

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 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 Asma Islam  
Councillor Zenith Rahman

**Members Present Virtually:**

**Other Councillors Present:**

Councillor Marc Francis

**Apologies:**

Councillor Peter Golds  
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman

**Officers Present:**

Runa Basit	– (Head of School Governance & Information)
Raj Chand	– (Director, Customer Services)
Pat Chen	– (Head of HR, HAC and Children & Culture)
Robert Curtis	– (Head of Electoral Services)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Simmi Yesmin	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)
Janet Fasan	– (Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Amanda Harcus	– (Director of HR, Workforce Development & Business Support Services)
Alison Littlewood	– (Interim Director of Workforce, OD and Business Support Services)
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**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None were declared.

**2. MINUTES**

The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**3. WORK PLAN**

The General Purposes Committee Work Plan was noted.

**4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

The order of business was varied at the meeting, the minutes are set out in the agenda format for ease of reference.

**4.1 LA Governor Report**

Runa Basit, Head of School Governance and Information, introduced the regular report on Local Authority School Governor appointments. The report contained two 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.

It was noted that Ms Basit was leaving the Council and so the Committee extended their thanks to Ms Basit for all her hard work and contributions over the years and wished her the very best for the future.

**RESOLVED**

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

**4.2 Members Enquiries Policy and Process**

Raj Chand, Director of Customer Services, introduced the report which provided information on how it was intended to improve the process for Members Enquiries (ME's) and in dealing with the service moving forward.

Ms Chand explained that following several consultation meetings with Members and officers, the new ME policy and process simplifies existing protocols by reducing the number of steps interested parties need to take in managing ME's and also addresses historic issues around the delivery of the service. It was noted that there were still some areas that would need to be improved as part of this process and therefore this process would be kept under continuous review so that it can be continuously improved for residents and Councillors.

The Committee was referred to the proposed policy and process appended to the report and further explained that it incorporated the changes taken on board from feedback from Members in order to make the process robust and more efficient.

The Chair invited Councillor Marc Francis to address The Committee;

In his submission, Cllr Marc Francis highlighting the following points,

- It was noted that this Authority had been subject to cuts in its funding from central government and aware that the service received by Councillors cannot be excluded from making contribution towards those savings.
- That there were no criticisms of staff from the Information Governance who currently work on ME's and specifically mentioned Ms Konica Das for her continuous hard work on the ME's.
- He questioned the decision to move the administration of ME's from Members Support to Information Governance.
- It was noted that previously enquires were assigned to the relevant department within two days and in the nine months since its responsibility has moved from Member Support Office to Information Governance, there had been a number of ME's with more than two-week delays.
- Further examples of delayed ME's and the increase in the backlog of ME's being processed were noted.
- That the decision to change the service, placed a large part the duties and responsibilities of four members of staff in Members Support Teams on the shoulders of one member of staff in the Information Governance Team and questioned how feasible this was?
- The excellent level of service provided for ME's by the Members Support Team over the past years was noted.
- Having enquired about the claims made that the cuts to the service provided by Member Support Team were approved by Councillors themselves in the budget were inaccurate. The budget for 2017/18 made no reference to a saving required in Members Support Team and therefore it not being a key decision, backbench members had no knowledge or oversight of this.
- Concerns were raised of a possible two-tier approach that was felt amongst backbench members with the level of service provided in relation to ME's. As it was apparent that ME's raised by the Mayor's office and Cabinet Members were assigned swiftly to the relevant department and responses sent back to residents equally quickly. However, enquiries from the 30 backbench councillors and opposition councillors were not being prioritised or receiving the same level of urgency.

Cllr Francis concluded that constituents needed a much quicker and more reliable service and suggested that this policy is not just noted and adopted

but officers provide actual performance measures to go with the policy proposed.

Members thanked Cllr Francis for his contributions.

A detailed discussion ensued during which the following points were noted;

- The Committee Members agreed with the points made by Cllr Francis and shared similar examples of the delayed processing of ME's.
- That performance reports to track time scales can be reported to the Committee almost immediately upon request.
- Having checked the system prior to the meeting it was noted that backbench member ME's had been responded to within the time scales at a rate of 69.2% and the Mayor's enquiries were responded to within the timescale at a rate of 71.2% (these figures were up to August 21).
- Ms Chand sought clarification on the types of performance monitoring members wanted reporting on, in order to provide further information.
- Serious concerns were raised in terms of response times and quality of responses received from RSLs.
- It was noted that the Council had no jurisdiction over Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and would be unable to hold them to account or ask them to provide performance reports, however officers could continue to chase them for updates.
- Officers currently working to establish a Joint Forum with representatives from the local housing associations, officers and Councillors to have joint discussions about ME's as well as other matters.
- The Committee's general view was that it was not physically possible to provide this demanding service with just one member of staff.
- That the Information Governance Team support the officer in post to deal with ME's and noted that they were currently advertising for a new post for 6 months to help alleviate some of the pressures faced with processing ME's, as well as looking at technology to help and streamline processes.
- It was noted that the whole service would be going through a review, to understand the needs of the service, the statutory duties and the resources required. It was a detailed piece of work which would require 3-4 months for completion.

The Committee **Agreed** that the adoption of the policy be delayed and officers report back at the January GPC Meeting with a detailed report taking into consideration the feedback from the meeting, to provide robust performance monitoring figures, and to report back on the review of the service and exploring service budgets to see how sufficiently resourced this area of work required.

It was also **Agreed** an informal offline meeting to be arranged to update the Committee on the progress made with the review and get assurance that

performance monitoring reports were being collated before a new proposal is brought to the Committee.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

**Resolved**

1. Officers to reflect on the comments made and report back to the next Committee meeting with more detailed proposals for the Members Enquiry Policy and Process.

**4.3 Post Election Polling Places Review 2021**

Robert Curtis, Head of Elections, introduced the report which set out the review of polling places following the elections in May 2021. He explained that an informal/formal review took place after every election in the borough and if deemed necessary, amendments to polling places are brought to the General Purposes Committee for consideration and then to full Council for approval.

Mr Curtis highlighted that this was not a statutory review, as that occurred every 5 years and last took place in 2019 and a decision was then made in January 2020 to approve amendments to existing polling places. It was noted that this was essentially a voluntary post-election review undertaken at the behest of the Returning Officer to review the current situation following a number of changes that had occurred over the last 18 months to two years. Mr Curtis referred Members to the appendices in the report detailing the changes that have been implemented and those that were not implemented from the previous review.

It was noted that the review would take place over a period of six weeks and had commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> September and would continue until 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The review would enable any changes to be agreed and in place prior to the local elections scheduled for May 2022. As part of the review consultation, 53 disabled organisations in the borough, the existing polling places and Councillors had been written to for their comments on the existing polling places that used during elections. It was noted that all responses would be collated at the end of the review process and recommendations from the Returning Officer would then be reported back to the next GP Committee meeting with a view of taking the report to Full Council in January 2022 for a decision in time for any changes to be implemented before the elections in May 2022.

In response to a question Mr Curtis explained the consultation process used during the review, the timetable set for the review and the accessibility requirements that are taken into account when assessing polling places.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

**RESOLVED**

1. The report be noted.

#### **4.4 Dismissal Appeals - Process and Guidance**

Amanda Marcus, Divisional Director of HR, introduced the report which referred to a new dismissal appeals procedure. It was noted that a report was brought to the Committee in February 2021 and was followed by an in depth discussion with Members, Officers and Trade Unions resulting in the Committee asking management to reconsider options and report back to the committee with a different proposal. This took place in June 2021 and the General Purposes Committee supported the changes to the dismissal appeals panel to move to a model for a dismissal appeals panel to be supported by Members but with the decision maker being a Corporate Director.

The proposed process for conducting the dismissal appeal panels were detailed in the report as well as a proposed policy with best practises. Ms Marcus referred to submissions made by the Trade Unions which was circulated to Members at the meeting. She highlighted that the Trade Unions wanted it noted that their previous objections that were raised at General Purposes Committee in February remained with the view that the dismissal appeals should continue to be heard by a Member only panel. The trade unions also believed that it was important that this arrangement continues as it mitigates against organisational and institutional bias intending to always uphold management decisions and therefore ask the Committee to review the decision made in June to give sole responsibility to a Corporate Director. It was also noted that the Trade Unions had also given some really constructive feedback on the proposed policy which would be considered by Officers.

Ms Marcus then set out the approach for the process and put forward the proposal to implement the new policy from November 2021, she suggested implementing the new policy for a trial period of six months or over a set number of dismissal appeals and then review the policy again if Members were minded to do this.

In response to questions the following points were noted;

- Further clarification sought on the makeup of the proposed panel.
- That the proposed model of dismissal appeals would be moving in line with other boroughs across London.
- There would be a fair representation from all members of the panel however the final decision would be taken by the Chair of the panel (Corporate Director).
- The elected member on the panel would be selected from each political party on a rotational basis for each appeal.

Following a short discussion on the prospect of trialling this policy for a period of time, it was agreed that the policy be adopted, and it be reviewed after an 18 month period and for GPC to receive an update report on an annual basis.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

### **Resolved**

1. The revisions to the constitution to reflect the revised arrangements for appeals against dismissal, as set out in the report to GPC on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021 be agreed.
2. The amendments to the relevant policies and procedures to reflect the changes to the appeals process for dismissals be agreed.
3. The new policy for dismissal appeals panel be adopted and the new arrangements to be implemented with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021
4. The policy to be reviewed after 18 months
5. The General Purposes Committee to receive an update report on an annual basis.

#### **4.5 Update on Senior Recruitment, October 2021**

Amanda Marcus, Divisional Director, of HR and Organisational Development, briefly updated the Committee on the recent senior recruitment activity.

The Committee noted:

- That an offer had been made for the post for Director Adult Social Care.
- Director of Workforce, OD & Business Support, - recruitment process ongoing with final interviews to be held on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021.
- Director of Supporting Families (Children & Culture) - recruitment process ongoing with final interviews to be held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021.
- Recruitment to the post for the Corporate Director Resources and Governance - currently finalising the approach and timetable for each recruitment process and this was likely to commence in early new year.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

### **RESOLVED**

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

#### **4.6 Calculation of Appointments Sub-Committee Proportionality**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and explained that Council at its meeting on 30 September 2021 considered a report reviewing the proportionally calculation for the Council Committees. Following that review, the General Purposes Committee are asked to consider the proportionally implications for its sub-committees and agree their arrangements. It was noted that opposition group representation would

alternate between recruitment rounds as and when they were required and both groups were in agreement with this arrangement.

The Committee noted and agreed the changes set out.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

### **RESOLVED**

1. The amendment to the arrangements for nominating Councillors to serve on an Appointment Sub-Committee as set out in Paragraph 3.6 be agreed.
2. That it be noted that no change is required to the Employee Appeals Sub-Committee as its membership is drawn from Members of the General Purposes Committee which therefore determines the opposition Member who can be selected.

#### **4.7 Constitution Review**

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the regular constitution review report and highlighted the changes detailed in the report;

At the request of the Chair, Mr Mannion referred Members to each of the decisions that required consideration and the following was noted;

##### Part B

- General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference – change to allow general reports on employee appeals and related matters.

### **AGREED**

##### Part B

- Standards Advisory Committee Terms of Reference – (change agreed by SAC) to highlight their powers to report to Council as required,

### **AGREED**

##### Part B

- Functions of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Directors – to include reference to make it clear that the Monitoring Officer has direct reporting line to Chief Executive.

It was noted that following suggestions made by the General Purposes Committee during the Senior Management Review, the structure now includes the Monitoring Officer's direct reporting line to the Chief Executive.

The delegated powers for the Deputy Chief Executive were also set out.

**AGREED**

Part B - Council Procedure Rules

- Full Executive Procedure Rules should be presented at the AGM

**AGREED**

Part B - Council Procedure Rules

- Option to include a noting report to the Council agenda setting out any Call-Ins received by the Executive since the last Council meeting.

Mr Mannion explained that Full Council had no formal role in Call-Ins so they could not overturn a decision. However, in line with transparency it was proposed that a regular noting report be put to Council setting out any Call-Ins received, it was highlighted that the report would be for noting as opposed to being for decision. Mr Mannion highlighted the fact that this may take up time at Council meetings, however Officers remained neutral on this matter and sought views from the Committee.

The Committee's general view was that the current system where Call-Ins are reported to Overview & Scrutiny allowed sufficient time to discuss and consider the Call-In, before referring back to Cabinet for reconsideration, was fit for purpose. It was noted that the Constitution sets out distinctive responsibilities and functions for Cabinet, Council and each Committees which work well and therefore there was no need for noting at Council meetings.

Members were also concerned about the time this would take at Full Council meetings when no decision making was required and therefore questioned whether this would be a good use of time at Council meetings.

It was clear that there was no strong view either way from Officers regarding this option and was mainly about transparency. The overall committee opinion on this proposal was to **reject** this proposal as there were procedures already in place for reporting Call-Ins.

**REJECT**

Part B - Council Procedure Rules

- Clarification of Member questions rules and making it clearer where the Mayor is expected to respond.

Mr Mannion explained that further clarifications were required to be introduced to the Executive Scheme of Delegation on Member question rules which had been out of date and did not reflect what the current practice was. Therefore, the proposal is to amend them to clarify what questions the Mayor should be answering and those that Cabinet Members should be responding to.

**AGREED**

Part B - Council Procedure Rules

- To include a new section on webcasts, virtual attendance and hybrid meetings.

**AGREED**

Part C

- Financial and Contract Procedures – to bring the thresholds into line with the Key Decision thresholds (raising them from the current £250k). Anything between £250k and £1M should be published on website as an officer decision.

Mr Mannion explained that the Council's Key Decision thresholds were updated in 2019 to include a new financial threshold of £1 Million for most decisions. At the time not all the financial and procurement thresholds were adjusted to bring them into line. The appendices in the report set out a number of proposed revisions to bring these thresholds into line with the standard Key Decision thresholds. This would mean that contracts under £1 million would be considered officer decisions and would be published as Officer Decisions and anything over £1 million would be key decisions. However, anything that was politically sensitive would be taken to Cabinet for decision regardless of the value.

Mr Mannion also highlighted the request for the Monitoring Officer to be given delegated authority in case further related amendments were identified in relation to the above decision.

In response to a question, it was noted that a full benchmarking exercise was done on the financial thresholds in 2019 when the Council brought in the key decision thresholds and at that time London Borough of Tower Hamlets was towards the top end of the thresholds, a quarter of the authorities in London didn't have a threshold and used the word 'significant' as a key decision and there were a couple who had similar thresholds and the rest were below this figure.

**AGREED**

Part C - Employment Procedure Rules

- Change to allow the Chief Executive to make interim appointments for 6 months rather than 3 months
- A new requirement that permanent appointments to Monitoring Officer or Chief Finance Officer roles must be approved by Council.

### **AGREED**

The Committee noted and agreed the changes set out.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

### **RESOLVED**

1. Consider the changes in Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.14 of the report and set out in detail in Appendices 1 – 4 to the report.
2. Agree the changes in Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.13 and as set out in Appendices 1 – 4 to the report.
3. To note that the new Employee Appeals process agreed by the Committee on 24 June 2021 will come into effect from 1 November 2021.
4. Note the changes in Paragraphs 3.14 and as set out in Appendices 1 – 4 to the report.
5. Note that the proposed new Member Code of Conduct set out at Appendix 5 may be submitted to Council on 17 November 2021 for consideration, subject to any final comments of the Standards Advisory Committee.
6. To delegate to the Monitoring Officer any consequential changes resulting from the above and to reflect any decisions made at the meeting.

### **5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

The Committee extended their thanks to Ms Amanda Harcus for all her hard work and contributions through the years and acknowledged her integral role in helping transform the borough.

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

**7.2 Forthcoming Restructures - Staffing Implications**

Amanda 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.

Three roles was listed in the report.

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

**RESOLVED**

1. That the three dismissals 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 8.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin  
General Purposes Committee