBERS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor.

In response to a comment, the Borough Solicitor noted that an email from the Chair of Standards Committee would be circulated to all Members asking them to apply for the General Dispensation. Commentary could be added to clarify that the first dispensation concerning housing was limited to when decisions applied to tenants generally and not when a councillor had a particular interest. Advice could be sought from himself or other Legal staff if a Member was in any doubt.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT the Committee:

- (i) Delegated authority to the Borough Solicitor to, upon application by Members, grant a dispensation for four years from the date of this Committee meeting, for Members to participate and vote in the following matters, irrespective of them otherwise having a pecuniary interest:

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- (a) housing, where the Member is a tenant of Camden or a housing association tenant, provided that any function/decision does not relate particularly to the Member's tenancy or lease;
  - (b) school meals or school transport and travelling expenses, where the Member is a parent or guardian of a child in full time education, or are a parent governor of a school, unless the matter relates particularly to the school which the child attends;
  - (c) statutory sick pay under Part XI of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, where the Member is in receipt of, or is entitled to the receipt of, such pay;
  - (d) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to Members;
  - (e) any ceremonial honours given to Members; and
  - (f) setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (ii) Noted that such dispensation does not relieve the Member of the obligation to declare the interest or have such interest registered in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

**10. UPDATE ON STANDARDS MATTERS, NOVEMBER 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor.

The quick response by the Council to the best practice recommendations by the Committee for Standards in Public Life was commended.

It was noted that the draft response to recommendation 9, which had proposed that a decision notice be published following any decision on an allegation of misconduct, implied that the Council would retain confidentiality where an accused councillor was exonerated. A further summary anonymised report was proposed for a future meeting.

Concern was expressed that there was no transparency around the accounts for Camden Living, which was partly owned by the Council.

The Borough Solicitor responded that the new model Code of Conduct would be published later in the year and that a meeting of Standards Committee would be arranged in February 2021 to enable Members to consider further changes. A Member requested that in addition to that, consideration be given to how Camden Living could be encouraged to greater transparency.

Councillor Henry Newman declared for transparency that he was an employee of the Cabinet Office. The Committee for Standards in Public Life was a non-departmental public body of the Cabinet Office. He had no comments on the draft response.

**RESOLVED –**

THAT Standards Committee:

- (i) Noted the contents of the report and made comments as summarised above; and
- (ii) Commented on and approved the draft response at Appendix 2 to the report to the Committee for Standards in Public Life's request for an update on progress against the best practice recommendations in its report on Local Government Ethical Standards.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

**11. STANDARDS INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE RECORD**

Consideration was given to the report of the Borough Solicitor. He noted that general advice would be circulated on the pre-election period for the postponed Greater London Assembly elections, as well as the specific advice to Members standing for election. He commented that officers were reviewing information in the Constitution on how the Council managed emergencies, including how emergency powers were used. As there was a connection to standards issues, this could be brought to Standards Committee.

Members considered that virtual governance had worked successfully, ensuring that Council business was able to continue fairly and transparently. They thanked officers for their work enabling the introduction of virtual governance.

Having reviewed the record of guidance, a Member suggested that advice to officers on councillors' rights to information which had been circulated in September 2017 be circulated again. It was considered that this was important for transparency.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

It was suggested that, while Standards Committee could evidence its promotion of high standards of conduct by councillors, a conversation could be had on its role with regard to co-opted members and church and parent governors. The Borough Solicitor agreed to consider how the Committee could address its wider role.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

The Borough Solicitor noted that the Local Government Association had written to the Government urging it to extend the ability for councils to hold remote meetings beyond May 2021 as set out in regulations. He noted that while some meetings with public participation were more effective in person, it had been proven that other meetings could be held effectively while remote, with a saving in time and money. There were also benefits for certain demographics within the workforce for being able to work from home. There would need to be transparency about which meetings were being held remotely and why.

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The Borough Solicitor agreed that an update on the volume and nature of complaints against Members be brought to the next meeting of Standards Committee, with benchmarking against other London boroughs.

**ACTION BY: Borough Solicitor**

**RESOLVED –**

THAT Standards Committee noted the record of standards guidance.

**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 7.06 pm.

**CHAIR**

**Contact Officer: Cheryl Hardman**

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**MINUTES END**