

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 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
Councillor Shad Chowdhury

Officers Present:

Runa Basit	– (Head of School Governance & Information)
Adam Boey	– (Senior Strategy & Policy Manager - Corporate)
Robert Curtis	– (Head of Electoral Services)
Amanda Harcus	– Divisional Director of HR
Asmat Hussain	– (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Simmi Yesmin	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

Apologies:

None

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6 October, 29 October and 13 November 2020 be agreed.

3. WORK PLAN

The General Purposes Committee Work Plan was discussed, and the following was noted;

Actions List

- 1. A report on Alternative Models of Employee Appeals Sub Committee had been scheduled for GPC on 23 February 2021.
- 2. Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director Governance & Monitoring Officer confirmed that Officers had been working on policies and procedures for raising Members Enquiries and this would be reported back to the Committee in January/February 2021.
- 3. Robert Curtis, Head of Elections, confirmed that emails had been sent out to all Councillors following the publication of the Electoral Register on 1st December 2020 and therefore Members will need to request a copy of the review/register which would then be sent out accordingly.

RESOLVED

1. That the Work Plan be noted

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 LA Governor Appointment Report

Runa Basit, Head of School Governance and Information, introduced the regular report on Local Authority School Governor appointments. The report contained four re-appointments and one new proposed appointment. Members noted the information set out in the exempt appendices.

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 GLA Polls update – Thursday 6 May 2021

Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services, introduced the report which set out the administrative progress and preparation being undertaken for the Polls to be held on Thursday 6 May 2020.

Mr Curtis referred to the report and detailed the management hierarchy for the polls, the three different contests that made up the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections and the two local referendums. It was noted that details of the referendums would be detailed in a future report to GP Committee at its meeting in February 2021.

It was noted that following the suspension of the polls and the COVID 19 pandemic it had been necessary to keep in touch with all the stakeholders both external and internally. Mr Curtis explained that the ongoing preparations were reliant on significant risk assessments and project planning that has been going ahead as if the current COVID situation was going to be at the same rate at present. Infection rates would continue to be assessed in the new year to further assess what amendments will need to be made for the election.

To assist in the project planning and risk assessment, several meetings had been held and guidance continues to be updated and reviewed with a range of stakeholders. It was also noted that an internal Tower Hamlets Project Group chaired by Will Tuckley, Chief Executive and Returning Officer, will be convened, the makeup of this project team would include officers from;

- Legal
- IT
- Communication
- Facilities Management
- The Metropolitan Police
- The Electoral Commission
- Electoral Services
- Democratic Services.

It was noted that risk assessments are considerable and are being reviewed daily with all Returning Officers across London, who will be sharing what is perceived to be best practice for a COVID affected poll. It was also highlighted that postal voting could increase in double or triple due to electorates not wishing to visit polling stations, however there would be a better steer on this in January/February 2021 and an update on those figures and the number of electorates would be reported back to the Committee at its meeting in February.

During a brief discussion, the following was noted;

- That the Returning Officer would be looking into crowd control and intimidation outside polling stations, the relevant risk assessments

would be done and discussed with the Metropolitan Police nearer to the time of the election and would also be raised at the TH project group as a priority.

- That the process for postal vote applications had changed and applications were now data matched with the Department of Work and Pensions, date of births and national insurance numbers.
- Postal votes would not be issued unless verified via these processes. This robust process had reduced the number of accusations of fraud.
- Clarification on registering to vote in two boroughs was sought and explained.
- That all reasonable and necessary expenses incurred for the GLA poll would be reimbursed by the GLA subject to a submission of expenses once the poll concluded.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

4.3 Electoral Canvass 2020

Robert Curtis, Head of Elections introduced the report which detailed the revision of the Electoral Register published on 1st December 2020 and the implications of canvass reform introduced for the first time and implemented over a four-month canvass period between July to November 2020. It was noted that due to the COVID pandemic the canvass had to be slightly curtailed at the final stage, where previously, non-responding properties would have ordinarily received a personal visit from an electoral canvasser to ascertain those residents, this exercise did not take place following careful consideration by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) as it was thought this exercise would compromise the safety of residents and also those recruited to carry out the exercise.

Members were taken through a detailed analysis of the three canvass reform routes that were now in place. It was noted that 141,720 residential properties had been canvassed and the following salient points were noted;

Route 1

- These are properties matched with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
- 89,135 properties matched and marked as no changes.
- The match rate was 62.9%

Route 2

- These are properties that did not match, and the data indicated that there may be a change in household composition.
- 42,980 properties did not match exactly and were sent Canvass Communication B (CCB) forms.

- Properties in route 2 must also receive a personal canvass if no response is received either by telephone or visit to the property by a electoral canvasser.

Route 3

- Only defined properties, identified as care homes and student accommodation buildings can go through this process.
- These properties were all contacted and a named responsible person ascertained who would be the contact for information required.
- 9,013 properties were identified as Route 3 and responsible persons allocated.

It was noted that for the first time local data matching was undertaken utilising the data held by the Council which also enabled the ERO to match individuals with the existing electoral register database;

In response to questions the following was noted;

- Clarification was sought about the possibility of registering to vote from two properties in two different boroughs, it was advised that they would need to justify living in both places equally.
- Concerns raised on whether there had been a significant difference in the electorate numbers for not going through the door knocking process, it was noted that this would be known following a meeting at the Cabinet Office in the new year and Members would be updated on this at the next GPC meeting.
- That officers would be working on a Communication Strategy explaining the different polls etc and details of this strategy would be brought to the next GPC meeting in February.
- It was further noted that following the additional flexibility given to ERO's by the Government to allow an extension to publish the Electoral Register, an extension was considered not necessary and the register was published on time on 1 December 2020.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee

RESOLVED

1. To note the report.

4.4 HR Policies and Procedures

Ananda Marcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, introduced the report and explained that following the Tower Rewards proposals, it was evident that a number of the HR policies had not been updated/revised for a significant period of time and therefore a framework for a systematic review of policies and procedures were developed in June 2020 setting out the priority of order in which policies would be reviewed.

There had been a minor slippage to the delivery time due to the COVID 19 pandemic and therefore Cohort One would now be implemented in January 2021.

It was noted significant work had been undertaken on family friendly policies and so two policies had been moved to Cohort Two so they can be considered as part of an over-arching suite of policies dealing with time off for family and/or dependants. Members were informed that changes to the policies would ensure they were clearer and consistent.

The Committee welcomed this report and it was agreed that a quarterly report would be brought to the GPC with updates and changes to HR policies.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee

RESOLVED

1. The progress on the review of HR policies and procedures was noted.

4.5 Update on Senior Recruitment - Verbal Update

Ananda Marcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, briefly updated the Committee that the Senior Management Review had passed the midway consultation process and a further update with a precise timetable would be presented at the extraordinary GPC on 21 December 2020.

Update noted.

4.6 Procedure Update: Councillor Call for Action Protocol

Adam Boey, Senior Strategy and Policy Manager, briefly introduced the report and explained that the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) guide had been developed as part of the Strengthening Local Democracy Framework. It allows for Councillors to raise issues or matters of local concern and affecting their ward for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Localism Act 2011 broadens this so that a Councillor can refer matters which are not restricted to local government.

It was noted that the CCfA is a 'last resort' means and Councillors must demonstrate that other methods or resolution have been exhausted first. The report sought the Committee's approval for the Constitution to be amended to include the CCfA procedure and guide.

Members welcomed the report and were supportive of this process. Members expressed a need for adequate and sound training on the procedure on how and when to use this process appropriately and suggested that a suitable communication strategy is developed to promote and inform members of this.

It was agreed that a training package would be developed and lead by Sharon Godman, Service Head Corporate Strategy, Policy and Performance and supported through the Member Learning and Development Programme.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee

RESOLVED

1. That the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) Guide be approved.
2. That the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) Guide is to be added to the main Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules in Part B of the Council's Constitution.

4.7 Annual Constitution Review

Updated Appendices to the report were tabled at the meeting.

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and briefly highlighted that it was important that the Constitution was seen as a living document and is kept under regular review to ensure that it is up to date and meets the Council's requirements and therefore it had been decided that a yearly report would be brought to the General Purposes Committee setting out changes and updates and giving the Committee the opportunity to request reviews of specific sections as and when required.

It was reported that a full set of Directorate Schemes of delegation had now been updated and published. Mr Mannion asked the Committee to note the revisions and amendments highlighted in the appendices to the report (Constitution with tracked changes) for the Committee to agree.

The Committee welcomed the report and the following additional amendments were noted and agreed;

- Changes to the Place Scheme of Delegation following new powers related to COVID 19 that had implemented and these changes are to be delegated to the Corporate Director, Place.
- Minor revisions to the Terms of Reference to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

The Sub-Committee extended their appreciation and thanks to Mr Mannion for his efforts and the robust work undertaken on the review of the Constitution. The Committee were pleased with the document, which was now clearer, accessible and more practical than it had been previously.

RESOLVED

1. The report was noted.

2. The changes listed in paragraphs 3.6 to 3.10 of the report and set out in the Appendices to the report was noted.
3. The Constitution changes listed in paragraphs 3.11 to 3.25 and set out in the Appendices to the report was agreed.
4. That the Head of Democratic Services to lead on the development of the Constitution and to bring forward any changes/review to the Committee as and when required.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

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. EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the extraordinary General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

8. RESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Local Authority Governor Appointments - Restricted Appendices

The exempt appendices setting out the details of the applicants for the School Governor appointments was noted

The meeting ended at 6.55 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee