

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 21 JUNE 2022

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

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled
Councillor Kabir Ahmed
Councillor Musthak Ahmed
Councillor Abu Chowdhury
Councillor James King
Councillor Maium Talukdar
Councillor Abdal Ullah

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Maisha Begum

Apologies:

Councillor Asma Begum
Councillor Gulam Kibria
Choudhury

Officers Present in Person:

Matthew Mannion	(Head of Democratic Services)
Will Tuckley	(Chief Executive)
Justina Bridgeman	Democratic Services Officer (Committee)

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Farhad Ahmed	(Traded and Business Development Manager)
Janet Fasan	(Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Musrat Zaman	(Director of HR, OD & Business Support Services)
Paul Hallett	(Deputy Electoral Services Manager)
Stacey Kennedy-Clarke	(Deputy Electoral Services Manager - Registration)
Pat Chen	(Head of HR, HAC and Children & Culture)

1. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair requested nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2022/2023.

Councillor Maium Talukdar proposed Councillor Musthak Ahmed for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Kabir Ahmed.

There were no further nominations.

The General Purposes Committee;

RESOLVED

1. That Councillor Musthak Ahmed is elected as Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2022-2023.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disposable pecuniary interests.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 22 March 2022 were noted, as attendees were not present. The minutes held on 25 May 2022 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

4. WORK PLAN

The Committee reviewed the work plan for the first meeting of the municipal year and the following were proposed:

Review on Employment Appeals and a review on Polling Stations

- Agreed to receive updates on whether these items can be reviewed at the next General Purposes Committee scheduled for 13 October 2022.

RESOLVED

1. That the General Purposes Work Plan be noted.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 Local Authority Governor Applications June 2022

Farhad Ahmed, Head of Governance Information and Traded Services, introduced the report which detailed three recommended Governors be appointed to Tower Hamlets maintained primary schools and three reappointments.

As this was the first meeting of the municipal year with new administration, Mr. Ahmed informed the Committee that the summary of all BAME Governors will be submitted at the next General Purposes Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the recommendations for Governors be agreed.
2. A summary of all BAME Governors be submitted at the next General Purposes Committee.
3. The report be noted.

5.2 Post-Election report - Thursday 5 May 2022

Will Tuckley, Chief Executive Officer, introduced the report in his capacity as the Returning Officer. The report detailed the administrative arrangements put in place by the Returning Officer for the Mayoral and Borough Ward polls, held on Thursday 5th May 2022. The report is an information item only.

In response to the presentation, the Committee noted:

- A highly successful administered election/s
- Concerns about campaigning outside polling stations and clarification on any complaints logged.
- Concerns regarding disproportionate third-party reporting of family figures in Tower Hamlets, when other local authorities had similar numbers.
- Information had been received of postal votes not arriving on time for some electors to return and this should be looked at and any lessons learnt as to why this was the case.
- Clarification on the number of poll counting staff and any recruitment issues.
- Clarification on why poll counting took place at East Wintergardens, rather than the Excel Centre and why observers were not provided water.
- Clarification on the two wards requiring informal double checking and why this occurred.

Mr. Tuckley said that as long as campaigning outside polling stations did not intimidate constituents, this is a legitimate act. A government bill was quoted by many complainants but was incorrect because the bill was not enacted.

Tower Hamlets worked in conjunction with the Police regarding complaints which were formally logged by both sides. There are no complaints pending. It was agreed that third-party reporting on family voting to Tower Hamlets and appeared prevalent in the figures reported in other local authorities.

The numbers of postal packs not received, although regrettable were minimal. Officers can look into the number of cases if required. Counting staff were

recruited based on the capacity of the venue and numbers of staff withdrawing on polling day at the count was minimal.

The decision to hold the counts at the East Wintergardens was made as it had the capacity to accommodate both polls, it has the best quality accommodation and local services and was a better financial option by some way.

Mr. Tuckley apologised for not providing water to observers and confirmed decisions on re-counts are made at the Returning Officer's discretion. The informal double checking took place in two wards where there was an estimated small gap between the last elected candidate and the following one listed not elected and this affected two long standing councillors who appeared to be losing their seats. The names of the two wards in question will be submitted to the Committee for information.

Electors/residents were encouraged to vote in the run up to the election via a comprehensive communications engagement programme linked with the Electoral Commission. The Returning Officer, Electoral Commission and Tower Hamlets Communication team had done a great deal to encourage electoral registration and access to the various voting methods available.

As a result of the controversy over elections in Tower Hamlets in 2014, the Returning Officer had chosen not to take his fees for any local elections, this the case since 2015.

The Chair thanked Mr. Tuckley and the Electoral Services department for their success in conducting the election.

RESOLVED

1. The names of the two wards which required informal re-counts be submitted to the Committee for information.
2. The report be noted.

5.3 Annual report on employee relations casework and policies

Musrat Zaman, Director of Workforce, OD and Business Support, introduced the annual report which detailed the level and management of employee relations casework with the Council and highlighted progress made. This report relates to the period from April 2021 – March 2022.

In response to the presentation, the Committee noted:

- Clarification on why the report was moved from quarterly to annual submittance.
- As the General Purposes Committee now consists of Members from the new administration, a proposal was made for the report to be reverted back to quarterly submittance.
- Clarification on the ratio of panellists.

- Proposal to reinstate the formal three-member appeals panel.

Pat Chen, Head of HR clarified that the agreement to submit the report on an annual basis was made at the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 01 January 2022. At that time, the Committee were assured the good work would continue and therefore took the view that a quarterly update to the Committee in such detail was no longer required. A proposal was made to receive a report detailing updates on an annual basis going forward.

Musrat Zaman reported that the new appeals process had been agreed by the General Purposes Committee and assured members that appropriate training for managers was provided and that independence is built into the Disciplinary Process. Furthermore, she confirmed that Trade Unions are involved in every step of the process and provide an additional level of scrutiny.

The Committee were urged to consider that 4 dismissals had taken place (workforce of circa 4,000 staff) and that the current process was robust, and these decisions are the responsibility of Officers with one Member on the appeal panel. Any changes can also not be unilaterally made and may require a change of constitution through Full Council.

Mr. Tuckley advised the Committee to look carefully at the evidence before proposing further changes as more evaluation is required. Employment tribunals may result from appeals and decisions are usually taken by officers in most local authorities. It was noted that Members who attended previous tribunals, felt it highly inappropriate for them to be part of that process. This then presents a greater risk to the organisation.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be reverted back to quarterly submittance to the General Purposes Committee.
2. That the report be presented to a future Committee meeting examining options around Employee Appeals processes, including exploring the re-introduction of the previous formal Employee Appeals Sub Committee
3. That the report be noted.

5.4 Constitution Update Report

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services Governance, introduced the committee to the updates for the new municipal year 22/23. The committee were asked to:

- Note the General Purposes Committee's role as general overseer of the Council's Constitution.
- Confirm whether it wishes to undertake reviews of any sections of the document.
- Note the changes set out in Paragraph's 3.12 to 3.14 of the report.
- Agree the changes set out in Paragraph's 3.15 to 3.17 of the report

In response to the presentation, the Committee noted:

- Clarification on why sections 25 regarding investigatory powers and section 26 on the use of surveillance were included.
- Clarification on the amended paragraph 3.15 regarding accepting personal gifts.

Mr. Mannion said that the aforementioned sections were added as Members are required to have oversight in the Audit Committee, as per legislation. The paragraph change relates to discussing any gifts received with your line manager, which may not be possible after acceptance in some instances. The new change states that in these cases this does not need discussions in advance, not does it require recording in the Gifts and Hospitality register.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted, and the Constitution changes be agreed.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No resolution to exclude the press and public was passed at this meeting.

7. RESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 Local Authority Governor Applications - June 2022 - Restricted Appendices

The exempt appendices related to the school Governor appointments and the Forthcoming Restructures were noted.

7.2 Forthcoming Restructures - Staffing Implications

This report was withdrawn

The meeting ended at 8.19 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled
General Purposes Committee