

# Subject: Seminar of London Standards Committees

Report Number: 6

Report to: Standards Committee

Date: 9 March 2010

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Committee notes the report on the Seminar of London Standards Committees held on 11 February 2010, appended to this report.
- 1.2 That the Committee notes the themes emerging from the seminar (set out at paragraph 4.2) and the possible role identified for the GLA in leading on training and recruiting Independent Members, and that officers give more consideration to that suggestion and report back to the Committee.
- 1.3 That the report of the London Standards Committees be sent to the organisations which were invited to send delegates to the seminar (the London Boroughs, the Corporation of London, the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), Transport for London, Professor Alan Lawton and Alison Kelly, National Lead Governance and Accountability, Audit Commission), and to the delegates who attended the seminar.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 9 December 2009 the Standards Committee agreed to host a seminar of London Standards Committees on 11 February 2010 at 2pm in London's Living Room.
- 2.2 Invitations were sent to the Chairs of Standards Committees in London for up to four delegates from each authority to attend (the Chair, an elected member, Independent Member and the monitoring officer or representative).
- 2.3 There was a very good response to the seminar and representatives from 26 London boroughs, the Corporation of London, LFEPA, the MPA, Professor Alan Lawton and Alison Kelly, National Lead Governance and Accountability attended the seminar (approximately 80 people). The Chair, Deputy Chairman, Richard Barnes AM, Deputy Mayor, Caroline Pidgeon AM, Pradeep Agrawal (Independent Member), Lucy Dennett (Independent Member) and Diane Mark (Independent Member) attended from the GLA Standards Committee, as well as officers who support this Committee.

### 3. Issues for Consideration

3.1 In order to make the most of the time available, after welcoming delegates and introductory remarks the seminar was divided into two sessions, as follows:

*Session 1 – Effectiveness and Added Value*

*Discussion area*

- *How do standards committees contribute to the effectiveness of your authorities and how do they work?*

*Session 2 – Experience to Date and What the Future Holds (time -3.30pm to 4.30pm)*

*Discussion areas*

- *What have been your greatest successes or innovations and biggest problems in relation to the local handling of complaints? and*
- *Looking to the future, do you believe that the Standards regime is fit for purpose, should it be changed, and, if so, how, and how we can go about securing the changes?*

3.2 Delegates discussed the issues in eight groups and then fed back their comments. The comments are summarised in **Appendix 1**.

3.3 The following themes emerged from the seminar:

- Local assessment has been a good step away from the constraints of the all complaints having to be determined by Standards for England. However, authorities want to have their own procedures that reflect what they need to do locally, for example, the monitoring officer having the power to deal filter out trivial complaints and look at early forms of resolution/ mediation (the amendments may require primary legislation).
- The fairness of keeping the subject member informed at a very early stage about what is going on (whether it is to indicate to which part of the Code of Conduct the complaint relates or, very vaguely, the nature of the complaint). Elected members do not need to be treated as hostile witnesses.
- The composition of assessment sub-committees will vary depending on local circumstances and should not be prescribed.
- The capacity of authorities to share resources and help each other. There is a possibility of joint training and recruitment of independent members. The GLA, as a regional body, could possibly lead on those issues.

- 3.4 The seminar was very well received with feedback being extremely positive. Delegates appreciated the opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from colleagues in other authorities. There were suggestions that more opportunities to share ideas would be very useful.

#### **4. Strategy Implications**

- 4.1 There are none.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The GLA is required, further to the Local Government Act 2000, to have a standards committee to deal with certain issues as well as other functions that the GLA considers appropriate. These are set out in the GLA's Standards Committee's terms of reference. Hosting a seminar will help the Standards Committee to meet its objectives to promote high ethical standards at the GLA.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The costs of providing light refreshments at the seminar was £544 (exclusive of VAT). The costs were met from the budget for Assembly meetings (F11B).

Background Papers: None  
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