



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

General Purposes

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Purposes** committee held on **Wednesday 18th March, 2020**, Committee Room 18.08, 18th Floor, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP.

Members Present: Councillors Paul Swaddle (Chairman), Melvyn Caplan (Vice-Chairman), Gotz Mohindra and David Boothroyd

1 MEMBERSHIP

1.1 There was one change to the membership, Councillor Gotz Mohindra replaced Councillor Mark Shearer.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest

3 MINUTES

That the Chairman, with the consent of the Members present, signed the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020.

6 REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES IN THE CITY OF WESTMINSTER

The Committee was informed that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The 2013 Act requires that a compulsory review be carried out every 5 years. Changes arising from the previous review were enacted in 2015.

Members noted that the Local and Mayoral Elections had been postponed for a year and were to be held in May 2021. The Committee agreed that the reviewing of Polling Stations should also be postponed and that all By-Elections are dealt with at the time.

RESOLVED

1. Agreed to note the comments and observations received in respect of polling place provision for the general election on 12 December 2019 and that due consideration is given to those comments and observations when a comprehensive and overarching review of Westminster's polling districts and polling places is carried out after the LGBCE electoral review of Westminster is completed on 5 May 2020.
2. Agreed to note that the Chief Executive has delegated powers to designate alternative polling places in the event of any polling place not being available at any election, following consultation with the Party Whips and respective ward councillors.

5 A.O.B

The Committee held discussions on holding non-executive Member level meetings during the Covid19 pandemic. The Committee was informed that the 1972 Local Government Act had little provisions about convening virtual Meetings. Members were informed that Statutory Guidance had been issued to the National Assembly of Wales in 2014 about remote Meetings and that it was advised that 30% of Assembly Members had to be present for these meetings. The Committee was advised that the Government was to provide guidance for convening remote Meetings.

Members were informed that the Council could delay and postpone meetings, use the Officers Scheme of Delegation to determine urgent matters or hold meetings which are attended by the minimum number of Members required. The latter would need to be held in large rooms in order to observe social distancing. The Committee was informed that Members joining remotely would be unable to vote and could only express their views. Officers do not need to be physically present at meetings. The following were also noted: -

- Planning Applications Sub-Committees & Licensing Sub-Committees – There are risks of challenges through 'Non-determination' of Applications which have been deferred by both Committees. These risks are low. The two Sub-Committees should continue to meet and this should either be done via a virtual platform or live setting. The Council's own Scheme of delegation would need to be determined by a Committee.
- Expedite Reviews and Temporary Events Notice would need to be considered by the Licensing Sub-Committees; the former can be conducted virtually.
- That full Council meetings should be convened and that a minimum of 15 Members would need to be present to undertake all necessary decisions. Members noted that all business could be transacted before Full Council and that the Meeting should solely be used to ratify decisions. Full Councils in which there are no decisions being made should be postponed.

- That Dispensations would be processed for any Councillors who are or may become at risk of breaching the 'six - month rule' of non-attendance of a meeting.
- Discretionary and Housing Review Panel and the Rating Advisory Panels can continue by operating virtually.
- All meetings should be analysed and factors such as how 'essential' they are, Member availability, nature of the business/urgency, legal risk to holding a meeting or cancelling a meeting must be considered. The minimum number of Members would be required to attend, and proportionality must be adhered to. All meetings would need to be prioritised.
- The Council has IT Software (Microsoft Teams) which supports virtual meetings. The Software enables external parties to participate in meetings. Officers would be tasked with the logistics for organising and running virtual meetings and ensuring that all relevant parties are able to participate.

The Meeting ended at 6.30 pm

CHAIRMAN: _____

DATE _____