

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.35 P.M. ON TUESDAY, 13 JUNE 2023

**COMMITTEE ROOM - TOWER HAMLETS TOWN HALL, 160 WHITECHAPEL
ROAD, LONDON E1 1BJ**

Members Present in Person:

Councillor Shafi Ahmed (Chair)
Councillor Saied Ahmed
Councillor Kabir Ahmed
Councillor Sabina Akhtar
Councillor Asma Begum
Councillor Abu Chowdhury
Councillor James King
Councillor Rebaka Sultana
Councillor Maium Talukdar

Other Councillors Present in Person:

Councillor Peter Golds

Officers Present in Person:

Janet Fasan (Director of Legal & Monitoring Officer)
Matthew Mannion (Head of Democratic Services)
Joel West (Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee))

Officers In Attendance Virtually:

Farhad Ahmed (Head of Governor Services)
Robert Curtis (Head of Electoral Services)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None were declared.

2. TO ELECT A VICE CHAIR FOR 2023-24

RESOLVED that Councillor Abu Chowdhury be elected as the Vice Chair of the General Purposes Committee for 2023-24.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that:

1. The unrestricted minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 23 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record; and
2. The unrestricted minutes of the extraordinary General Purposes Committee meeting held on 28 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

4. WORK PLAN

RESOLVED that the work plan be noted.

5. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

5.1 General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference, Membership and Dates of Meetings 23-24

Joel West, Democratic Services Team Leader (Committee) introduced the report that asked the Committee to note its terms of reference and delegated powers, membership and dates of meetings for 2023-24. Joel asked the Committee to note that human resources (HR) functions previously delegated to the Committee had, for 2023-24, been delegated to the Council's new Human Resources Committee.

Members noted that the Constitution Working Group would soon meet and would review elements of the Constitution such as committee terms of reference to identify where there are gaps, misalignments, typos etc. The Committee noted the important role elected members play in this process.

Some members of the Committee indicated unhappiness with the new terms of reference as:

- The Committee previously managed to fulfil its work plan, including HR items. It did not feel overburdened.
- Creation of a new committee for HR matters would result in increased costs, such as officer time and payment of special responsibility allowance to its chair.

Some members of the Committee welcomed the new terms of reference as giving both the Committee and the new HR Committee dedicated time and resources to consider the matters within each's remit.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Note its terms of reference, quorum, membership and dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report.

5.2 Local Authority Governor Applications May 2023

Farhad Ahmed, Head of School Governance and Information, introduced the report that set out for Members details of applicants who had applied to be nominated as local authority governors at Tower Hamlets maintained schools. Farhad corrected a minor error in the report by explaining that Sylvette Peksa's was a new nomination (not a re-nomination) though this did not affect the recommendation as set out in the report.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Agree to nominate the applicants to the positions that are available for local authority governors at maintained schools in Tower Hamlets as set out in the report.

5.3 Update on Elections Act 2022

The reasons for urgency as set out in the report were noted and approved.

Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services, introduced the report that summarised the key elements of the Elections Act 2022, set out which elements of the Act had already been implemented, and noted future changes and their implications for the borough.

Further to questions from the Committee, Robert provided more details on:

- Funding and resources required to implement the changes. Rob explained that small grants were being provided by DLUHC but with no elections scheduled this year expenditure was being contained and the plan for future polls is to use existing equipment and facilities where possible.
- Plans were being put in place to communicate the key changes, particularly voting ID in polling stations, to residents and that the electoral services team were working alongside other boroughs across the UK and London (e.g. Haringey) who had already ran elections under the new legislation
- Technical information on the new voter ID requirements including what types of ID were valid is now in the public domain and can be accessed on the Councils web site.
- The changes to the rights of citizens living overseas with the 15 year rule to be abolished and the potential for this to significantly increase the number of overseas electors eligible to vote in Parliamentary elections.
- Following a question from Cllr K Ahmed Robert explained that there has not been any changes to the franchise and right to vote for Ukrainian and/or Somali nationals who are residents but who are not eligible to register to vote.

- Rob explained how the elections service worked closely with the Registrars service to identify potential new voters via the citizenship ceremonies
- The position of assisting voters in the polling place was clarified particularly the illegality of “family voting” and the changes that have now been introduced for those who need additional support at polling stations.
- Robert explained that the grants provided thus far for the implementation of the requirements of the Act have been very low primarily because Tower Hamlets does not have scheduled polls in 2023 but this will be reviewed as we approach the GLA in 2024 and the potential General Election to be held no later than 28 January 2025. The financial implications are not known until the first polls are held and will be communicated to the council as this develops in due course.
- Information on changes to how postal votes will be handled in the future, what is now required on campaign materials and changes to undue influence (Corrupt Practices) were also highlighted

Further to officer responses, the Committee discussed the importance of communication regarding the changes. It asked to receive a report setting out how the Council would effectively communicate the changes to residents prior to the GLA polls in May 2024.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Peter Golds addressed the Committee and summarised his role in the drafting elections legislation. He also informed the Committee of the recent electoral experience of Leicester, which he explained had a similar demography to LBTH, where communication campaigns included non-English language media channels. The experience was that voters largely came prepared for new photo ID requirements.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Notes the requirements already implemented by the Elections Act 2022 and the implications of future scheduled changes.
2. Will receive a report setting out how the Council can most effectively communicate the Act’s key changes to residents prior to the election in May 2024.

5.4 Constitution Updates

Mathew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report that provided an update on amendments to the constitution made to allow for decisions taken at that Annual Meeting of Council in May 2023.

The Committee asked that the organisational structure chart is amended to reflect the recent appointment of an interim Director of Public Realm.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

1. Note the updates set out in the report, including the minor amendment noted above.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

6.1 Appointment of Member to the Corporate Parenting Board

Reasons for urgency were noted and agreed.

Matthew Mannion, Head of Democratic Services introduced the urgent report that, following an administrative error with the nominations papers for the AGM, invited the Committee to nominate a member of the Council to a vacancy on the Corporate Parenting Board.

Nominations were received for:

- Councillor Sirajul Islam;
- Councillor Mufeedah Bustin; and
- Councillor Nathalie Bienfait.

The nominations of Councillor Sirajul and Councillor Mufeedah Bustin were put to the vote in turn and were **defeated**.

The nomination of Councillor Nathalie Bienfait was put to the vote and was **agreed**. The nomination was agreed on the basis that Councillor Bienfait accepted the position.

RESOLVED that:

1. Councillor Nathalie Bienfait is appointed to the Corporate Parenting Board for 2023-24, subject to accepting the appointment.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

A resolution to exclude press and public was not required.

8. EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED that:

1. The exempt minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 23 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Shafi Ahmed
General Purposes Committee