

Decisions of the Constitution and General Purposes Committee

12 January 2021

Members Present:-

Councillor Melvin Cohen (Chairman)
Councillor Laithe Jajeh (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Richard Cornelius Councillor Geof Cooke
Councillor Helene Richman Councillor Alison Moore
Councillor Barry Rawlings

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting dated 10 October 2020 be agreed as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

None.

3. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

None.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION AND COMMENTS (IF ANY)

None.

6. MEMBERS ITEM (IF ANY)

None.

The Chairman announced a variation in the order of the agenda. Item 8 (Electoral Services Overview Report 2019) would be considered before agenda item 7 (Constitution Review).

7. ELECTORAL SERVICES - OVERVIEW REPORT 2019

The Chief Executive, John Hooton, Head of Electoral Services, John Bailey and Head of Assurance & Business Development, Emily Bowler, presented a report which provided an update on the activities of Barnet's Electoral Services Team throughout 2019 and 2020 and reported on Barnet's delivery of the UK Parliamentary general election on 12 December 2019. The report highlighted the learning that had been taken from each election and offered recommendations to inform the preparations for future elections in the borough.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee that recommendation 3 on page 82, which related to circulating pre-filled postal vote application forms to every elector that currently does not use a postal vote, was being withdrawn.

Officers reported that preparations were taking place to deliver a Covid-secure Mayoral and GLA election on 6 May 2020. Additional staff were being recruited and polling venues were being reviewed to ensure that additional steps could be taken to deliver in-person voting safely.

Members noted that due to the pandemic, some voters may be reluctant to attend polling stations in-person to vote and highlighted the requirement for postal voting to be promoted to ensure fairness. Officers reported that postal voting was being promoted in the following ways:

- Including leaflets in Household Notification Letters;
- An article in Barnet First;
- Promotion on social media;
- Via London Elects who would promote the election London-wide; and
- Via the Electoral Commission's national publicity campaign.

The Head of Electoral Services reported that he had been working as part of a London-wide project looking at delivering the Mayoral and GLA election and this included considering how to make all count venues Covid-secure. It was noted that the venues had been booked for an extended period of time in case the count took longer than usual.

The Committee noted that the date of the election was being kept under review by Government.

The Chairman moved the following amendments to the Electoral Services Overview Report – September 2020 attached at Appendix A:

1. Amend recommendation on 7 (page 84) to add that "In all cases there will be prior consultation with Ward Members."
2. Add a new recommendation 9 as follows: "That every effort be made to eradicate duplicate entries on register wherever possible."

The Committee noted and agreed the amendment and new recommendation.

RESOLVED that:

1. **The Committee note the Electoral Services overview report attached at Appendix A.**
2. **The Committee note the recommendations detailed in section 4. of the Electoral Services overview report attached at Appendix A subject to:**
 - **the withdrawal of recommendation 3; and**
 - **the amendment and addition as detailed above.**

8. CONSTITUTION REVIEW

The Monitoring Officer, Jessica Farmer, presented a report which contained various proposed Constitution amendments.

The Committee agreed item 2. (Chairmen of Meetings) and item 3. (Suspension of Committee Business) as detailed in section 1.2 of the report and appendices A and B.

The Committee discussed the issue of late amendments moved by Members for committees which had been included in the report without any specific amendments proposed. The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that substantial late amendments could result in new information being introduced at meetings. In some cases, officers would not have had sufficient time to consider the implications of the amendments and provide advice to a committee. It was highlighted that committee reports followed a clearance process which allowed all issues to be considered.

A Member highlighted that reports were occasionally published as 'to follow' and suggested that where this was the case, there needed to be a degree of flexibility. It was proposed that the following wording could be added "Where reports are published after the deadline, amendments will be accepted after the deadline including during the meeting." It was also suggested that the deadline be 10.30am the same working day to be consistent with other deadlines in Constitution.

Officers advised Members that this issue could be dealt with by way of a protocol agreed by the Committee rather than a Constitution amendment as this would enable the principle to be agreed and applied for a period before considering how effective it was.

Following debate, it was agreed that a protocol be drafted for the next meeting of the Committee for consideration and agreement.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Agree that a protocol regarding late amendments would be drafted for consideration and debate at the next meeting.**
- 2. Recommend to Council that the Constitution be amended to incorporate the changes set out in the report and the amended versions attached at Appendices A and B.**

9. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Assistant Director Human Resources & Organisational Development, Jon Bell, presented a report on the Pay Policy Statement incorporating information on Gender Pay Gap and Recruitment and Retention.

The Committee noted that there was currently a gender pay gap in favour of female employees. It was suggested that this could be attributed to a combination of factors including: social workers tending to be female and, due to requirement for those posts to require a professional qualification, that they were higher paid; Street Scene staff tending to be male and for those roles to be lower paid; and some lower paid professions which tended to have female staff, such as care services, being outsourced and not therefore part of the Council's pay data. Officers reported that overall there were no significant issue with pay parity.

In relation to pay progression, the Committee commented that there was a significant increase in percentage from Satisfactory (0.5%) to Good (2.25%). It was suggested that such a big increase could move officers to the top of their grades faster which then result in there being a demotivating factor for future performance. The Assistant Director Human Resources & Organisational Development advised the Committee that performance related pay was due to be reviewed and this would be taken into consideration at that time.

A Member questioned whether there was a London minimum pay level for apprentices. The Assistant Director Human Resources & Organisational Development advised the Committee that there was and highlighted that Barnet pay above the minimum level.

The Chief Executive reported that a report on the Ethnicity Pay Gap would be produced by 31 March 2021.

RESOLVED that Committee recommend that Council approve the Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 (as attached at Appendix A) at the meeting on 19th January 2021.

10. BARNET COUNCIL'S ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

The Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Mike Koumi, presented the Annual Health and Safety report which set out health and safety performance for the period 2019/20 and sets the priorities for the period 2020/21. The Committee noted that Barnet had been achieved an excellence award for the revised London Healthy Workplace Award.

The Committee questioned whether more could be done to ensure completion of mandatory health and safety training audits. It was reported that staff turnover could have an impact and that some officers might not be desk-based which could impact on their ability to complete training. Members were advised that there were other types of training available to those members of staff.

It was noted that performance in health and safety audits varied across different services and it was questioned if an overall compliance of 87% was good performance. It was reported that the level of compliance was generally very high including for services such as Street Scene, but there were of course areas for improvement.

Responding to question, officers reported that the health and safety team had worked closely with services and schools on a Covid secure return to activities and continued to provide advice and support. It was noted that the health and safety team coming under Public Health has assisted with this.

The Committee were advised that comprehensive arrangements had been put in place to respond to the increase in working from home due to the pandemic.

RESOLVED that the Committee note Barnet Councils Annual Health and Safety Report as set out in Appendix 1 and approve the priorities for the period 2020/21 as outlined in section 3.

11. COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that the Committee note the forward work programme.

Members requested that if there are any changes to polling stations in the lead up to the Mayoral and GLA election that the Committee and Ward Members be informed once decisions had been made. **Action: Head of Electoral Services**

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm