

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 25 JUNE 2019

COMMITTEE ROOM ONE - TOWN HALL MULBERRY PLACE

Members Present:

Councillor Helal Uddin (Chair)
Councillor Kevin Brady (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Asma Islam
Councillor Peter Golds
Councillor Amina Ali
Councillor Denise Jones
Councillor Shad Chowdhury

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Marc Francis

Apologies:

Councillor Faroque Ahmed

Officers Present:

Runa Basit	– (Head of School Governance & Information)
Holly Bell	– (Trainee Solicitor)
Amanda Marcus	– Divisional Director of HR
Afazul Hoque	– (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Asmat Hussain	– (Corporate Director, Governance and Monitoring Officer)
Clare Matthews	– Strategy & Policy Officer
Will Tuckley	– (Chief Executive)
Neville Murton	– Corporate Director, Resources)
Matthew Mannion	– (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Simmi Yesmin	– (Democratic Services)

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019-2020

The Chair sought nominations for the election of Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year 2019-2020.

Councillor Asma Islam nominated Councillor Kevin Brady as Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2019-2020. Councillors Denise Jones and Shad Chowdhury both seconded the nomination.

There were no further nominations.

RESOLVED

1. That Councillor Kevin Brady be elected as Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2019-2020.

2. DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were received.

Councillor Shad Choudhury, declared a personal interest on item 5.10, Spitalfields and Banglatown Community Governance Review Update on the basis that he was a Ward Councillor and a resident in Spitalfields and Banglatown.

Councillor Denise Jones declared a personal interest on item 5.10, Spitalfields and Banglatown Community Governance Review Update on the basis that she owned a shop in Brick Lane (Banglatown).

3. MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 7th May 2019, were agreed as a correct record.

4. WORK PLAN

The work plan of future agenda items was received and noted by the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the Work Plan be noted

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 General Purposes Committee, Terms of Reference 2019-2020

Mathew 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 2019-2020.

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 Appointments Sub Committee

Mathew 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 2019/20 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.

5.3 Establishment of Employee Appeal Sub- Committee

Mathew 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 2019/20 be established.

5.4 Local Authority Governor Applications

Runa Basit, Head of School Governance and Information, introduced the report, which detailed applications for Local Authority Governor re-appointments at six Tower Hamlets maintained schools.

The Committee considered the report, and agreed to nominate the applicants for the school governor positions.

Ms Basit informed the Committee that following on from the last meeting of the General Purposes Committee, Governor Services had been working to gather and obtain equality information and the demographic of Local Authority Governors currently living the borough and the breakdown of equality information for governors overall. This work was progressing well and a full summary of the findings would be produced at the next General Purposes Committee in October.

It was also noted that Ms Basit was currently reviewing how new Governor appointments/nominations are made and processed, and what due diligence checks are undertaken before an application is brought to the Committee. This review would also be reported back to a future Committee meeting.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Ms Basit for the work being undertaken.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That the following applicants for re-appointment to Local Authority School Governor positions as set below be approved;

Mowlem Primary School- Di Roome
English Martyrs RC Primary School – Michael Topley
Christ Church CoE Primary School – Mike Tyler
London East Alternative Provision – Percy Aggett
Columbia Market Nursery School – Tonje Pettersen
Elizabeth Selby Infant School – Oliver Hopwood

5.5 Update on Senior Recruitment - June 2019

Amanda Harcus, Divisional Director, HR, presented the report which provided an update on recent senior recruitment activity.

The Committee noted:

- That the position of the Divisional Director, Housing, Place Directorate had been offered and accepted.
- That there were three Divisional Directorate posts to be recruited over the next three months.
- Members extended their thanks to Amanda Harcus and the HR Team for all their work on the recruitment process.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED to:

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

5.6 Constitution Review Update

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and took members through the latest report on the ongoing Constitution Review. It was noted that the overall review of the Constitution would improve the ease of use and navigation of the Constitution, revising decision making rules to ensure decisions can be taken at the appropriate level and allowing easier updating of supporting documentation and procedures with the aim of it being presented for consideration at Council at its meeting on 17 July 2019.

It was noted that this had been the first meeting that the Committee had reviewed a draft of the whole document including the proposed changes to the Financial and Contractual Procedure Rules.

Mr Mannion drew Members attention to pages 62-62 and highlighted the substantive changes that had been made to the draft document since the last time it had been reviewed by the General Purposes Committee.

Neville Murton, Corporate Director, Resources, briefly updated the Committee on the Council's Financial Regulations which formed part of the Constitution. It was noted that the Financial Regulations set out the financial policies and principles of the Council and provided the framework for managing its financial affairs. It was highlighted that the current composition of the Council's Financial Regulation provided content that was comparable to that published by other local authorities. However, it was noted that there were a number of changes that were required in line with the new financial management code of CITFA and these would be actioned and presented with the full Constitution to Council in July.

Responses to specific questions raised at the last General Purposes Committee in relation to Torbay Council call-in procedures were noted.

Following discussions, Members agreed that Officers continue their work with the intention to present the final Constitution at the Council meeting in July. It was noted that if the reviews of any individual sections were incomplete at that stage, the existing version of that section would be presented to ensure that a full Constitution could be agreed together. Any further amendments could then be agreed as part of the next Constitution review session.

Councillor Peter Golds asked that his thanks to all Members of the General Purposes Committee for their contributions be recorded. He considered that the engagement and discussion around the Constitution had been excellent and a big improvement on previous reviews.

It was Agreed that Mr Mannion would send a note to Members of the Committee if any substantial changes are made to the Constitution before it is presented to Full Council in July.

Members extended their thanks to Mr Mannion for all his work on the Constitution Review

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED to:

1. That all four Parts of the Constitution were reviewed and noted.
2. The responses to specific questions raised by the General Purposes Committee at its last meeting were noted.
3. It was confirmed that the Constitution should be presented for consideration to Council on 17 July 2019.
4. It was agreed that minor amendments can continue to be made to the draft constitution in advance of the Council meeting on 17 July with General Purposes Committee Members to be informed of any such changes.

5.7 Update on Tower Rewards

It was noted that background information papers were presented at the meeting, in respect to item 5.7, Trade Union Submission on Tower Rewards and a copy of the Chief Executive's message on Tower Rewards which was published in TH Now on 25 April 2019. Both documents were noted by Members of the General Purposes Committee.

Amanda Harcus, Divisional Director HR & OD, introduced the report and briefly updated Members on the current position on the Tower Rewards and the progress to date. Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report which detailed the activity since the proposals had been launched in January 2019.

Comprehensive feedback had been received from staff, managers and trade unions and Officers were using this to revise and review the draft proposals on terms, conditions and benefits. Once this work has been completed a revised proposal would be presented to CLT to consider and make decisions on the content of final proposals for change. Following this, the revised proposals would be shared formally with the Trade Unions and in a similar way as the initial launch, a series of briefings for managers, staff meetings and frequently asked questions will accompany the final proposals. Ms Harcus stressed that management were keen to reach a collective agreement on the revised proposal document.

In response to questions the following was noted:

- That following consultation, trade unions had indicated that any proposals should be removed or there would be strike action.
- That the trade unions have held indicative ballots for strike action and it was apparent that all three unions have received positive responses in relation to support for strike action.
- That staff have been more understanding when there has been direct briefings and when they have understood the underlying principles.
- That there were some negative impacts, such as removing severance pay, however, it is proposed to reinvest this into the current workforce through the proposed revised LBTH grade structure.
- Members raised serious concerns about possible staff strike action and how this would impact Council Services.
- Members encouraged Officers to work hard and negotiate with the trade unions to reach a collective agreement on the proposals.
- That all views and feedback had been listened to, taken on board and Officers were currently working on a new set of proposals.
- It was Agreed that officers would report back to the Committee once a new set of proposals were agreed.
- It was suggested that a dedicated session on the Tower Rewards be scheduled for Members of the General Purposes Committee to review once a new set of proposals have been agreed.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. The current position on the current progress in relation to the implementation of the Reward Strategy be noted.

5.8 Council's Governance Arrangements

Holly Bell, Lawyer Civil Litigation, introduced the report and explained the statutory position relating to the Council's current governance arrangements. She explained that the adoption of the current model was a result of a referendum, a 10 year moratorium against any further changes in the governance structure. This commenced from the May 2000 referendum and expires on 5th May 2020. It was noted that the Council had received enquiries about the statutory process of presenting a petition and holding a referendum.

The two possible types of governance models other than the current model would be the Executive Leader/Cabinet model or the Committee System model. It was noted that it would be the role of the Chief Executive to apply consideration to any changes to the governance models that are proposed and he would also be responsible for organising the referendum.

Members welcomed the report and noted that the report was for information as part of good governance.

After a detailed discussion the following was noted;

- That the Committee would be sent the Council's website link to the information on the petition threshold number for requesting a referendum on the Council's Governance.
- Clarification was sought on whether the first petition to reach the required threshold would trigger a referendum or could petitions run consecutively? – Officers to clarify this to Members.
- Costing implications were noted and the significant changes that would be needed as a result of any change to the current governance model were also noted.
- Concerns were raised that any referendum would incur significant costs to public funds and have staffing implications

Members welcomed the report.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

5.9 Strengthening Local Democracy

Afazul Haque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy introduced the report which reviewed how the community and Councillors engage in local democracy. It was noted that the review had identified areas of best practice and makes recommendations to continue to strengthen and improve local democracy in Tower Hamlets.

It was noted that last year 45 councillors were elected to represent Tower Hamlets and more than half of these councillors were new. All Councillors had been through a comprehensive induction programme which included mandatory and non-mandatory sessions designed to support them in carrying out their role effectively. In order to strengthen demographic engagement and improve satisfaction with the Council, and the local area, a task and finish group was established to review strengthening local democracy. Members were referred to appendix 1 of the report which listed the task and finish group sessions and attendees and to appendix 3, the ward councillor support framework.

Some of the key messages and findings from the task and finish group were that there needed to be more communication about events in the local wards, ward walkabouts, supporting empowerment, and to ensure Councillors are engaged at the onset.

After a short discussion, the following was noted;

- New Councillors needed to be supported and need to find out more about local partners and the services in their wards.

- Sharing more information on the Members Hub portal.
- That there was a lot of work Councillors did that was not shared and the need for Councillors to be encouraged to let the Council know about the work they were doing.
- Look at ways to promote the roles and responsibilities of Councillors.
- Frustrating for Councillors to find out about events in their wards right before the event or after the event. Look to explore better communication methods to keep Councillors informed about events, executive functions etc.

Members welcomed this piece of work and thanked the Officers for the work they have undertaken and continue to do.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. That the Councillor Support Framework attached as Appendix 3 to the report be noted.
2. That the Corporate Director, Governance, retain oversight for implementation of the Framework and is to report back to the General Purposes Committee on its progress every six months.

5.10 Spitalfields and Banglatown Community Governance Review Update

It was noted that background information papers were presented at the meeting, in respect to item 5.10, a letter from the Spitalfields Campaigners and the response on behalf of the Council. Both documents were noted by Members of the General Purposes Committee.

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report and gave a brief summary of the Community Governance Review Consultation. It was noted that the consultation period closed on 28 May 2019 and this was an update on the results of the second stage of consultation.

It was noted that the last stage of the process, following this report, would be for, the Chief Executive to present a report setting out the proposed final recommendations to Full Council at its meeting in July 2019.

It was also noted that Officers were content with the consultation process and the work undertaken – there were a series of events, social media events, and as a result there were a lot of responses received. Mr Mannion explained that the Spitalfields Campaigners were challenging the lack of engagement, however they were been kept in touch throughout the process and the Council had gone beyond what was required of them to do. It was noted that the Council had responded to concerns in regards to the complaint letter submitted by the Campaigners and this had been tabled at the meeting as background information.

As a result of the consultation, the findings were that the majority were not in support of a parish council. It was not a poll but the consultation process was used to indicate a preference.

Accordingly, the Chair Moved and it was:-

RESOLVED

1. The results of the second stage consultation exercise be noted.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

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.

7.1 Local Authority Governor Applications - Exempt Appendices

The appendices for Local Authority Governor Applications were considered during item 5.4 on the unrestricted part of the agenda.

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee