

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.00 P.M. ON MONDAY, 10 JANUARY 2022

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

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)

Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Danny Hassell
Councillor Zenith Rahman

Members Present Virtually:

Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Motin Uz-Zaman

Apologies:

Councillor Tarik Khan

Officers Present:

Farhad Ahmed	– (Traded and Business Development Manager)
Perveez Akhtar	– (Information Governance and Complaints Manager)
Kevin Bartle	– (Corporate Director, Resources & Section 151 Officer)
Raj Chand	– (Director, Customer Services)
Pat Chen	– (Head of HR, HAC and Children & Culture)
Ann Corbett	– (Director, Community Safety)
Robert Curtis	– (Head of Electoral Services)
Keith Stanger	– (Head of Safer Neighbourhood Operations)
Barry Scales	– (Project Lead Community Safety Transformation)
Simmi Yesmin	– (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)
Will Tuckley	– (Chief Executive)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

2. MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 5th October 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

3. WORK PLAN

The General Purposes Committee Work Plan was noted.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Local Authority Governor Applications

The Committee 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 Use of Fixed Penalty Notices for Breaches of Byelaws and Setting of Penalties. Sections 15 – 18 London Local Authorities Act (LLA) 2004 – Facilitated Through London Councils’ Transport and Environment Committee (TEC)

Ann Corbett, Director of Community Safety introduced the report and explained that anti-social behaviour (ASB) was a top priority for the Council and its residents. She explained that in 2017 the Council consulted with residents and published an ambitious ASB blueprint for action, in this blueprint the Council committed to utilising all of its powers to tackle the issues that impact upon the quality of life for residents as residents had expressed the need for more enforcement and visibility. It was noted that the Council had a large number of byelaws, and they covered a broad sweep of prohibited activity in places particularly such as parks and open spaces.

Ms Corbett explained that currently the only means to deal with breaches of byelaws was by way of a prosecution, this had proved to be inefficient, legally not cost effective and underused. It was highlighted that in Tower Hamlets in the years 2017/18 and 2018/19 combined, there were only fourteen prosecutions, of which six were withdrawn, two were not issued and only six were prosecuted. It was believed that there were inconsistencies as to how Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) were able to dispose of some

offences by means of fixed penalty notices (FPNs). Since April 2021, THEOs had issued approximately 600 FPNs for a variety of offences including the use of nitrous oxide, however there were other offences which were covered by byelaws but were not being used and so, THEOs were often on the street dealing with difficult and complex issues of anti-social behaviour and unable to effectively use the full range of powers available to them. Therefore, Ms Corbett asked Members to comment on the proposal put forward in the report and agree to the submission of this proposal for consideration by the London Councils Transport and Environmental Committee to authorise the use of FPNs for byelaws for the authority and set the penalty fees.

In response to questions the following was noted;

- Concerns were raised as to why Mudchute Park and St Andrews Wharf were not included in the list of parks and open spaces where byelaws applied. Officers confirmed that the list was compiled in 2012 and this would need to be checked to see why this was excluded.
- Further clarification was sought on whether the byelaws covered parks and open spaces across the whole of the borough. Officers confirmed that they would need to seek further clarification from Legal Services on this matter and would report back to the Committee at a future meeting.
- Officers to seek clarity on whether byelaws applied to privately managed areas such as St Katherine Dock, Limehouse basin, Canal path etc.
- It was noted that the FPNs were not proposed for the full list of byelaws listed in the schedule but were only for those listed on pages 34-37 of the report.
- That noise complaints from residential dwellings would need to be reported to the Noise Team/ Environmental Health via the normal statutory route.
- These byelaws would be encouraged and promoted, to ensure people were reporting issues, as well as this, reported offences and the number of FPNs would be closely monitored to help build up intelligence allowing THEOs to target hotspot areas and identify the issues that are being raised.
- Council's communication challenge channels and social media could be used to help prevent and deter breaches and also help promote the byelaws in place.

It was Agreed that officers would amend the report, to include clarification on whether the byelaws would apply to all parks and open spaces in the borough and investigate why some areas were not included in the list of grounds to which byelaws applied and this to be reported back to a future meeting of the General Purposes Committee.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

Resolved

1. To note the comments made on the proposal.
2. Officers to reflect on the comments made by the Committee and report back to a future General Purposes Committee meeting.

4.3 Post-election polling places review 2021

Robert Curtis, Head of Elections, introduced the report which set out the review of the polling places, it was noted that the review had concluded, and the location of polling places had to be formally agreed by Full Council to enable arrangements to be put in place for May 2022 elections.

Mr Curtis explained that the post-election places review took place informally after every election and this review had been held primarily because of some changes to polling places that had to be put in place since the last formal review undertaken in 2019. It was noted that in addition to the polls that took place in 2019, the impact of Covid precautionary arrangements had had a detrimental effect on the provision of certain polling places in 2021.

It was noted that there were 75 polling places that were used within Tower Hamlets, which were then split into 109-110 polling stations and that it was felt necessary to review the places that had been used following the extraordinary General Election in 2019. Mr Curtis said that not all 75 polling places had been secured, as there were 6-7 polling places yet to be confirmed despite the fact that they had been written to numerous times over the last 12 months. It was noted that this task would be prioritised by Officers, who would be working to confirm and secure these remaining places by end of January 2022 in time for polling cards to be sent to the printers.

Mr Curtis referred Members to the report in the agenda and detailed the legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling places, the accessibility requirements, the timetable for the review and the responses to the review.

Mr Curtis then referred to the comments and proposals made by Cllr Peter Golds during the review and highlighted the actions that were being undertaken as a result. It was noted that following the review there were six polling places where observations had resulted in alternative arrangements being sought, continued work having to be undertaken and the retention of some of the places allocated in May 2021. Mr Curtis confirmed that this work and any other proposals received was to be prioritised and it was anticipated that this would be completed by the end of January 2022 subject to any covid precautionary measures which has had previously impacted on site visits.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.
2. To recommend the report to Full Council on 19 January 2022.
3. To note that where the allocation of a polling place has yet to be determined that the Returning Officer make the final decision to allocate for the polls to be held in May 2022.

4.4 Elections/Polls update – Thursday 5 May 2022

Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, introduced the report by informing the Committee of the administrative progress and the preparations being undertaken for the Mayoral and the Borough Council Elections in May 2022. Mr Tuckley emphasised that having reviewed the experiences of the 2014 elections and each of the electoral events since then, have fed into the management plan for the May 2022 elections. Mr Tuckley stressed how important and significant the forthcoming elections were in his role as Returning Officer in two ways; firstly, the access to democracy to maximise people's ability to take part in the democratic process and secondly by making sure that the process was safe and secure despite having had challenges in the past. To address these two items, a project group had been established which was chaired by Mr Tuckley himself and included representatives from the Police Service, as well as other services across the Council and the Electoral Commission.

Mr Robert Curtis, referred to the report contained in the agenda and highlighted the hierarchy structure which was slightly different than the elections in 2014 and 2018, this included the introduction of three formal deputies with full powers, the Director of Legal (Monitoring Officer), the Corporate Director Health, Adults and Community and Deputy Chief Executive and Mr Curtis himself.

It was confirmed that several meetings had taken place with external stakeholders to assist in the project planning and risk assessments being undertaken. The membership of the Project Board was referred to and it was noted that IT, Communications and Facilities would have separate delivery plans which would feed into the main project plan.

It was noted that the Police would be putting together their own project plan which will cover the whole of London but there would also be elements in there that would cover and relate to Tower Hamlets specifically and these would be presented at the Project Board. Mr Curtis mentioned that the publication of the notice of election was Monday 28th March 2022, when the election would formally start, and this was the date for when purdah would commence for the Council. The implications of the purdah would be formally communicated to all Members and Officers directly from the Monitoring Officer.

Mr Curtis confirmed that the Count venue would be East Winter Gardens in Canary Wharf. The count would be separated into two separate days with the verification of the ballot boxes and count for Mayoral Election on Friday 6th May 2022 and the Borough Council Elections would commence on Saturday 7th May 2022. It was noted that due to Covid there would continue to be a number of safety measures in place that were previously used for the GLA elections in 2021.

Concerns were raised about the number of people that would attend for the verification process which could potentially include the Mayoral candidates, all the Borough Council candidates as well as party agents/representatives and that could result in a huge number of people attending for the first part of the process. The Committee were assured that there had been lessons learnt from the 2014 elections and that there would be robust security measures and controls in place and guests invited to observe the count would be required to provide photograph barcoded invitation upon on entry as well as this the invitation list would be tightly managed and controlled. Mr Tuckley said that the venue had the capacity to accommodate the numbers anticipated but these issues were being tested strenuously and if there were any risks, then other mechanisms would be explored to ensure that the venue is safe and secure.

The Chair thanked Mr Tuckley and Mr Curtis for the update and requested that Members of the Committee are kept up-to date with the progress and preparations leading up to the elections in May 2022.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.

4.5 Employee Relations Casework Policy Quarterly Update Report Q2

Pat Chen, Head of HR and Organisational Development, introduced the update report on the management of the Employees relations casework and policies within the Council, she detailed the progress made to-date, the considerations for the future development of case management and the data trends for the last 12 month period. It was noted that the number of cases has reduced by 2/3 since the team had been set up to manage cases and the time to resolve cases had also dropped significantly. Ms Chen also confirmed that 70 officers had been trained as investigators to manage the casework. It was noted that there had been some new revised policies and officers were now working on a number of new policies and further revisions to existing policies were also underway.

The Committee welcomed the report and recorded their thanks for the all the good work that's been done and noted the significant turnaround from previous years where there were huge backlogs of cases and delays in HR

processes. The Committee noted the improvements made around polices over the past couple of years and were pleased to note this piece of work was coming to its conclusion. The Committee suggested that having noted the progress made, they were assured this good work would continue and therefore were of the view that a quarterly update to the Committee in such detail was no longer required and proposed to receive a report detailing updates, trends and key pieces of work on an annual basis.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.
2. That the Committee receive an update report on Employee Relations casework and polices annually.

4.6 Member Enquiries Policy and Process

Raj Chand, Director of Customer Services, introduced the report which proposed to improve the Council's Member Enquiry (ME) Process with the new ME policy and process which simplifies existing protocols by reducing the number of steps interested parties needed to take in managing ME's and also addressed historic issues around the delivery of the service. She explained that there had been extensive discussion since the report was previously considered at the General Purposes Committee meeting on 5th October 2021 where the decision was deferred pending a number of actions. It was noted that the report now included an update on the actions and progress that has been made since, it also provided an update on continued improvements of the member enquiry process that is being undertaken as part of the wider Information Governance Team and Service Review which was ongoing.

Ms Chand asked Members to note the report which recommends the Committee to adopt the new Member Enquiry Policy and Process which would in turn help improve the member enquiry process and provide improved outcomes for residents. Ms Chand took the opportunity to thank Members for their continuous engagement as part of this review and the ongoing progress made as a result of their input.

Councillor Golds expressed his discontent with the new policy and process based on his recent experiences of receiving delayed and poor-quality responses, and then briefly highlighted examples of the errors and inconsistencies in the process. Cllr Golds believed the system was poor and not fit for purposes and wished for his dissent against the proposal set out in the report to be noted.

Ms Chand welcomed the feedback and responded by referring the Committee to the actions set out in the report to improve the process which Members had been engaged in. She also highlighted the positive dialogue between the

Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and how having met with individual RSL's had helped update data in order to improve the speed of responses, as well as this the actual system upgrade which would also help with the improvements set out.

Ms Chand explained that the new policy would ensure that Members are copied into responses and are also given direct case officer names from external agencies as well as officers that are dealing with cases within the Council, to allow Members to be able to contact the Officer dealing with the enquiry directly as well as using the Information Governance Service to be kept updated. Ms Chand concluded that this policy and process would be kept under continuous review so that it could be continuously improved for residents and Councillors.

The Committee acknowledged the concerns raised regarding the speed and quality of responses but were generally in agreement with the policy and process. It was noted from the update report that resources to deal with Member Enquires across the Information Governance team were being reviewed as part of the wider Information Governance Review which was taking place and additional support with the ME process had been arranged till May 2022. The Committee also welcomed the commitment made in terms of continuous review and improvement of the service to allow on-going scrutiny, maintenance and updating of the document. The Committee asked that good proactive monitoring be undertaken and that the sufficient capacity of staff for this area of work be monitored and kept under review.

On a vote of 3 for and 1 against it was AGREED, by a majority vote by the General Purposes Committee;

Councillor Peter Golds asked for his dissent to be recorded.

RESOLVED

1. The report be noted.
2. That the Members Enquiry Policy and Process be adopted.

4.7 Member Induction Programme 2022

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and referred the Committee to the draft Member Induction Plan in preparations for the May 2022 elections. Mr Mannion explained that the Plan had incorporated the changes taken on board from feedback and extensive consultation with Officers, Members, CLT directorates, Members Seminars and the Standards Committee. The core elements of the induction plan were noted which included, administrative functions and setup, statutory/corporate duties, introductions and orientation, training and seminars on specific subject areas.

Mr Mannion highlighted that this was the final draft as the overall structure was unlikely to change much, subject to small changes around adding and removing dates amending timings, amalgamating, or dividing some of the seminars and any feedback from the Committee.

The following feedback from the Committee was noted;

- Clarity was sought on the purpose of some of the seminar sessions whether it were to support members with casework, understanding the policy or how to shape and influence policies and it was suggested that it would be useful to distinguish and detail which sessions were workshops, training, or information sharing.
- To prioritise sessions that would immediately impact on Members, such as having the session on 'what makes a good Members Enquiry' further up the plan as opposed to the session on 'corporate parenting and safeguarding' which could be held slightly later in the plan.
- To explore the option of a weekend session to cover the core elements of the induction and then spacing out the trainings and seminars according to relevance and need.
- That a contact information list including officer details and service areas to be made available to Members at the onset.
- To look at the option of linking Culture and Sport/Leisure Services together with Public and Mental Health.
- Consider moving seminars on Finance up on the induction plan.
- To consider using external facilitators to help facilitate some of the sessions as it would allow Members to get a different perspective and a better context of how the things work across local government as opposed to just Tower Hamlets.

Mr Mannion welcomed the feedback and responded to the following;

- That he would speak to the relevant directorates and would look at the descriptions of the sessions and specify what types of sessions they were.
- Feedback from Member seminars, indicated a strong support to space out the sessions for Members to comprehend learning.
- That an information list with details of key officers and services would be made available to Members and all information would also be available via the Members Hub.
- That various open afternoons/evenings sessions would be held by Democratic Services to help and support Members with questions/queries.

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

It was noted that Members represented the Council at a number of meetings of Outside Bodies and there were no proper channels where the work being carried out could be reported to. The Chair suggested that the Committee look

at ways for Members to feedback and report on the work that is being done on outside bodies where Members are representing the Council.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted the good work being undertaken.

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. To note the comments made on the report.
2. Subject to the comments made, the final draft Induction Plan to be agreed.
3. The Committee to receive a further update report at its 22nd March meeting.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business to consider.

6. EXCLUSION OF 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 Applications - Restricted Appendices

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

7.2 Update on Senior Leadership Restructure and Senior Recruitment - January 2022

Pat Chen, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, introduced the report, and briefly updated the Committee on the recent

recruitment activity to senior roles arising from the Senior Leadership Review previously considered by the General Purposes Committee in December 2020.

The Committee noted:

- The current position on the recruitment to senior management vacancies in the Council structure was noted.
- The establishment of a Chief Executive's Office and the changes in reporting lines and structure was noted with the Monitoring Officer now directly reporting to the Chief Executive.
- That the new structure demonstrated a better distribution of responsibilities.
- That any extension to senior interim positions was discussed and consulted with The Mayor.
- That Mr Kevin Bartle, Interim Corporate Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer) would remain in post till Autumn until the recruitment to the post for the Corporate Director Resources is finalised.

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

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. The current position on the recruitment to senior management vacancies in the Council structure was noted.
2. The establishment of a Chief Executive's office and the changes in reporting lines and structure was noted.
3. Agreed that the Monitoring Officer have delegated authority to make any changes to the constitution in relation to this structure and that following any changes the updated constitution will be reported to the Committee for noting.
4. Agreed to rename the original Corporate Director Resources post to Corporate Director Resources (and Section 151 Officer).
5. Agreed that Mr Kevin Bartle is to be the holder of the Section 151 designation until such a time as the post is permanently filled or another appointment is made.

7.3 Funding of Historic GLC / ILEA Pension Liabilities

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

Accordingly, the General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. Agreed to proceed with the proposed solution for the funding of the historic GLA/ILEA pension deficit by entering into a legal agreement with the LPFA.

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee