

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 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 Asma Begum
Councillor Abu Chowdhury
Councillor James King
Councillor Maium Talukdar

Members In Attendance Virtually:

Councillor Musthak Ahmed

Apologies:

Councillor Maisha Begum
Councillor Abdal Ullah

Officers Present in Person:

Matthew Mannion (Head of Democratic Services)
Joel West (Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Musrat Zaman (Director of HR, OD & Business Support Services)
Farhad Ahmed (Traded and Business Development Manager)
Robert Curtis (Head of Electoral Services)
Pat Chen (Head of HR, HAC and Children & Culture)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

2. MINUTES

The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 October 2022 were not agreed as a correct record. The Committee asked that the draft minutes are amended to reflect that all members of the Committee contributed to discussion at the meeting.

3. WORK PLAN

The Committee reviewed the updated work plan circulated as agenda supplement 2.

RESOLVED: That the General Purposes Work Plan be noted.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Polling Places and Districts Review

Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services informed the Committee of the compulsory statutory timetable and the processes to be followed for a review of polling places and polling districts.

Robert explained that any proposal to hold an interim review would overlap with statutory requirements to review every five years due to commence on 1 October 2023. It was instead proposed that all stakeholders be informed in advance of the statutory review timetable commencing to enable stakeholders to prepare in advance

Robert explained that the ongoing Parliamentary Constituency Boundary review, which was not covered in the report, would also impact on this work and that the statutory timetable meant the results of the review would not be implemented prior to the May 2024 elections if the consultation period were to extend to that date.

Further to questions from the Committee, Robert provided additional information on:

- Scope to deviate from the statutory review timetable: there was no flexibility in this regard.
- Feasibility of concluding the review prior to the May 2024 elections. Robert advised that the period for undertaking the review is not specified as long as it is completed within 16 months and that commencing on 1 October with everyone prewarned and able to prepare responses in advance may make this feasible. This would be considered when the timetable is formally announced prior to 1 October 2023
- The rationale and process for the ballot paper check undertaken for Shadwell Ward at the 2022 election count.
- Informal feedback from the 2022 election regarding polling places. Feedback was positive in the main, but some concerns had been received regarding high voter numbers at some venues and this will be considered as part of the review and requirements of the Elections Act 2022.

The Committee then discussed the report and raised the following points:

- It would be desirable to pursue any opportunities to expedite the statutory review timetable so that findings might be implemented for the 2024GLA elections.
- The Committee asked officers to explore whether the Council's decision to implement any changes to polling districts or polling places arising from the review could be delegated to the Committee to help speed up the overall process.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Committee endorses the following approach to reviewing polling places and polling districts:
 - i. The council adhere to the compulsory statutory review timetable and that all political parties and elected members are informed of the commencement date in advance to enable all stakeholders to preliminary prepare any recommendations that they may be considering ready for the compulsory statutory timetable and consultation this scheduled to commence on 1 October 2023.
 - ii. No interim review is to be pursued because the requirement to fully consult will result in an overlap of the timetables resulting in duplication of process.
 - iii. Any agreed amendments to polling districts or polling places would be adopted after the review has concluded and amendments agreed by council or delegated committee.

4.2 Constitution Updates

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the report that provided an update on proposed and agreed amendments to the Constitution. Matthew outlined the main proposed changes and the rationale for each.

Regarding the item on the Committee's work plan on a proposed constitution working party, Matthew advised that discussions were in progress and a report would be brought to a future meeting with outline proposals, though any suggestions from members in the meantime would be welcome.

Further to questions from the Committee, Matthew provided additional information on:

- Background to the proposed change to the definition of a co-opted member.
- The membership arrangements for the proposed Employee Appeals Sub-Committee sub committee. Members can be drawn from all members and substitutes of the General Purposes Committee.

The Sub Committee then discussed the report and raised the following points relating specifically to the proposed Employee Appeals Sub-Committee:

- The terms of reference should clarify on whether decisions of sub committee will be binding.
- The terms of reference should include a provision that proportional political group representation and gender/ethnicity balance be secured as far as is reasonably practicable.
- The Committee discussed a proposal that the terms of reference provide for the exclusion of members of the executive from Employee Appeals Sub-Committees where the appeal being considered related to an employee in their service. Some members of the Committee felt such an approach would protect the Council from accusations of conflicts of interest; other Committee members felt such a provision was unnecessary as any such conflicts of interest would be managed through existing mechanisms including the Members Code of Conduct and the declarations of interest agenda item at the meeting.
- The Committee asked the Head of Democratic Services to propose minor changes to the terms of reference and hearing structure to give effect to the Committee's discussion. It asked that any changes be determined following consultation with the Chair.
- Training to cover the requirements outlined in paragraphs 2.4 (policies and procedures) and 2.5 (safeguarding) should be scheduled together as far as practicable.

RESOLVED to:

1. Establish the Employee Appeals Sub-Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2022/23 with the terms of reference as at Appendix 1, hearing structure at Appendix 2 and the consequent Constitution changes set out in Appendix 3 to the report.
2. Delegate to the Head of Democratic Services, following consultation with the Chair, authority to make minor amendments to the Employee Appeals Sub-Committee terms of reference and hearing structure to give effect to the Committee's wishes regarding:
 - a. Clarification on whether decisions of sub committee will be binding.
 - b. Guidance on membership, gender and ethnicity balance and political proportionality requirements.
 - c. Any reasonable and practical restrictions to be placed on executive members' participation.
3. Agree the proposed amendments to the Council's Petition Scheme as set out in Paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10 of the report.
4. Note the agreed changes to the Constitution on the Member Allowances Scheme in Appendix 5 to the report, the Grants Determination Sub-Committee in Appendix 6 to the report and the Officer Structure Chart.

4.3 Local Authority Governor Applications Dec 2022

Farhad Ahmed, Head of Governor Services introduced the report that set out details of applicants who had applied to be nominated as the local authority governor at Tower Hamlets maintained schools.

Further to questions from the Committee, Farhad provided additional information on:

- How governor positions are advertised and recruited and how the Council encouraged local community involvement.
- Current equalities monitoring arrangements and data. Farhad asked the Committee to note that governors can choose not to declare equalities monitoring information and previous efforts to seek equalities data resulted in a response rate of only 10 per cent. Therefore, data regarding the overall position is incomplete.

Farhad agreed to provide Committee members with details of training opportunities and attendance data (including equalities data where available) for governors.

The Committee discussed black and minority ethnic representation within school governance. Some members of the Committee noted that the Council had previously made recommendations to improve black and minority ethnic take-up of school governor roles. Farhad was asked to review those previous recommendations to ensure any new initiatives build on previous learning.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Committee nominates the applicants to the positions for local authority governors at maintained schools in Tower Hamlets as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

4.4 Employee Relations Casework and Policy update - Q2 - July - September 2022

Musrat Zaman, Director of Workforce, OD & Business Support and Pat Chen, Head of HR introduced the report that provided an update on the level and management of employee relations casework within the Council, highlighting progress made for the period July 2022 – September 2022.

Further to questions from the Committee, Musrat and Pat provided additional information on:

- The main categories of grievances.
- How data is monitored and work to identify patterns.
- The training of staff and introduction this year of a mediation service and how the service focussed on re-building relationships to reduce the number of formal grievance processes.

The Committee indicated it would welcome greater detail in statistics relating to ER casework as it felt the current level of detail was not sufficient to allow meaningful conclusions to be reached. Such additional detail ideally to include feedback or similar data on levels of complainant's satisfaction with the ER process; performance against policy timescales; and categorisation of individual complaints/ grievances. The Committee noted the risk of identifying staff involved may place limits on the level of additional detail that could be provided.

RESOLVED that:

1. The report be noted, subject to the comments above.

4.5 Update on Senior Recruitment - December 2022

Musrat Zaman, Director of Workforce, OD & Business Support and Pat Chen, Head of HR introduced the report that provided an update on senior posts and recent recruitment activity.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Committee note the current position on the recruitment to senior management vacancies in the Council structure and the interim arrangements to cover the chief officer post with statutory responsibility for Adult Social Services (DASS) and Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) post, as set out in the report.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

None.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Saif Uddin Khaled
General Purposes Committee