

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.30 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2020

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

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

Apologies:

Asmat Hussain - (Corporate Director Governance & Monitoring Officer)

Officers Present:

Runa Basit – (Head of School Governance & Information)
Robert Curtis – (Head of Electoral Services)
Amanda Harcus – Divisional Director of HR
Afazul Hoque – (Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy)
Matthew Mannion – (Head of Democratic Services, Governance)
Simmi Yesmin – (Democratic Services Officer, Committees, Governance)

1. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020-2021

The Chair sought nominations for the election of Vice-Chair for the remainder of the municipal year 2020-2021.

Councillor Faroque Ahmed nominated Councillor Kevin Brady as Vice-Chair of the General Purposes Committee for the municipal year 2020-2021. 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 2020-2021.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

1. That the unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on Tuesday 16 June 2020 be agreed.

4. WORK PLAN

The General Purposes Committee Work Plan was discussed and agreed. The following was noted;

- The report on HR Policies and Procedures would be brought forward to the meeting in December 2020.
- A report on Scrutiny Membership and Procedure Updates had been added to the workplan for the December meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the Work Plan be noted

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 General Purposes Committee, Terms of Reference 2020/21

Matthew 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 2020-2021.

RESOLVED

1. That the Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and the Schedule of meeting dates for the General Purposes Committee be noted.
2. To remove the words 'non-material' from row 6 of the Terms of Reference to better reflect the powers of the General Purposes Committee as agreed during the 2019 Constitution review.

5.2 Establishment of Appointments Sub-Committee

Matthew 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 2020/21 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) Appeals Sub-Committee

Matthew 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.

Following a brief discussion, it was noted that the Divisional Director, HR and Transformation would present a paper to a future General Purposes Committee detailing better practices and proposals for alternative models of Employee Appeal Committees, looking at mixed membership panels including Members, Trade Union representatives alongside management in order to have broader representation at such meetings.

It was agreed a report would return to a future meeting for consideration.

RESOLVED

1. That the Employee Appeals Sub Committee for the Municipal Year 2020/21 be established.

5.4 LA Governor Appointment Report

Runa Basit, Head of School Governance and Information, introduced her regular report on Local Authority School Governor appointments. The report contained four re-appointments and six new proposed appointments. Members noted the information set out in the exempt appendices.

It was noted that the applications were of good quality and had a good mixture of experience and diversity. Ms Basit explained that the work on diversity was on-going, and some work had to be delayed due to the pandemic. The progress to date was noted and the need for more work around wider diversity and ethnicity was highlighted.

Members 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.

5.5 Change of Borough Ward Names

Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services, introduced the report which set out a recommendation for the Council to consider changing three borough ward names. It was noted that the recommendation was originally made during the consultation for the Polling District and Polling Places review in 2019 and determined by Full Council on 15 January 2020.

One of the Consultation responses from the Local Campaigns Forum of the Labour Party, there had been a recommendation that the Council initiate the required steps to amend three ward names, namely;

- Bethnal Green Ward to change to Bethnal Green East
- St Peters Ward to change to Bethnal Green West
- Canary Wharf Ward to change to Millwall.

It was noted that the recommendation did not empower the Council to undergo the required process as it wasn't considered to be a formal request however it was considered that it be brought to the Committee to decide if it should be acted on.

It was noted that The Committee had received correspondences from both the Ward Councillors for Canary Wharf in favour and against the changing of the ward name for Canary Wharf Ward.

During a brief discussion, the following was noted;

- That the request to make this change had not come from Ward Councillors or local residents.
- That local residents referred to the area as Canary Wharf, the train stations were named as Canary Wharf and so would Crossrail once it was opened.
- That the name Millwall is often referred to as the Football Club which was located in the Deptford/Lewisham area.
- That the renaming of the Canary Wharf Ward to Millwall would still exclude much of the historic Millwall area such as Millwall Park and other historic sections of the area.
- Concerns noted that the name Canary Wharf was associated with a large commercial entity.
- Canary Wharf Ward's current natural boundary on two sides follows the Millwall Inner Dock and Millwall Outer Dock water.
- Only part of the Canary Wharf estate falls within the ward named Canary Wharf, the remainder was situated in Blackwall and Cubitt Town.
- Renaming the ward would reclaim the area's own historic name.
- The Committee, generally had no reservations for reviewing the ward names for Bethnal Green and St Peters as it was thought it would help avoid the current confusion residents have when looking for their Councillors in the Bethnal Green area and would be an obvious way to divide the geographic boundary.
- That all councillors should receive a copy of the Submissions to the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2019, to note any changes in their wards.

At this point the Chair called for a vote;

With 6 For and 1 Against it was a majority decision to agree on Recommendation 2 of the report.

Councillor Peter Golds asked for his dissent to be recorded.

Accordingly, by a majority vote the General Purposes Committee

RESOLVED

1. To formally review the changes to Borough ward names which would be taken to Full Council to determine.

5.6 Strengthening Local Democracy

Afazul Haque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy introduced the report which set out the second performance update on the delivery of the Council's Councillor Support Framework. This covered the period up to September 2020 including services/activities undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that arose during that period.

On a positive note, the Committee was informed that 60-70% of the work had been completed despite setbacks during the pandemic. Mr Haque reported that the Council's response to the pandemic had required extensive partnership working with local organisations, residents and Councillors acting as key catalysts for providing information and support to the Borough's most vulnerable residents. He highlighted the following as part of the support given to Councillors and examples of joint-working during this period;

- Roll out of new laptops and software for all Councillors, enabling them to use new tools such as MS Teams.
- Set up a temporary urgent member enquiry system.
- Supporting Councillors during the roll out of virtual meetings
- Promoting the role of Ward Councillors as key stakeholders in the community.
- Working on engagement and restarting ward walkabouts.
- Councillor Briefings and Councillor Learning and Development sessions introduced to MS Teams (resulting in increased attendance)

It was noted a detailed report on the Council's response to the pandemic had been presented to Cabinet in June 2020. It was also noted that realistic deadlines had been set against tasks/actions given the current climate and any further delays to any actions would be reported to The Committee in the next update report in May 2021.

Members welcomed the report and noted the good progress made and continues to be made.

Concerns were raised by Members regarding;

- the process for raising Members Enquires
- the lack of support available to process enquires
- Councillors and residents unable to get through to the Tower Hamlets Homes contact centres/staff and services and that this was proving to be difficult especially for vulnerable residents in the community.

Officers acknowledged the fact that the process needed to be improved and informed the Committee that discussions with the Chair of the Housing Association Forums would be restarted to resolve some of the highlighted matters.

It was agreed that these concerns would be raised with the Corporate Director Governance and Monitoring Officer and reported back to the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.

5.7 Council Meeting Filming Protocol

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the follow-up report that was presented to GP Committee in December 2019 on a proposed filming protocol for Council and Committee meetings. It was noted that a number of refinements had been made to the initial draft protocol including the increase in virtual meetings and webcasting of meetings.

Mr Mannion explained that this protocol had been prepared for Chairs of Committees to use when setting out the limitations under which filming should take place. The appendices in the report included various protocols from other authorities as well as an updated version of the filming protocol for Members to consider. It was noted that the protocol would be more relevant once public meetings start to commence again.

Mr Mannion further explained that given many meetings were being webcast by the Council, the protocol also covered some issues that must be considered by users for all recordings including those made from webcasts.

The Committee welcomed the report and the following amendments were suggested;

- Strengthen the rules to protect the discretion of officers and members of the public given exceptional circumstances where identities cannot be disclosed.
- Make it clearer that webcasts of meetings were available. However it was noted that this could not prevent people from filming meetings.

Subject to the two changes it was;-

RESOLVED

1. That the proposed Council Meeting Filming Protocol be approved and included in Part D of the Council's Constitution.
2. That the Monitoring Officer be given the delegated authority to amend the Filming Protocol as required and for updated versions to be published in the Constitution.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

Nil items.

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.

8. RESTRICTED REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 Local Authority Governor Appointments - Restricted Appendices

The exempt appendices setting out the details of the applicants for the School Governor appointments was noted.

8.2 Forthcoming Restructures - Staffing Implications

Ananda 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 were 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 7.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Helal Uddin
General Purposes Committee