

**LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

**ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY, 11 JUNE 2014**

**APPOINTMENT OF POLITICAL ADVISORS**

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

**1. SUMMARY**

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

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Council consider whether to re-establish for the duration of the current administration, posts of political assistant (known as Political Advisors) to those political groups that qualify for such a post in accordance with section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- 2.2 That if the Political Advisor posts are to be re-established, in order to contain the total cost of the posts within the budget available, this should be on the basis of a 0.6 FTE post for each of the Labour Group and the Tower Hamlets First Group.
- 2.3 That, should the Conservative Group increase in size to at least 5 Councillors, a 0.3 FTE post be then allocated to that group.

**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) provides 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 2010-2014**

- 4.1 Tower Hamlets Council has appointed Political Advisors in accordance with the 1989 Act during successive administrations. During the 2010-14 administration, posts were allocated to the Labour Group (full-time post) and Conservative Group (half-time post). Please note that the Executive Mayor may also appoint a Mayor's Assistant in accordance with the Local Authorities (Elected Mayor and Mayor's Assistant) (England) Regulations 2002.

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

- 5.1 The political composition of the authority following the Council elections on 22 May 2014 (but in advance of the final Ward election on 3 July) is:-

Labour Group	-	20 Councillors
Tower Hamlets First Group	-	18 Councillors
Conservative Group	-	4

- 5.2 The Council is asked to consider whether posts of political assistants should be established for the 2014 - 2018 administration. If the Council decides to establish the positions, Political Advisor posts will be allocated to the Labour and Tower Hamlets First Groups.

- 5.3 The eligibility of the Conservative Group for a Political Advisor post will depend on the outcome of the Blackwall and Cubitt Town ward poll. In the event (i) that the Council agrees to establish Political Advisor posts; and (ii) that the Conservative Group increases in number to at least 5 (representing the threshold of 10% of the authority), that group would then also qualify for a post.
- 5.4 The Council is further asked to determine whether the Political Advisor posts should be allocated on the basis of full-time or part-time posts. Previously the Council has allocated a full-time post to the majority group and a half-time post to a political group with significantly fewer councillors than other qualifying group(s). 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.
- 5.5 Currently the budget allocation for Political Advisor posts is sufficient to fund 1.5 posts (i.e. the number established in recent years). It is suggested that the total cost of any new posts should be contained within the budget available. Therefore if the Council wishes to re-establish the Political Advisor posts, it is recommended that this should be on the basis of a 0.6 FTE post for each of the Labour Group and the Tower Hamlets First Group; with the Conservative Group being allocated a 0.3 FTE post in the event that group increases in size to at least 5 Councillors.

## **6. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER**

- 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 report seeks a Council decision on whether or not to re-establish, for the duration of the current administration, political advisor posts. The budget for Democratic Services includes provision for 1.5 Group Political Advisor posts. This covers the costs of the current arrangements. The recommendations set out above would facilitate the containing of costs within that provision. If, however, the Council wishes to agree new arrangements that increase the costs of the Political Advisor posts over and above the existing budget, it must be assured that such arrangements would constitute value for money, and compensatory savings would need to be identified. Alternatively if Council resolved not to have political advisors then there would be an annual saving of some £60k.

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### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 (as amended)**

#### **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.	