

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY 2010**

**APPOINTMENT OF POLITICAL ADVISORS**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE HEAD,  
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report concerns the appointment of Political Advisors to the political groups on the Council.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Council is invited to consider whether to re-establish for the duration of the current administration, posts of political assistant (known as Political Advisors) to the Labour Group and Conservative Group on the authority in accordance with section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- 2.2 If the Political Advisor posts are re-established, the Council is invited to determine whether this shall be on the basis of a full-time post to support the Labour Group and a half-time post to support the Conservative Group as previously, or whether these arrangements shall be varied in any way.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ('The 1989 Act') governs the appointment of political assistants (known in Tower Hamlets as 'Political Advisors') to provide assistance to political groups represented on the Council. An authority may choose to establish such posts in accordance with the framework set out in the Act. This provides that, where the members of the authority are divided into different political groups, a political group shall qualify for a political assistant if:-
- (a) the membership of that group comprises at least one-tenth of the membership of the authority;
  - (b) the number of the other groups (if any) which are larger groups does not exceed two; and

- (c) where the number of the other groups which are the same size or larger than that group exceeds two, the authority have determined that group should be a group to which a post is allocated.

3.2 Political assistants must be appointed on a fixed term contract extending no further than just beyond the next council elections; each group may only have one assistant and there must be no more than three such posts in total. Regulation 18 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (as amended) provide that 'where [an authority] ... makes an appointment to a post for the purposes of section 9 of the 1989 Act the authority shall from time to time review allocations made for the purposes of that section'.

3.3 The legislation prohibits the making of an appointment to any post allocated to a political group until the authority has allocated a post to each political group on the Council which qualifies for one. The appointment of political assistants must be in accordance with the wishes of the political group to whom the post has been appointed. The appointments process, however, must be conducted in accordance with the Council's procedures and statutory requirements.

#### **4. POLITICAL ADVISORS 2006-2010**

4.1 Tower Hamlets Council has appointed Political Advisors in accordance with the 1989 Act during successive administrations. During the 2006-10 administration, posts were allocated to the Labour, Conservative and Respect Groups.

4.2 In May 2006 the Council agreed that, having regard to the political balance on the Council at that time, a full-time post would be allocated to the Labour Group and part-time posts of 24.5 and 17.5 hours per week to the Respect Group (which had 12 Councillors) and Conservative Group (7 Councillors) respectively.

4.3 Following changes to the political composition of the Council such that the Respect and Conservative Groups had the same number of Members, the Council in November 2007 amended this arrangement and set the hours of the Respect and Conservative Party political advisors at 17.5 hours each per week. This arrangement continued until the end of the administration, at which point the Conservative Group had 9 Councillors and the Respect Group 8.

#### **5. THE CURRENT POSITION**

5.1 The political composition of the authority following the Council elections on 6 May 2010 is:-

Labour Group:	-	41 Councillors
Conservative Group	-	8 Councillors
Ungrouped Councillors	-	2 (1 Liberal Democrat, 1 Respect)

5.2 The Council is asked to consider whether posts of political assistants should be established for the 2010 - 2014 administration. If the Council decides to

establish the positions, Political Advisor posts will be allocated to the Labour and Conservative Groups.

- 5.3 The Council is further asked to determine, if the Political Advisor posts are re-established, whether this should be on the basis of a full-time post to support the Labour Group and a half-time posts to support the Conservative Group as previously. There is no legal requirement for the allocation of these resources to mirror the relative size of the groups and the allocation is not subject to a strict proportionality calculation but is at the Council's discretion.

## **6. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)**

- 6.1 The legal position is set out in the main body of the report.

## **7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 7.1 The budget for Democratic Services includes a sum of £87.5k for Political Advisor posts. This covers the costs of the current arrangements. Any increase in the costs of the Political Advisor posts will need to be met from compensatory savings within the overall Members' Support budget.

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### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)**

#### **LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

Brief description of "background paper"	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection
None.	