

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 24 JUNE 2021

**COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL, MULBERRY PLACE, 5 CLOVE
CRESCENT, LONDON, E14 2BG**

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)
Councillor Danny Hassell (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Zenith Rahman

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Amina Ali (Virtual)
Councillor Denise Jones (Virtual)
Councillor Asma Islam (Virtual)
Councillor Tarik Khan (Virtual)
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman (Virtual)

Apologies:

Apologies for lateness – Councillor Denise Jones

Officers Present:

Perveez Akhtar	– (Information Governance and Complaints Manager)
Runa Basit	– (Head of School Governance & Information)
Raj Chand	– (Director, Customer Services)
Robert Curtis	– (Head of Electoral Services)
Agnes Adrien	– (Head of Litigation, Legal Services)
Amanda Harcus	– (Director of HR, Workforce Development & Business Support Services)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Simmi Yesmin	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair, asked for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2021/2022.

Councillor Tarik Khan proposed Councillor Danny Hassell for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman and Cllr Zenith Rahman.

There were no further nominations.

The General Purposes Committee;

Resolved

That Councillor Danny Hassell is elected as Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2021-2022.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 23 February 2021 be agreed.

4. WORK PLAN

The General Purposes Committee Work Plan was discussed and agreed. The following was noted;

Report on Employee Relations Casework Policy -Quarterly Update

- Agreed to receive future update reports on a six-monthly basis.

RESOLVED

That the Work Plan be noted

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 General Purposes Committee, Terms of Reference 2021/22

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and highlighted the General Purposes Committee terms of reference, quorum, membership and the schedule of meeting dates for the municipal year 2021-2022.

RESOLVED

1. That the Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and the Schedule of meeting dates for the General Purposes Committee be noted.

5.2 Establishment of Employee Appeals Sub-Committee

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, which recommended the Committee to establish the Employee Appeals Sub Committee to consider employee appeals against dismissal.

RESOLVED

1. That the Employee Appeals Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22 be established.

5.3 Establishment of Appointments Sub-Committee

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report, which recommended the establishment of the Appointment Sub Committee for the current municipal year, to note and agree its terms of reference, the arrangements for nominating Councillors to serve on an Appointments Sub Committee and note the process for appointment to Chief Officers and Deputy Chief Officer.

RESOLVED

1. That the terms of reference for Appointments Sub-Committees for the remainder of the municipal year 2021/22 as set out at paragraph 4.1 of the report be agreed.
2. That the arrangements for nominating Councillors to serve on an Appointments Sub-Committee as set out at paragraph 4.2 of the report and the Divisional Director, HR (or their respective nominee) be authorised to agree the dates of Appointments Sub-Committee meetings and the membership of the Sub-Committee for each appointment that is required in accordance with nominations from the Opposition Group Leader and the Mayor; be agreed.
3. That the process for appointment to Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officer posts as set out at paragraph 5 of the report be noted.

5.4 Local Authority Governor Report

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

of the new appointments detailed in the report for Appendix 8 had been withdrawn.

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.

5.5 Elections 2021 Update

Robert Curtis, Head of Elections, introduced the report which set out an update following the polls undertaken on Thursday 6 May 2021 for Greater London Authority (GLA) elections, the Borough Referendum and the Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Planning Referendum. It was noted that in general from feedback and observations it was considered a well-run election.

Mr Curtis referred to the report and highlighted the following;

- That all communication to the electorate were undertaken in partnership with the GLA and the Electoral Commission to ensure consistency of approach but for the Referendums, with no candidates, was restricted to fact explanation.
- The council actively promoted all avenues to cast votes and used social media extensively to do this.
- 26,000 postal votes were sent to all residents who were registered with the NHS as shielding.
- Polling places were regularly communicated with, however there were a loss of a few portacabins which were replaced with suitable alternatives and there was also an introduction of new polling places such as Brady Arts Centre, Toynbee Hall and etc which had proven to be successful.
- All polling staff were trained, there were unexpected drop-outs at the terminal hour which did cause problems but were dealt with by the Elections Team.
- There had been reports of campaigners addressing people in queues, mock ballot papers, and family voting – these issues would be addressed and currently working on draft guidance for future candidates and parties addressing these concerns.

Mr Curtis, said that officers were aware of issues that need to be addressed and areas that required improvement and these areas would be looked at in great detail in time for next year's elections.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Mr Curtis for the update. Members raised concerns of intimidation at polling stations from campaigners and the need for extra security at polling stations in future, to prevent a repeat of past elections.

The Committee requested that an update report leading up to the elections in 2022 be added on the General Purposes Work Plan.

The Committee extended their thanks to Mr Curtis and the Elections Team for the effort and hard work during the Elections.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.
2. An update report on the preparations for the Elections in 2022 to be brought back to GPC at beginning of next year (2022).

5.6 Renaming the Borough Wards

Robert Curtis, Head of Elections, introduced the report which set out the results of the proposals to change the ward names for Bethnal Green, St Peters and Canary Wharf. It was noted that a recommendation to change the names were made during the consultation for the Polling District and Polling Places review undertaken by Full Council on 15th January 2020 and the review was agreed by the General Purposes Committee.

Mr Curtis went through the presentation attached in the agenda on pages 89-105. It was noted that there had not been a huge response to the consultation process, with a total of 369 responses of which 6 were invalid. The overall responses and results for all three wards was for the current ward names to remain.

Following a short discussion, the general consensus from Members of the committee as well as feedback from residents to Members, was for changes to the ward names for St Peters ward and Bethnal Green ward, as it caused confusion to where the boundaries were geographically, and the area having no connection to St Peters. The Committee suggested that ward names such as Bethnal Green South and Bethnal Green North should be considered in its place. The Committee also suggested that the name for Canary Wharf ward should remain as Canary Wharf had a clear geographical link to the area.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. That comments from the Committee to be added as part of the consultation response.
2. That the Committee note that the proposed names changes are to be submitted to Council for consideration.

5.7 Physical, Hybrid and Virtual Committee meetings

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and briefly detailed a summary of the meeting options and recommendations for the future of physical/hybrid/virtual meetings.

It was noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic the Council had made use of the extensive powers from the Coronavirus Bill to operate virtual council and committee meetings. Those regulations had now expired and the Council had reverted to holding physical meetings with some features of virtual meetings having remained. It was noted that this was a good opportunity for Members to give a steer on how future meetings should continue following the lifting of Covid restrictions.

The Committee welcomed the initial research and findings detailed in the report. Members acknowledged the good work undertaken, and emphasised how over the past year, technology had proven to be effective, allowing flexibility especially for those with carer responsibilities, and increasing participation at meetings. It was noted that Option B - hybrid meetings, is the type of meetings that should be explored and developed further as it allowed a greater deal of flexibility for all participants at meetings.

Clarification was sought in regard to voting at meetings, Mr Mannion explained that the Local Government Act 1972 specified clearly that Members physically present at a meeting only have voting rights. However, it was noted that Government had recently undertook consultation on this matter, and LBTH had responded as did other authorities to allow provisions for voting in virtual settings subject to safeguards, and the outcome of the consultation was still pending.

Mr Mannion encouraged Members of the Committee to contact him if they had any further feedback over the next few weeks.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.
2. Officers to develop the meeting procedure rules with Option B (hybrid) settings and for it to be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.

5.8 Members Enquiry Process

Raj Chand, Director of Customer Services, gave a brief update on the progress of the Members Enquiry (ME) process to date. Ms Chand highlighted that she was aware of the previous and current issues Members had been experiencing regarding ME's. It was noted that Members of the Committee had been contacted with a proposed consultation meeting to consider the

policy and process with the aim of receiving feedback from Members to then feed into the policy. This would then be followed by wider briefing meetings with other council members with a view of bringing back a full report to the next GPC meeting.

In response to questions the following was noted;

- That issues of quality control and delays should be addressed.
- The final report would include details of the collaborative work being done with Housing Associations (RSL's) on how to simplify enquires to them.
- Officers had been exploring different software systems for ME enquires and where possible looking to streamline the current process.
- That the Mayor's Enquires were separate to Members Enquires.
- That the final report would address the concerns raised and any feedback from the consultation meetings.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The verbal update was noted.
2. That a full report on the Members Enquiry Process would be reported back to the Committee at the next GPC meeting.

5.9 Alternative models of Employee Appeals Sub Committee

Amanda Harcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development introduced the report and explained that this was a follow up from the report to GPC in February 2021, where there was a proposal to change the make up of the Employee Appeals Sub-Committee. It was noted that this report incorporated feedback and discussion had at that meeting together with feedback from Trade Unions.

Ms Harcus explained that she was seeking Members approval for the recommendations listed in the report, in making amendments to the constitution for moving from a Member panel to an Officer panel supported by a Member.

Ms Harcus explained the purpose for this proposal was to increase the importance of positive performance management so individual officers are fully accountable for their action they take and make in the organisation. That Senior Officers should hear dismissal appeals and have accountability for final decisions and should have to account for themselves in the event a case is to go to an Employment Tribunal. It would also reinforce the role of the Chief Executives responsibility as Head of Paid Services to deal with all employment matters. It was noted in the last 5 years there had been 76

dismissals with 24 appeals, 18 cases had been upheld, 6 cases reinstated and 18 cases ending up in an Employment Tribunal.

In response to questions the following was noted;

- Clarification sought on the respective roles of Members and Officers at the appeal meetings.
- Mixed model with officers and members would give assurances to staff and trade unions that a fair process was being followed.
- Officers were confident as this model progresses, this would improve performance management and employee relations. The updating of HR policies and procedures would also make policies and procedures clearer, with less chance of misinterpretations.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The Constitutional arrangement for appeals panel to be amended to refer dismissal appeals to an Officer panel, supported by a Member in an advisory capacity.
2. The selection of the advisory member on the appeals panel is to be chosen from the General Purposes Committee.
3. That amendments to the relevant policies and procedures to reflect the changes to the appeals process for dismissal.
4. To receive a report on the performance of dismissal procedures and the outcome of appeals on an annual basis.

5.10 Update on Senior Recruitment – June 2021

Amanda Harcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, briefly updated the Committee on the recent senior recruitment activity.

The Committee noted:

- That Officers for the Director of Education (Children and Culture Directorate) and Director of Customer Services (Resources and Governance Directorate) were now in post.
- In the final stages of confirming appointment to the role of Director of Finance (Deputy S.151 Officer) (Resources and Governance Directorate).
- The recruitment process for the Corporate Director Resources and Governance had been paused and would re-commence in Autumn 2021, and the current interim arrangements would remain in place until then.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

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

5.11 Employee Relations Casework Policy - Quarterly Update

Amanda Marcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, briefly updated the Committee on the handling of Employee Relations casework within the council, progress made to-date and targets and considerations for the future development of case management.

It was noted that the council was on an improvement trajectory on the amount of time taken to resolve and conclude cases for grievance, disciplinary or capabilities processes and moving to a time resolved to 60 days, where previously some cases have taken up to a year or longer to resolve. Ms Marcus was pleased to report that this was improving. It was also noted that officers were currently working on reviewing a number of policies and working closely with trade unions to ensure policies and procedures are clearer for both managers and staff.

In response to a question it was noted that the next update report would include how are policies are being applied fairly across the organisation, how the need for learning and developing skills can be identified at an early stage and what the broader learning experience is for the organisation from reviewing these policies.

The Committee noted the report and improvements made to policies.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

5.12 Nominations to LGA General Assembly 2021

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and briefly explained that the Council had delegated the function of making appointments to outside bodies to the General Purposes Committee. It was noted that only one outside body related to Council functions and this was the Local Government Association General Assembly and Annual Conference.

The Committee noted and agreed the four nominations set out in the report.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That Councillors Rachel Blake, Asma Begum, Asma Islam and Victoria Obaze be appointed as Members to the Local Government Association (LGA) General Assembly and Annual Conference for 2021.

5.13 Constitution Updates

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and briefly highlighted the changes detailed in the report.

Mr Mannion sought agreement to one addition to the Constitution (for the inclusion of the Channel Panel), for the Committee to note an update to the Place Scheme of Delegation and to note that further work in relation to changes following the recent Senior Leadership would be presented at a future meeting.

The Committee noted and agreed the changes set out.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. The addition of the 'Channel Panel' to Section 20 'Other Bodies and Panels' was agreed.
2. The additions to the Place Scheme of Delegation be noted.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

7. 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.

8. EXEMPT REPORTS

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

8.1 Local Authority Governor Report - Restricted Appendices

The exempt appendices setting out the details of the applicants for the school Governor appointments were noted.

8.2 Annual Report on Redundancy Departures

Ananda Marcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, introduced the update, with the purpose to ensure that General Purposes Committee are kept up to date on the overall number of redundancies within the organisation during the period between 1st April and 2020 and 31st March 2021.

The Committee reviewed and noted the report.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

8.3 Forthcoming Restructures - Staffing Implications

Ananda Marcus, Divisional Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, introduced the regular report listing any potential redundancies from forthcoming restructures where the overall severance package was likely to exceed £99,999.

One role was listed in the report.

The Committee reviewed the report and agreed the requests as set out.

RESOLVED

1. That the one dismissal set out in the report be agreed.
2. To note and approve the severance packages that apply to the dismissals arise as a result of the individual's contractual terms and conditions of employment.

The meeting ended at 8.05 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee