

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PANEL

1 FEBRUARY 2011

REFERENCE FROM STANDARDS COMMITTEE –14 DECEMBER 2010

Attendance at other Meetings of the Council by Independent Members

At its meeting on 14 December 2010, the Standards Committee gave consideration to the observations of the Committee's Independent Members who had attended a range of Council meetings.

The Chairman reported that the Committee's Independent Members had attended a range of meetings throughout the authority. The report detailed their observations and suggested outcomes

The Chairman reported that generally they were very impressed with the high levels of standards and conduct demonstrated at the meetings they observed. There were only 3 main suggestions, which they considered to be relevant.

The Chairman reported that the first suggestion from the Independent Members referred to reminders being provided to ensure that late reports were attempted to be sent to all Members within a timely manner. Their second suggestion involved encouraging Members to ask detailed and technical questions prior to a meeting, to ensure that full and comprehensive responses was provided by officers at the meeting. Their third suggestion involved providing members of the public more information on how to ask questions and present petitions at Council meetings.

Members of the Committee raised a number of issues which included:

- it would be helpful to have guidance for members of the public on how to ask questions and present petitions at meetings. Members of the public only usually attended meetings if there was an item of interest to them. It was important for residents to be informed of ways that they could lobby the Council, particularly as difficult decisions would have to be made in light of the current economic climate. The role of chairmen and Members was also particularly important to ensure flexibility in public participation at meetings;
- there were concerns about what constituted detailed and technical questions as this was a subjective test. The public perception also had to be taken into account. If questions were asked prior to meetings, it could appear that there were not sufficient relevant questions being asked at meetings. Time-pressures also meant that this would not always be possible.

The Chairman summarised the comments made by Members as follows:

- Recommendation 1 could be agreed if it was re-worded to recognise that there were often occasions when information had to be provided late and a lot of work was performed to ensure that it was reported as soon as possible;

- Recommendation 2 could be referred to the Member Development Panel, as this was a potential training issue;
- There was general agreement on Recommendation 3 with the addition that the leaflet explains generally what the public can do at the meeting and for the future.

The Committee also agreed that, given the proposed changes to the Standards regime, it would not currently be wise at this stage to repeat the project.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the following suggestions be referred to the Monitoring Officer for actioning:
 - in relation to late reports presented to Member level meetings recognition should be given to Members who have not had the opportunity to previously see and absorb the information;
 - that guidance be provided at all Member-level meetings providing information for members of the public on how to participate at meetings and what can be done for the future.
- (2) **the suggestion of Members being encouraged to give notice of detailed technical questions prior to meetings, to ensure full and comprehensive answers at the meeting, be referred to the Member Development Panel as it potentially involved a training issue.**

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Report considered by Standards Committee - 14 December 2010
Minutes of Standards Committee – 14 December 2010

Contact: Miriam Wearing, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Tel: 020 8424 1542 (or Ext 2542)
miriam.wearing@harrow.gov.uk