

General Purposes Committee

Meeting of held on Monday, 10 June 2024 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);
Councillor Appu Srinivasan (Vice-Chair);
Councillor Samir Dwesar, Joseph Lee, Stella Nabukeera and
Andrew Price

PART A

1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lara Fish and Patricia Hay-Justice.

2/24 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

3/24 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

4/24 **Urgent Business (if any)**

The Chair informed Members of the need to provide an update on urgent business regarding the Committee's oversight of elections. After consideration of the items of the agenda, he informed the committee that a working party had been reviewing the electoral processes, stating that the committee had been receiving support from various Council Electoral Services Officers from Sutton Council to ensure everything was in order.

The Chair emphasised the importance of keeping the committee informed about the progress made and actions taken in the lead-up to the elections, given the concerns expressed about the efficiency of election management and the time it sometimes took to announce results. They mentioned that they had contacted the Chief Executive, who also serves as the Returning Officer for Croydon, to request an update.

The Chair summarised the key points from the Chief Executive's response, stating that the notice of election had been published on time on 31 May. He noted that all originally designated polling stations would be used, with one exception: the polling station at the garage on Crane Valley Road was no longer available due to the sale of the property. An alternative residential garage would be utilised instead.

The Chair reported that recruitment for polling station staff was underway, and training was scheduled to start on 17 June. The main run of postal vote cards would begin on 17 June as well, with the delivery expected during the week of the 7 June. He mentioned that the nomination period had taken place from 3 to 7 June, and candidates were now listed on the official website.

Additionally, the Chair explained that there would be an early dispatch of postal votes for overseas electors on 14 June, while the main dispatch for other voters would occur on 17 June. He noted that there would be a second dispatch for individuals who signed up for postal voting during the election campaign.

The Chair stated that the elections would not take place at Trinity School as previously planned due to a prior commitment for a comedian. Instead, the election count would occur at the Barnhouse, where there would be sufficient space for counting and official announcements. He expressed satisfaction that the arrangements were progressing well, and that the venue was centrally located.

Following this update, Councillor Alasdair Stewart acknowledged a recent error in an email communication, which inaccurately indicated that the deadline for nominating a proxy was 24 July. They pointed out that this date was incorrect by 20 days. The member noted that a correction email had been sent but urged the Committee to encourage thorough checks on future electoral communications before 4 July to prevent misleading information from being disseminated.

The Chair agreed with the concerns raised, emphasising the need for accurate and clear communication, particularly regarding important civic duties such as voting. They acknowledged the potential for errors, stating that while spelling and grammar could be corrected, the worst mistakes often involved dates and other critical information. The Chair reassured the committee that they would ask those responsible to be extra vigilant regarding deadlines and communications.

The Chair concluded by stating that the committee would reserve final judgment until they had experienced the election process, which they hoped would conclude satisfactorily on 5 July. He also mentioned the

upcoming change in venue for counting and expressed relief that the new location would reduce travel burdens for members.

RESOLVED to:

1. Note the update on elections from the Chief Executive.
2. Ask the Council to be extra vigilant with details about dates and times in the communication with voters about the electoral process.

5/24

Use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and Investigatory Powers Act 2016

Members received the report on the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, from Howard Passman, the Information Management and Governance Co-ordinator. He explained that the annual report outlined the Council's use of powers in the previous year, which had decreased over time due to increased data sharing between public authorities and less intrusive investigation methods.

The Chair acknowledged initial concerns about RIPA but noted that fears of misuse had not materialised. One member asked how their use of powers compared to other London boroughs, to which the officer responded that it was similar, although he lacked specific data. Another officer confirmed that the trend was consistent across Councils.

A Member then inquired about the outcome of inspections by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). The officer explained that local authorities were inspected every three years, with their next inspection scheduled in three years. He added that Police and security services were inspected annually, and that communications data was handled by a separate organisation, which would soon merge with IPCO for unified oversight.

In response to a question about alternative methods, the officer gave an example from trading standards, where shops were notified of upcoming test purchases rather than using covert surveillance. This approach streamlines the process while maintaining effectiveness without formal RIPA applications.

The officer concluded by emphasising that clearer legal practices and increased data sharing had reduced the need for such powers since local authorities no longer investigated benefit offenses, which were now handled by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendices, the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 Note the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 by the Council in previous years and the Covert Activities Policy, Appendix A to this report; and
- 1.2 Note the outcomes of an inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office.

6/24

Proposed Changes to the Constitution - Staff Employment Procedure Rules

Members received a report from Gillian Bevan, the Head of Human Resources - Business Partnering, who explained that the report recommended significant changes to the Staff Employment Procedure Rules. She noted that these changes were part of the Council's initiative to incorporate lessons learned from previous recruitment exercises and contract extensions reviewed by the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee (ADC). The main goal was to enhance governance and clarify procedures related to senior staffing matters, focusing on improving decision-making processes.

Gillian referred to section 4 of the report, highlighting key points. She indicated that the proposed changes to the staff employment procedure rules were detailed in section 4.3.1, which included updates, improvements, and corrections of drafting errors. For example, on page 46, corrections were made to the Constitution's Part 2 and Part 3 regarding responsibilities for functions as they pertained to the ADC.

She emphasised that page 46 outlined corrections and cultural changes along with other necessary amendments. Additionally, section 4.3.2 reflected established ADC practices, particularly concerning appointment decisions for directors and higher-level positions, with relevant regulations found in the appendix on page 51.

Gillian then discussed changes related to officer delegation arrangements for interim or fixed-term appointments, detailed in section 4.3.5 (page 55). She clarified that the head of paid service would be responsible for making appointments for deputy chief officers and directors lasting less than two years, with ADC members needing to be notified. Any extensions beyond two years would require ADC approval. For corporate directors, the head of paid service would make appointments for up to one year, with extensions again needing ADC approval.

She emphasised the importance of these changes for the Council to remain competitive in the employment market, as current procedures necessitated multiple ADC meetings, which consumed significant officer

time. The proposed changes aimed to simplify the process and increase agility in making interim appointments.

Gillian also referred to section 4.3.6, which formalised arrangements for disciplinary matters concerning senior officers. She clarified that the changes made explicit officers' rights of appeal, including the limited circumstances in which appeals were possible to the Appeals Committee.

She continued by highlighting section 4.3.9, which clarified the rules on suspension (pages 58-59) and confirmed that the terms of reference for the ADC had been amended, as outlined in section 4.4 (page 45).

In conclusion, Gillian stated that the proposed changes aimed to ensure that all staffing matters would be managed by the ADC, including the Council's annual pay policy statement, thus placing overall staffing responsibility with the ADC. She referenced paragraph 4.6 (page 49), which indicated that an annual report would be provided to the ADC regarding the operation of the rules, ensuring continuous review and improvement.

The Chair confirmed that the proposed changes had been thoroughly reviewed by the Constitution Working Group, which comprised councillors from various parties. They reiterated that the changes had undergone extensive discussion within the working group and were now presented to the committee for consideration.

Councillor Alasdair Stewart who was also a member of the Constitution Working Group, expressed satisfaction with the outcome, stating that the lengthy discussions had been accurately reflected in the current report. They confirmed their support for the recommendations.

The Chair moved to recommend that the committee accept the recommendations as outlined in the report.

For the reasons set out in the report, the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- 2.1.1 Review and comment on the proposed changes to Constitution contained in paragraph 4.5 of this report and Appendix 1; and
- 2.1.2 Recommend to Full Council the approval of the proposed changes.

The Chair moved the recommendations in the Political Balance Review and the appointments to the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee as outlined on pages 63 to 68 of the agenda. The Chair explained the importance of this item, noting that there were occasions when the General Purposes Committee may need to address urgent business. He explained that the Constitution provided for the establishment of a politically balanced Urgency Sub-Committee.

The Chair pointed out that there would be two members from each of the large political groups, along with two reserves. The nominations included the following councillors:

MEMBERSHIP

- Sean Fitzsimmons
- Appu Srinivasan
- Samir Dwesar
- Lara Fish

RESERVES

- Joseph Lee
- Andrew Price
- Patricia Hay-Justice
- Stella Nabukeera

The Chair sought confirmation from both political parties regarding these nominations, noting that while they had been agreed upon with the Chief Whip, it was prudent to check again to ensure no changes had occurred. The Chair received confirmation that the nominations were agreed upon. Next, the Chair moved on to the **Constitutional Working Group**, an informal body that conducts preliminary work before submitting outcomes to the committee. They outlined that the group comprised of seven members: three Conservatives, three Labour members, and one Green Group member.

The Chair listed the members as the following Councillors:

- Sean Fitzsimmons
- Stuart King
- Leila Ben-Hassel

- Jason Cummings,
- Luke Shortland,
- Alasdair Stewart
- Ria Patel

For the reasons set out in the report the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- 2.1 Review the representation of different political groups on the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee.
- 2.2 Agree the allocation of seats on the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee, by applying the political balance rules, to the Conservative and Labour groups as set out in paragraph 2.10 of the report.
- 2.3 Appoint to the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee, in accordance with the wishes of the relevant political group, the 4 Members and 4 substitutes as set out in paragraph 2.13, with nominations to be moved at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.25PM