

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2020

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)
Councillor Kevin Brady (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Faroque Ahmed
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Rajib Ahmed

Apologies:

Councillor Shad Chowdhury

– Corporate Director Governance & Monitoring Officer.

Officers Present:

Amanda Harcus
Matthew Mannion

– Divisional Director of HR
– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)

Simmi Yesmin

– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

Farhad Ahmed

– (Traded and Business Development Manager)

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1. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest.

2. MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 25 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

3. WORK PLAN

The work plan of future agenda items was received and noted by the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the Work Plan be noted.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Local Authority School Governor Appointments

Farhad Ahmed, Traded Service & Business Development Manager, introduced the regular report on Local Authority School Governor appointments. The report contained four proposed appointments, three reappointments and one new appointment. Members noted the relevant applications set out in the exempt appendix.

Members considered the report and agreed the nominations.

RESOLVED

1. To agree the nominated applicants to the positions set out for local authority governors at maintained schools in Tower Hamlets.

4.2 Update on Senior Recruitment

Amanda Marcus, Divisional Director, HR, presented the report which provided an update on recent senior recruitment activity.

The Committee noted:

- That the Corporate Director Children and Culture would be starting on 6 July 2020. He had already been attending meetings and was currently going through induction and handover with the current post holder.
- That the recruitment process for Divisional Director, Finance, Procurement and Audit and other senior finance posts would be commencing shortly.
- Following the unsuccessful recruitment process for the post for Divisional Director, Finance, Procurement and Audit – the job profile and salary had been reviewed and was now ready for re-advert and Officers were confident that it would now attract a wider range of applicants.
- The draft timescale for the two Divisional Director posts were noted and Officers were confident that successful applicants would be in post by January 2021.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED to:

1. Note the current position on the recruitment to senior management vacancies in the Council structure.

4.3 Virtual Committee Meetings

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and updated The Committee on the Council's response to the requirement to operate Council meetings 'virtually'.

It was noted that Council had now successfully held a number of virtual meetings since The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force on 4 April 2020, this included meetings of the Cabinet, Licensing Sub Committees, Audit Committee and Development Committee, O&S Committee and Strategic Development Committee.

Mr Mannion extended his thanks to officers for the work done to set up and support these meetings and also thanked Councillors for their cooperation and continued support during the meetings.

It was noted that the regulation changes would automatically override any Council Procedure Rules that would have restricted the operation of virtual meetings and but it was considered best practice for the Council to adopt its own procedure rules for virtual meetings into its Constitution to govern how it intends to operate such meetings. The Committee was referred to Appendix 1 of the report which set out the Draft Procedure Rules – Virtual Meetings, for The Committee to agree and adopt for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.

In response to questions the following was noted;

- That all election ballots had for the moment been suspended till May 2021.
- To explore options and ways in which technical support can be given to Members who had been receiving new Council IT equipment.
- Concerns were raised in relation to the new guidance from Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) on Members not being able to come into Council offices for meetings with officers etc.
- That the introduction of virtual/hybrid meetings was welcomed and was seen as a positive step, allowing the flexibility for people to participate in meetings where they may have other commitments such as childcare, carer or work duties.
- That the issues concerning hybrid meetings should be resolved quickly so not to restrict Councillors from participating in meetings.
- It was agreed that Mr Mannion would look at the possibilities of hybrid meetings and would update and brief members outside this meeting.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. The Council's response to the requirement to hold Committee meetings virtually be agreed.
2. The Virtual Meetings Procedures set out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed for inclusion in the Council Constitution.

4.4 Committee and Member Appointments

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services briefly introduced the report and explained that following the postponement of the Annual Council meeting in May 2020, the agreed establishment of the Committees and Sub Committees arrangements for the municipal year at the Annual Council meeting on 15 May 2019 remained in place.

The report sought the General Purposes Committee's agreement for a small number of changes and appointments as set out in Appendix 1 (tabled at the meeting and detailed below;).

- Cllr Sufia Alam as Mayoral Advisor for Community and Voluntary Sector, and to support young people post-Covid19
- Cllr Amina Ali as Mayoral Advisor for Mental Health
- Cllr Abdal Ullah as Mayoral Advisor for Public Realm

The Committee noted and agreed the changes set out.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That Committee Chairs and Memberships and other appointments are to be carrying over from those agreed at the Annual Meeting in May 2019 (along with any subsequent changes agreed by the Monitoring Officer).
2. The amendments and appointments set out in Appendix 1 be agreed.
3. That any unfilled places within the seats allocated to a particular political group, the Council note that the Corporate Director, Governance has delegated authority subsequently to agree the appointments to those places in accordance with nominations from the relevant political group.

4.5 Waiver of 6 Month Councillor Attendance Rule (Sec. 85 of the Local Government Act 1972)

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and explained that Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 required a Member of a Local Authority to attend at least one meeting of that Authority within a six month consecutive period. It was noted that in order to avoid being disqualified as a Councillor this requirement could be waived and the time limit extended.

Mr Mannion highlighted the fact that due to the current Covid-19 Pandemic a number of meetings had been cancelled and therefore where a particular Councillor is not a member of many committees, they will therefore run the risk of not meeting the six month statutory requirement. A further impact would be, were a member is to be disqualified from office for non-attendance, a by-election could not be held until May 2021 which in turn would deprive residents of representation for a longer period.

It was noted that the proposed waiver extension was to 31 October 2020, and could be reviewed again if necessary. The Committee welcomed the report and expressed disappointment over the Government's lack of guidance on this matter when issuing the recent regulations.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED:

1. The request to extend the period of office for any required Councillors beyond six month period of non-attendance provided for within Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic be agreed.
2. The use of emergency powers to approve the requested extension of time to expire on 31 October 2020 be agreed.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business that was considered urgent.

6. 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.

7. RESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Local Authority Governor Appointments - Restricted Appendices

The appendices for Local Authority Governor Applications were considered during item 4.1 on the unrestricted part of the agenda.

7.2 Forthcoming Restructures

The Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED to

1. Agree and approve the recommendations in the report.

The meeting ended at 5.50 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee