

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 7.00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2016

C1, MULBERRY PLACE, 5, CLOVE CRESCENT, LONDON E14 2BG

Members Present:

Councillor Danny Hassell (Chair)
Councillor Denise Jones (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Khaless Uddin Ahmed
Councillor Shah Alam
Councillor Craig Aston
Councillor Aminur Khan
Councillor Helal Uddin
Councillor David Edgar

Apologies:

Councillor Muhammad Ansar Mustaqim

Others Present:

Mayor John Biggs (Executive Mayor)

Officers Present:

Will Tuckley	(Chief Executive)
Graham White	(Interim Service Head, Legal Services, Law, Probity and Governance)
Runa Basit	(Head of School Governance & Information)
Louise Stamp	(Electoral Services Manager, Chief Executive's)
Stuart Young	(Interim Head of HR and Transformation)
Joel West	(Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

In the interest of transparency, all Members of the Committee declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 3.4 on the grounds that they personally knew the school governor applicant Sirajul Islam, who is also a Tower Hamlets Councillor.

2. MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on 13 April 2016 and of the General Purposes Committee meetings held on 15 June and 29 June 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

3. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Elections Update

Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, provided a verbal update to the Committee on the conduct the June 2016 EU Referendum. The Chief Executive also tabled presentation slides containing further detail on the specific challenges faced regarding electoral registration; planning and management; local practices; polling day and the count. A list of all London referendum counts was also circulated, showing declaration times, number of votes, numbers of count staff, and ballot papers counted for each.

The Chief Executive explained that the Referendum had been delivered under immense pressure:

- The number of registered electors increased significantly, from around 170,000 to around 188,000 since the previous local election. Applications also contained a high level of duplicate registrations.
- The number of absent voters (primarily postal voters) had also increased significantly.
- The timing of the referendum, within the normal holiday season and partly clashing with Ramadan, presented difficulties recruiting experienced staff.
- Crash of the national electoral registration website and the extension to the registration cut-off date caused additional pressures for the team.
- Due to adverse weather conditions on polling day, several polling stations were affected by flooding and staff affected by traffic gridlocks.

However, the Council overcame these challenges and the referendum was delivered successfully. The Chief Executive attributed this success to heightened planning in the run-up to the Referendum, including:

- Enhanced training for election staff.
- Reserve teams of polling staff.
- Upgraded role of polling station inspectors.
- Learning lessons from previous experiences and ensuring an appropriate system of checks and balances were built in to the process.
- A well-led, committed, dedicated and appropriately reorganised core elections team.

The Chief Executive also welcomed the positive cooperation of the Local Police and helpfulness of staff at the count venue, East Wintergarden, Canary Wharf.

Some of the key successes of the Council's management of the Referendum include:

- No allegations of electoral malpractice or alleged fraud have been made.
- A respectable count declaration time, 4:05 am (18th earliest out of 33 London counts).
- Only one polling station opened late (7 minutes), despite floods and no electors were disenfranchised.

The Committee welcomed the report and made several suggestions for improving elections performance in the future:

- Officers to contact Wandsworth Council, whose count performance suggests Tower Hamlets could learn from its good practice.
- Members reported queuing at some polling stations. The Chief Executive explained difficulties had been encountered due to high turnout and inconsistent flows of electors, but no significant logistical issues had been encountered. Any potential improvements for polling stations would be identified in the upcoming Review of Polling Places.

The Committee also welcomed the cooperation of the Police during the election and reported they felt that police officers increasingly understood why their attendance at polling stations was necessary. Louise Stamp, Head of Electoral Services, explained that electoral offences now forms part of normal training for police officers in Tower Hamlets, making it unique among London boroughs.

RESOLVED –

That the verbal report be noted.

3.2 Organisation Structure

Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, introduced the report. He explained that the review of the Council's organisational structure had been informed by various elements and he believed the proposed structure is the best to deliver the outcomes and priorities of Members and the Mayor. The proposal will also reduce the workforce paybill, which is appropriate in a time of general decreasing resources for the Council

The Chair tabled a short document containing a number of comments from the Trade Union UNISON on the organisation restructure proposals.

The Chief Executive explained some of the key outcomes he hoped to achieve from the reorganisation, including:

- An improved workforce ethos and culture, building on the marked level of pride already present throughout the workforce, but also tackling some concerns with the internal culture, revealed through recent Chief Executive Roadshows.
- Consolidating the core functions of the Council
- Consolidating frontline customer services

- Creating a strong emphasis on the importance of partnerships and their critical role in securing positive outcomes for residents
- Identifying and strengthening cross-cutting areas within the structure (see the four dotted lines 'clusters' within Appendix 1 of the report). It was also noted the bottom entry under Director of Place represented liaison with Tower Hamlets Homes, not an additional AD post.

The Committee commented on several elements of the proposed organisation structure and asked the Chief Executive to clarify as appropriate, including:

- The scope of the Assistant Director (AD) Regeneration, Housing and Economic Regeneration is very broad. Can a single AD manage such a wide remit? The Chief Executive explained the current proposal envisaged a strategic focus for this AD and if the post looked likely to include significant operational responsibilities the proposition would be revised.
- Concerns that the education focus of Idea Stores may be compromised if they are located within the AD Customer Service. The Chief Executive explained that the Idea Stores represented the Council's best customer service practice and it is intended this proposal will allow that good practice to be shared. The educational role of Idea Stores will remain central to their operation.
- The Committee also made general points that it would be helpful to have more information on the current management organisational structure for comparative purposes.
- In response to questions from Members, the Chief Executive provided more detail on where specific Council functions were proposed to be located within the proposed new structure. He further explained that he is happy to receive suggested changes to titles of posts, especially if it helped to clarify roles and/or assist with recruitment to those posts.

Following several comments on the process of redeployment, the Chief Executive proposed an amendment to recommendation (c) in the report to clarify that the proposed change to the Officer Employment Procedure Rules would be limited to this specific reorganisation and would not require a permanent change. Graham White, Interim Service Head, Legal Services, advised that the amended recommendation would not require a reference to full Council and would mean, in turn, that recommendation (d) from the report should be dropped. The Chief Executive stressed that, subject to the change above, matters of assimilation, vacancies and redeployment would be handled in accordance with the Council's current rules and policies.

A discussion took place regarding the assimilation of current staff into the new structure.

The Chair, Councillor Danny Hassell, invited Mayor John Biggs to address the meeting. The Mayor advised he had been consulted on the proposal and agreed with the principles that underpinned it. He further stressed the consultation period would allow opportunity to scrutinise the proposal and he would be keen to hear any views.

Following a question from Councillors, the Chief Executive stated that an update on progress with the proposed reorganisation would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee and the timeline on page 28 of the report amended accordingly. The update will include information on formal consultation responses.

RESOLVED that the Committee –

- a) Agree the organisation structure described at paragraphs 3.21-3.25 and the attached chart for release to formal consultation.
- b) Note that the formal consultation period will commence with effect from 19th September and end on 28th October to provide sufficient time for comprehensive staff and union engagement.
- c) Authorise the Chief Executive, pursuant to the Council's organisational change procedure, to appoint to posts within the restructure any deputy chief officer who might be displaced.
- d) Note that a series of enabling projects will be delivered as described at paragraph 3.28 and where required staffing decisions brought back to this Committee.

3.3 Workforce Diversity

Stuart Young, Interim HR, OD & Transformation Manager, introduced the report. He drew the Committee's attention to the workforce development activities listed in paragraphs 5.2 to 5.7 of the report and offered to bring an update report on these initiatives to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair suggested the Council could explore GLA supported initiatives for gender and ethnic-blind recruitment.

Following questions by Members, the Interim HR, OD & Transformation Manager agreed to provide the Committee with London-wide benchmarking data referred to in the report and agreed that a report on sickness management be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

3.4 Local Authority Governor Applications

Runa Basit, Head of School Governance & Information, introduced the report, which summarised applications from seven persons who had applied to be nominated for appointment or reappointment as a local authority governor at Tower Hamlets maintained schools.

The Committee welcomed the fact that many of the governor applicants were Tower Hamlets residents.

Following consideration of the information supplied, including both unrestricted and restricted reports, the Committee agreed to nominate all seven applicants to the school governor position each had applied for.

RESOLVED -

1. That the applicants for re-appointment to Local Authority School Governor positions as set out in the report be approved as follows.
 - a. That Leonie Fleming be nominated for re-appointment as a governor at Shapla School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
 - b. That Michael Coleman be nominated for re-appointment as a governor at Hague Primary School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
 - c. That Oliver Rice be nominated for re-appointment as a governor at Children's House Nursery under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
 - d. That Sirajrul Islam be nominated for re-appointment as a governor at John Scurr Primary School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
2. That the applications for Local Authority Governors as detailed in the report be approved as follows:
 - a. That Mark Butcher be nominated for appointment as a governor at Cubitt Town Junior School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
 - b. That Rebecca Harvey be nominated for appointment as a governor at Olga Primary School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.
 - c. That Dr Larissa Moniz be nominated for appointment as a governor at Redlands School under the 2012 School Governance (Constitution) Regulations.

4. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

1. That in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government

(Access to Information) Act 1985, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that the remaining agenda item contained information defined as exempt or confidential in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

5. RESTRICTED MINUTES

The restricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meetings held on 15 June and 29 June 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

6. EXEMPT REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Exempt Appendices for Local Authority Governor Applications

The appendices for Local Authority Governor Applications were considered during item 3.4 on the unrestricted part of the agenda.

6.2 Council Organisational Structure - Staffing implications

The Committee considered a restricted report on staffing implications of the Organisation structure report considered in the unrestricted part of the agenda.

Members discussed the report and agreed the recommendations as set out, subject to an amendment.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Some members of the Committee indicated concern that local influence over education in Tower Hamlets is being compromised because many school governing bodies contain insufficient representation from Tower Hamlets residents. The Chair advised that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had recently reviewed the Council's influence over school governor appointments and asked if officers could prepare a summary of the review for the next meeting.

The Chair reminded Members of the Committee of two upcoming meetings of the Employee Appeal Sub Committee and urged Members to confirm their availability with Democratic Services by emailing Nishaat.Ismail@towerhamlets.gov.uk.

The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Danny Hassell
General Purposes Committee