

Ojoye, Bolanle

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 22 June 2012 13:54
To: FOI@ (LGBCE)
Subject: Request for minutes of meetings

Hi

Can I please request copies of minutes from all meetings the LGBCE has had regarding the electroal review in Tower Hamlets and also Hackney?

Regards

[REDACTED]

Ojoye, Bolanle

From: Ojoye, Bolanle
Sent: 02 July 2012 15:57
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI Response 06/12

Attachments: Documents released.pdf

Dear [REDACTED]

Our Ref: 06/12

Thank you for your email of Friday 22 June 2012 requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You requested:

Copies of minutes form any meetings the LGBCE has had regarding the electoral review in Tower hamlets and also Hackney.

The Commission does hold information relevant to your request. Please find attached a list of all the documents released and PDFs of the information you requested.



Documents
released.pdf (113 KB)

The Commission also holds minutes from its Commission meeting of 13 June 2012 where both the reviews of Tower Hamlets and Hackney were discussed. The Commission considers that this information is exempt under section 22 of the Act and for the reasons set out below we are withholding this information from public disclosure at this time.

Section 22 of the Act states that information held by a public authority with a view to its publication at a future date may be considered exempt from disclosure. In line with process the June Commission minutes will be finalised at the July Commission meeting on 10 July 2012. The June Commission minutes will be available on our website the following day at:
<http://www.lgbce.org.uk/about-us/commissioners-minutes>.

Considering that the Commission will be publishing the information in due course it would be reasonable in all the circumstances to rely on the exemption, in particular because the information requested will be published shortly and on a determined date.

I hope this has been of assistance. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me, quoting the reference number above in any correspondence.

If you wish to request a review of our decision, you should write to:

Bolanle Ojoye
Freedom of Information Officer
Local Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London

EC1M 5LG

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint or review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: www.ico.gov.uk.

Generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Regards

Bolanle

Bolanle Ojoye
Legal and Implementation Officer
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
3rd Floor, Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
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P Please consider the environment before printing this email.

FOI 06/12		
FOI Request – Meeting notes relating to Hackney and Tower Hamlets reviews		
Information	Date	Released/Withheld/Reasons
Tower Hamlets meeting notes		
Officers meeting (transcribed notes)	2 August 2011	Released
Mayor and Group Leaders briefing (transcribed notes)	11 October 2011	Released
Full Council briefing (transcribed notes)	29 November 2011	Released
Mayor and Group Leaders council size discussions (transcribed notes)	9 January 2012	Released
	6 February 2012	Released
Hackney meeting notes		
Officers meeting (transcribed notes)	4 August 2011	Released
Mayor and Group Leaders briefing (transcribed notes)	15 September 2011	Released
Full Council briefing (transcribed notes)	5 December 2011	Released
Council size discussion with Cllr Steinberger (transcribed notes)	9 January 2012	Released
Mayor and Group Leaders council size discussion (transcribed notes)	9 January 2012	Released
Commission meeting minutes		
LGBCE (12) 2 nd Meeting	14 February 2012	Released – Commission minutes are available on the website at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_documents/lgbce/corporate/lgbce-minutes/2012/minutes-lgbce-12-2nd-2012-02-14.pdf

LGBCE (12) 3 rd Meeting	13 March 2012	Released – Commission minutes are available on the website at http://www.lgbce.org.uk/_documents/lgbce/corporate/lgbce-minutes/2012/minutes-lgbce-12-3rd-2012-03-13.pdf
LGBCE (12) 6 th Meeting	20 June 2012	Withheld – the minutes from the June Commission meeting are not yet finalised. This will be done according with process at the 10 July 2012 Commission meeting. The June minutes will then be made available online the following day.

Tower Hamlets Meeting Notes

Officer Meeting- 2 August 2011

Attendees:

Archie Gall- Director of Reviews (AG)

Joan D'souza- Review Manager (JD)

Sarah Murphy- Review Officer (SM)

Isabella Freeman- Assistant Chief Executive (IF)

Louise Stamp- Electoral Services Manager (LS)

LGBCE officers discussed the review process with Tower Hamlets and made sure they were aware of why the review was taking place and what would be involved in the review. Emphasis was placed on the initial stage of the review- Council Size. How it was important that the council started thinking about this at an early stage and discussing this with Group Leaders, the Mayor and members

LS- noticed that the figures they held were slightly different from ours, noticeable: Millwall +37%; Bromley -11%; Spitalfields & Banglatown -22%. AG- explained that we had the Dec 2010 figures as to why they could be different. LS to send SM updated figures.

When discussing the meetings IF suggested a separate meeting with Mayor and Group Leaders because the Mayor is independent. Agreed that we would set up separate meetings, but hopefully in the same day. Agreed that Group Leaders and Mayor meeting to be late September and Full Council in November.

LS & IF concerned about how the format that the council size submission should take- SM to send LS previous submissions- Slough as a recent example and our guidance.

AG- explained how the legislation had changed so there is no longer a presumption for three-member wards in London Boroughs. LS & IF required clarification on what this meant for the wards in Tower Hamlets if the number of councillors were reduced from one ward. AG explained that the council size was thought of before the warding patterns. We would not just be looking at the wards that had high variances.

IF- there are strong feelings within the residents on the names of the wards- which would need to be taken into consideration when re-naming wards.

SM- asked whether the council had any media to be able to publicise the review- IF & LS stated there was the East End Life newspaper produced by the council every week. The communications department also text and e mail consultees who respond to consultations on the Tower Hamlets website.

LS- major concern about the review is when it would come into force and what this meant for their department which is very busy with 1500 additional electors and 900 fewer electors each month.

SM- asked whether this would have an effect on the forecast for 2018 due to the large movements- however IF stated it was a consistent pattern and actually very easy to forecast for the future.

Tower Hamlets London Borough Council

11 October 2011

Mayor's Meeting

Mayor: Lutfur Rahman
Electoral Services Manager: Louise Stamp

LGBCE Chair: Max Caller
LGBCE Lead Commissioner: Colin Sinclair
LGBCE Review Manager: Joan D'souza
LGBCE Review Officer: Jessica Metheringham-Owlett

Max Caller (MC) made introductions and provided a brief intro to the electoral review process.

MC emphasised that three-member wards are not necessary, particularly as the authority does not elect by thirds. The Mayor clarified that it might be possible to propose a mixed pattern of wards. MC further pointed out that it isn't necessary to have a number divisible by three.

MC talked about the importance of the executive function and political management structure in coming to a council size, and how these factors may be influenced by the functions of the Mayor.

The Mayor was keen for advice on how to make a good submission, and the team suggested looking at Hartlepool submissions.

A deadline of mid-January was agreed.

Group Leaders' Meeting

Leader: Cllr Joshua Peck (Labour)
Main opposition: Cllr Peter Golds (Conservative)
Opposition: Cllr Fozol Miah (Respect)
Electoral Services Manager: Louise Stamp

LGBCE Chair: Max Caller
LGBCE Lead Commissioner: Colin Sinclair
LGBCE Review Manager: Joan D'souza
LGBCE Review Officer: Jessica Metheringham-Owlett

Max Caller (MC) made introductions and provided a brief intro to the electoral review process.

Peter Golds (PG) asked whether council resolutions were taken as an indication of the view of the council. MC emphasised that rationale and argument was essential.

MC pointed out communities are not uniform sizes and generally overlap. He talked about the use of strong boundaries, and the councillors agreed that Tower Hamlets contained some strong and clear boundaries.

PG wondered whether large numbers of single-member wards were acceptable, and Joshua Peck (JP) raised concerns that the LGBCE was pre-disposed against three-member wards. MC stressed that the review sought to find a pattern which worked well for the council and the area. He further mentioned that he considered it would be difficult to justify a uniform pattern of three-member wards, and that each ward needs to be justified individually and on its own merit.

PG asked whether the Mayor would have a greater influence on the council size decision than the council. MC emphasised that each submission is considered on its own merit.

PG suggested that workloads could be a misleading way of approaching council size, as not all councillors held surgeries and some councillors had additional responsibilities. MC said that it was less to do with exactly what each councillor's workload was, and more about the council as a whole.

There were some additional concerns regarding deadlines, the timing of the review, when electorate forecasts could be agreed, and multi-member wards.

A deadline of mid-January was agreed.

Tower Hamlets London Borough Council

29 November 2011

Full Council

LGBCE Lead Commissioner: Colin Sinclair

LGBCE Review Manager: Joan D'souza

LGBCE Review Officer: Jessica Metheringham-Owlett

Presentation was given by Joan D'souza followed by a Q&A.

The following issues and concerns were raised by councillors:

Councillor Marc Francis

- With regard to council size, what sort of stakeholders would you expect to hear from, besides the council?
- Could you expand on issues which you don't consider because they are "political" – would issues such as ethnicity and languages spoken in certain wards be political issue? For example, the desire for councillors to speak particular languages could indicate multi-member wards.
- The timetable for getting a council size paper in seems a little short.

Joan D'souza (JD) clarified that anyone can forward a submissions, we consider the quality of the evidence provided. She explained that if a significant change in council size was proposed then there would be a public consultation. JD also suggested that councillors include all evidence they considered relevant in their submission – if it can be demonstrated that there is good reason for a single/multi member ward, then the Commission would consider it, providing it was not political. JD highlighted that the January deadline was only in regard to council size.

Councillor Ahmed Omar

- The census outcome is close, and the census will show us firstly the true identity of the community and secondly the undercount in the community, so shouldn't we wait for that?

Colin Sinclair (CS) explained that it was the electorate which was taken into account rather than the census. He also pointed out that the electorate forecast was compiled by the council staff, and that councillors could look at these figures and comment on them.

Councillor Ann Jackson

- How does this fit in with the new Localism Bill?
- What will the review cost us, the council?
- When would the results be implemented?

JD clarified that the LGBCE is paid through Parliament rather than by the council, and set out the process and the legislation we work under.

Councillor (unknown)

- Will individual voter registration have an effect, and if so, how will you deal with that?

CS said that while the LGBCE was looking at this issue, we work with the current electoral register.

Councillor Abdul Asad

- Will you be extending your consultation down to the general population?
- The timescale is too short.
- What sort of political implications do you consider?
- Are you doing this to other London Councils?

JD explained that the consultations would be open to everyone, and that all submissions were considered on the merit of evidence. She also said that party political implications such as one party losing or gaining seats were not considered, and that Hackney was also undergoing review. The timescale was in relation to council size only, not to warding patterns.

Councillor David Edgar

- How will you work through the impact of individual voter registration on future projections?

CS explained that the LGBCE was looking at this issue.

Councillor Mortin Uz-Zaman

- We have a very young population and a programme of house building – will you take these into consideration?
- What about strong boundaries such as large roads or canals?

JD explained that the forecasts were created by the council officers and that attainers and house building normally formed part of the methodology. JD emphasised that roads or canals could be regarded as strong boundaries and could be important evidence, but major roads are not always necessarily strong boundaries. We welcomed all views on boundaries.

Councillor Stephanie Eaton

- Do you have more detailed criteria on how to balance the geographical criteria?

JD pointed the councillor towards the website and examples of recent reviews, mentioning certain facilities that may be focal points in a community, and said that we considered all submissions based on rationale.

Councillor Shafiqul Haque

- The timescale seems very short.

- Do you accept proposals from anyone, and is the council's proposal given greater weight than anyone else's?

JD clarified that all submissions are considered on merit, but pointed out that the council itself is likely to have a good sense of the most appropriate council size.

Councillor (unknown)

- How do you work out the ratio?

JD explained divided the councillors by electors. This was the start of the review, and that while the current councillor/elector ratio was obviously known, once the council size had been decided that may change.

Councillor Judith Gardiner

- Will your proposals be equality accessed?
- Do councils ever increase in size?

JD emphasised that we make efforts for our consultations to reach as many people as possible and seek to work with the council's equalities staff to achieve this. She also gave examples of councils which have increased in size.

Councillor Oliyr Rahman

- Do you consider petitions on ward names if the petition is also backed up by evidence?

JD explained that petitions tended to provide little evidence, but that where an accompanying rationale was submitted then we would look closely at that rationale. It is the quality of proposals not the quantity. JD mentioned that people feel quite passionate about ward names and said that we would be interested to receive suggestions and proposals.

Notes from additional meetings with Tower Hamlets Council

This contains the notes from meetings held on 9 January 2012 and 6 February 2012.

Meetings on 9 January 2012

Mayor (page 1)

Conservative Group (page 2)

Labour Group (page 3)

Meetings on 6 February 2012

Conservative Group (page 4)

Labour Group (page 5)

Mayor's Representatives (page 7)

9 January 2012

Attendees for all meetings:

Colin Sinclair – Lead Commissioner, LGBCE

Joan D'souza – Review Manager, LGBCE

Jessica Metheringham-Owlett – Review Officer, LGBCE

John Williams – Head of Democratic Services, Tower Hamlets Council

Louise Stamp – Electoral Services, Tower Hamlets Council

Caroline Richards – Electoral Services, Tower Hamlets Council

Mayor's Proposal

5:15pm

Attending this meeting only:

Mayor Lutfur Rahman

Cllr Ohid Ahmed – Deputy Mayor

Axel Landin – Mayor's Political Assistant

Council size

The Mayor stated that he was considering a reduction of five or six councillors, reducing the council size from 51 to 45 or 46. He was unwilling to give a commitment on multi-member wards, beyond indicating that he would not be proposing a uniform pattern of single-member wards.

Discussion

The Mayor argued that the changes in executive arrangements, first with the committee structure and secondly with the mayoral system, pointed towards a reduction in council size. He emphasised that decisions are made in cabinet rather than committees. The mayoral system has resulted in a shift in the balance of political structures, and a shift in casework allocation – issues are now being raised directly with the mayor, whose casework has doubled.

The Mayor further argued that the system has become more streamlined and that the merging of committees has contributed to a need to reduce members. Constitution working group is looking at the committee structure.

He also stated that individual councillor workload has decreased since the implementation of the mayoral system, arguing that the overall workload of the council is increasingly concentrated on fewer councillors.

Labour Group Proposal

6pm

Attending this meeting only:

Cllr Joshua Peck – Labour Leader

Cllr David Edgar

Council size

The Labour group are considering a recommendation of no change (51 councillors). Cllr Peck stated that he was against single-member wards.

Discussion

The Labour councillors emphasised that the mayoral system has moved power from the executive to the mayor, but not from the majority of councillors to the mayor. They stated that full council makes important decisions and that the community role of councillors is essential.

Cllr Peck maintained that high levels of casework were being generated from the wards as a result of housing issues, with the majority of work arising from the representational role of councillors rather than the governance role. Cllr Peck argued that councillors were increasingly active, and that the community is very diverse. Councillors are heavily involved in outside organisations such as residents groups and housing associations or safer neighbourhood teams, with non-executive councillors taking a more such roles than the executive. Cllr Peck also stated that councillors carry out informal community roles such as mediation religious or cultural contexts.

The Labour councillors argued that three-member wards have increased the diversity of the candidates, enabling a more diverse range of councillors. The ability of councillors to respond to a rich mix of residents is enhanced by being in a multi-member ward. They also suggested that three member wards enable women to represent electors.

Concerns

The Labour councillors asked for clarity on presenting a case for multi-member wards, and in particular whether the LGBCE would accept an argument that multi-member wards are more democratic. They further argued that the question of councillors per ward feeds into the overall council size.

Conservative Group Proposal

6:45pm

Attending this meeting only:

Cllr Craig Aston

Council size

The Conservative group is considering a significant reduction of nine, taking the council size from 51 to 42. Multi-member wards are being considered, but not a uniform pattern of either three- or two-member wards. The suggested council size of 42 (rather than 43 or 41) is based on a particular preferred warding pattern.

Discussion

Cllr Aston stated that the Conservative proposal would consider members' responsibilities and caseload. He pointed out that timesheets kept by the council indicate that Tower Hamlets councillors are working fewer hours than the national average.

Cllr Aston argued that the case for reduction rests on the workloads, committee structures, scrutiny and representational roles of councillors. He stated that the Conservative submission will propose alternative governance structures, possibly combining a "beefed-up" committee structure with fewer councillors. He also argued for more scrutiny committees and a reduction in the non quasi-judicial structures.

Concerns

Cllr Aston asked for clarity around how far the forecast electoral figures should be broken down, especially in areas of high development.

6 February 2012

Attendees for all meetings:

Colin Sinclair – Lead Commissioner, LGBCE

Joan D'souza – Review Manager, LGBCE

Jessica Metherringham-Owlett – Review Officer, LGBCE

John Williams – Head of Democratic Services, Tower Hamlets Council

Caroline Richards – Electoral Services, Tower Hamlets Council

Conservative Group Proposal

5.30pm

Attending this meeting only:

Cllr Peter Golds – Conservative Leader

Cllr Craig Aston

Cllr Tim Archer

The Lead Commissioner and the team asked the Conservative councillors to expand on the key points of the Conservative proposal, in particular in relation to their proposed re-organisation of scrutiny and other committees.

Mayoral system and committees

The Conservative councillors stated that some of the non-executive committees are a waste of time. There is a significant difference in council workload under a mayoral system compared to the previously used committee system – for example, under the mayoral system councillors do not undertake as much formal decision making. The Mayor currently holds all the decision-making powers, except the ability to veto the budget. The Conservative proposal was therefore for a more streamlined committee system combining a number of different committees, such as pensions and audit.

Scrutiny

The Conservative councillors felt that the introduction of the Mayoral system means that more scrutiny is required. The function of councillors is mainly regulatory (ie planning and licensing) and scrutiny. Councillors therefore need to scrutinise the Mayor's decisions in a formal and effective way. The Conservatives councillors stated that scrutiny should be undertaken at a much lower level with more detail, getting down to the "nitty gritty" rather than ticking boxes. Under the mayoral system, full council meetings are considered to be more of a "talking shop", which does not provide the level of scrutiny needed.

The Mayor makes some decisions outside of cabinet and council, and ad hoc (and occasionally urgent) scrutiny meetings are called to deal with these decisions. The Conservative proposal was for a more effective formal structure, under which almost all non-executive councillors would be included in a scrutiny panel.

Community role

Councillors engage in other representative roles within the community, and these vary depending on how active individual councillors choose to be. Most wards contain Residents' Associations, but as these tend to be small and generally do not meet often, they do not add much to a councillor's workload.

Casework

Since the introduction of the Mayoral system, many councillors have been more proactive. An increase in casework or enquiries may also be due to the Mayor, as he is very active in the community and this generates more casework. The Conservative councillors all agreed that casework is manageable. Enquiries aren't necessarily the same as casework, and some enquiries can be very minor issues. Conservative councillors do not have letters or casework passed down to them from the Mayor, and the casework which is sent to the Mayor appears to stay within his office.

Other issues

The Conservative councillors stated their belief that Labour councillors would support the Conservative proposals with regard to increasing scrutiny, but did not think that the Labour councillors would accept further changes to the committee structure.

The Conservative warding proposal would be for two-member wards. This is due to the logistics of representing a dense urban area – the Conservative councillors argued that a two-member ward of 10,000 electors feels very different to a three-member ward of 15,000 electors.

Reason for a council size of 42

The difference between 42 and 51 is a matter of principle, while the difference between 42 and 43 is pragmatic, as 42 works better on the warding pattern.

Labour Group Proposal

6:15pm

Attending this meeting only:

Cllr Joshua Peck – Labour Leader

The Lead Commissioner and the team asked Cllr Peck to expand upon the key points of the Labour proposal, in particular in relation to councillor workload.

Mayoral system and committees

Cllr Peck argued that the Mayor's powers and responsibilities have come from the cabinet rather than from non-executive councillors. He also argued that the introduction of a Mayor has created additional work for non-executive councillors. There are 12 key strategies which are reserved for full council, and which are brought to full council by the cabinet lead member. Items put into the strategy plan are tied to the medium term financial plan, but the non-

executive councillors do not have an opportunity to engage in this process. Under the mayoral system, if full council wants to amend these key strategies then the research must be undertaken from scratch by those councillors independently, as the council officers aren't available to non-executive councillors. The contribution to the process by the opposition is therefore not properly resourced and can be time consuming.

Scrutiny

The Mayor regularly takes decisions outside of cabinet, which has resulted in the creation of more work, especially in regard to scrutiny. An example of this is the recent decision to let Victoria Park during the Olympics, which was then called in as an urgent decision for overview and scrutiny, resulting in an additional unplanned committee meeting. Cllr Peck argued that the normal methods of scrutiny are not effective enough and result in additional scrutiny work, adding significantly to councillor workload.

The full council scrutinises the Mayor's budget on an ongoing basis. The Labour proposal stated that it would be difficult to carry out the sort of scrutiny required with fewer councillors. Overview and strategy is a single group and cannot do all the work needed to scrutinise the decisions of the Mayor.

Community role

Large parts of Tower Hamlets have specific community needs, and the high levels of deprivation generate additional work for councillors. Councillors perform informal additional roles such as officiating at mosque AGMs, because councillors are seen as unbiased mediators. While not formal roles, there is high expectation from the community for councillors to be involved.

Casework

Cllr Peck stated that the mayoral system has resulted in more casework. Some of the casework is duplicated, as local residents often approach the Mayor as the first port of call as they feel he has more authority to deal with their issues, and then speak to ward councillors later. Casework is increasing significantly due to the amount of work related to housing benefit (following government changes to housing benefit) and the high levels of deprivation in the borough. Cllr Peck also provided anecdotal evidence of his workload, stating that he often spends Sundays reading through his emails as the working week and Saturdays are tied up in councillor surgery or undertaking his representational role by meeting with members of the public. It was added that the Mayor doesn't pass casework down to members in the Labour group.

Prior to the introduction of the Mayor, officers were able to assist councillors in drafting responses to queries from members of the public. However, under the mayoral system this has changed to a system by which officers can write the letters for councillors and send them out. Cllr Peck argued that because councillors are normally reluctant for letters to go out in their name without having had some input, most councillors keep the casework to themselves, thereby resulting in more work for those councillors.

Further comment

The informal community workload demands are not diminishing but increasing. The majority of councillors work full-time, and Cllr Peck stated that only one Labour councillor is above the state pensionable age. Reducing the number of councillors would restrict the number of individuals who would be able to devote the required time to stand for council.

Reason for a council size of 51

The council size was arrived at – not by looking at the status quo – but by considering the number of councillors required in view of the demanding nature of the job in an area with an increasing electorate and a highly diverse and deprived borough.

Cllr Peck stated that it is commonplace and generally accepted that councillors go beyond the call of duty when representing their wards. Current workload means that it's not practical to have a significant reduction. Furthermore, the current level of scrutiny would be difficult to undertake with less councillors.

Mayor's Proposal

7pm

Attending this meeting only:

Cllr Ohid Ahmed – Deputy Mayor

Axel Landin – Mayor's Political Assistant

The Lead Commissioner and the team asked the Deputy Mayor and the Mayor's assistant to expand on the key points of the Mayor's proposal, in particular the role of the Mayor and cabinet.

Mayoral system and committees

It was stressed that the capacity to reduce councillors arises from the changes to the committee structure which has occurred over the past ten years – since 2001 committee places have reduced from 221 to 95. The Mayor's proposal did consider additional changes to the committees, such as the General Purposes Committee, but decided against such changes as these committees are working well.

The Mayor's representatives argued that key policies and strategies which are reserved for full council rarely require indepth discussion in full council and all the necessary work is done at officer level. The Mayor and cabinet control the discussion about medium term financial plans for these strategies. Matters relating to the annual budget are reserved for full council to discuss. The Mayor sometimes takes decisions outside of cabinet (to date 13 such decisions have been taken since the Mayor took up his position in October 2010), but the volume of decisions made by the Mayor has remained the same when compared to the previous leader and cabinet system

Scrutiny

Scrutiny is currently streamlined, and this is an effective model. The Mayor's proposal was to reduce the councillors to fit this existing model, and so would not affect the current number of scrutiny positions.

Community role

In Tower Hamlets, communities are actively engaged in civic society, and much of the interaction with these communities comes from the Mayor. People direct their queries to him in the first instance as they realise that he has more authority than the ward councillors, both in terms of casework and in terms of other community expectations.

The Mayor's representatives recognised that informal the role within the community is extremely important and acknowledged that councillors may spend additional time in the community role than expected. The Mayor's representatives argued that a decrease in councillors would not have a detrimental impact on this community role. There is also a local engagement project in the pipeline, which will be more community-led – however, this is still very much a work in progress.

Casework

Time spent on casework differs amongst councillors, and it can be said that good councillors often generate work. The Mayor's office deals with the Mayor's casework and the casework of cabinet members. For practical reasons this work rarely gets filtered down to ward councillors. Many casework matters relate to specific issues such as housing. An increasing population will not necessarily equate to more casework. Figures regarding members' enquiries can also be misleading, as they include internal enquiries sent from councillors to the Mayor or to cabinet members.

Other issues

Councillors regularly complete timesheets. The Mayor's representatives state that current guidelines from the London Councils regarding expenses show that Tower Hamlets councillors are spending less time on their councillor workload than the London average.

There has been a reduction in planning applications, and Tower Hamlets does not receive as many planning applications as most other London councils.

Reason for a council size of 45

Under the more centralised executive Mayoral system, a reduction of six councillors is appropriate. The Mayor's representatives suggested that 38 councillors would be sufficient to run the business side of the council, but that 45 is more appropriate given the extent of the community roles undertaken by councillors.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
HACKNEY COUNCIL**

Officers Meeting

4pm, Thursday 4th August 2011

Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA

Attendees:

Tim Shields	CEO, LB Hackney
Gifty Edila,	Director, Legal, HR & Regulatory Services, LB Hackney
Michael Summerville	Head of Electoral & Member Services, LB Hackney
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Apologies: None

Welcome and introductions

The Review Manager provided an Introduction to the role of the LGBCE and gave a presentation on the electoral review.

Discussion / Q&A

LGBCE – First stage is to seek a view on Council size.

TS – Review is very poorly timed as it coincides with the run up to the Olympics which will be an extremely busy time for the Council.

MS – Review will also coincide with GLA elections which is a busy time for Electoral & Member Services.

LGBCE - Recognise the difficulties with timings however the Commission has a statutory duty to rectify most significant electoral inequalities. The team will work with the Council to support as appropriate through the most challenging elements of the review.

TS – Appreciated the electoral variances in Hackney and the consequent need for an electoral review.

GA – Will there be opportunities for consultation throughout review?

LGBCE – Significant opportunities for consultation depending on scale and scope of review. If there is a significant change in council size proposed, then a Type C review will enable consultation on council size and two rounds of consultation on warding patterns.

GA – How will the Commission work with the Council on ensuring adequate electoral growth projections?

LGBCE – Will require a robust rationale to underpin projections but recognise that forecasting is an inexact science. Council should seek to project growth that can reasonably be forecast. Forecasts should be realistic.

MS – Will the Commission help with Council costs?

LGBCE – There is no grant available to cover direct Council costs. Nor do we require you to fund us during the review. Commission staff will assist with significant elements of the review including consultation. Appropriate literature can be made available in foreign languages as required.

MS – is there any terms of reference for consideration of Council size?

LGBCE – Council size needs to be fit for purpose in terms of Hackney Council. The Commission does not have a threshold or banding for council size. The Commission has no preconceptions of what the council size for Hackney should be. Decision on council size will be based on evaluation of evidence. It is hoped that agreement will be arrived at through dialogue with our Commissioners and your political leadership during the early stages of the review.

GE – Which reviews have finished should Hackney Council wish to contact relevant local authorities to share best practice?

LGBCE – Details of all reviews are available on LGBCE website.

MS – Does the Commission engage with community groups?

LGBCE – A presentation on the review can be arranged for a group of local community and residential associations. All community groups will receive information on the review and consultation periods.

MS – Will the Commission ensure coterminosity with parliamentary boundaries?

LGBCE – The Commission has no regard for parliamentary boundaries which will anyway subject to change under the current review being conducted by the Boundary Commission for England.

Meeting closed at 5pm

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
HACKNEY COUNCIL**

Mayor & Group Leaders Meeting

Thursday 15th September 2011

Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA

Session One, Meeting with the Mayor, 9am

Attendees:

Jules Pipe	Mayor of Hackney
Max Caller	Chair, LGBCE
Dr Colin Sinclair	Lead Commissioner, LGBCE
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Apologies: None

Notes of discussion

MC provided an introduction to the role of the LGBCE and gave a presentation on the electoral review.

MC – The first stage of the review is to consider council size, and the Commission will seek a rationale based submission that considers management and scrutiny arrangements, workload, the representative role of the member etc. Many local authorities with elected mayors have taken the opportunity to reduce council size but each authority is different.

JP – Emphasised the dynamic in Hackney, where the work of members is valued and there is an unusually high workload due to licensing and planning committees.

MC – This would be key evidence in any submission on council size.

CS – The council should view the discussion on council size as an opportunity to review its ways of working, member workload and overall management arrangements.

JP – Does the Commission have any preconceptions on council size, particularly with regards to authorities with elected mayors?

MC – No preconceptions, review depends on local context. However, any submission will need to consider the representative role of members in light of having an elected mayor.

MC – The review may result in a mixed member warding pattern for Hackney. No presumption of uniformity or three-member wards.

JP – There may be strong feelings against a change from a three-member pattern. Multi-member wards may be viewed as essential to protect representative role and ensure effective representation on planning and licensing committees. There would also be concerns about ensuring adequate diversity amongst members but this would be difficult to evidence as it manifests itself informally. Also notes that three-member wards tend to offer greater proportionality at elections.

MC – Evidence of member workload and reflecting diversity could represent substantive evidence for a warding pattern and could be justified by ensuring effective and convenient local government. However, evidence from previous reviews suggests public appetite for single-member wards. Assertions of proportionality would unlikely be considered substantive evidence.

JP – Unable to assert views of Hackney residents on single or multi-member pattern. The council may do some local consultation.

MC - Notes that ensuring reflection of community identity does not imply the Commission would look favourably on the creation of ethnicity based warding arrangements.

JP – Will the Commission engage regional parties? Do they generally tend to show an interest in local government reviews?

MC – As stakeholders, regional parties are consulted as a matter of course. However, they tend to engage very little although this may be different in the case of a London borough.

JP – Hope the review will consider key high streets such as Stoke Newington High Street as centres of community providing focal point for wards rather than ward boundaries.

MC – Recognise value of high streets as centres of community. London boroughs are unique from districts in that they have identifiable centres but diffused boundaries between communities. The Commission will look to ensure that these centres form the focal point of wards. The team will look to utilise strong geographical features for boundaries such as canals, railway lines and parks.

JP – What if the council doesn't engage in the review process?

CS – Can present significant difficulties. Dialogue between the authority and LGBCE emphasises the benefits of proactive engagement as it fosters some ownership of the process and avoids a council size and warding pattern being foisted upon a council.

CS – The Commission will need to do a presentation to full council.

JP – This can be arranged for November.

Meeting closed at 10am

Session Two, Meeting with Group Leaders, 11am

Attendees:

Cllr Michael Levy	Leader, Conservative Group, LB Hackney
Cllr Ian David Sharer	Leader, Liberal Democrat Group, LB of Hackney
Max Caller	Chair, LGBCE
Dr Colin Sinclair	Lead Commissioner, LGBCE
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Apologies: None

Notes of discussion

MC provided an introduction to the role of the LGBCE and gave a presentation on the electoral review.

ML – Raised concerns reducing council size against the impacts of the Localism Bill and changes to planning will increase the workload of elected members. However, it is difficult to quantify an exact council size requirement in the absence of more information.

IS – Has concerns around increased delegated planning in order to accommodate smaller council size. Moreover, a smaller council size could be to the detriment of the representative role of the councillor.

MC – The Commission has no preconceptions on council size. If it can be evidenced that Hackney requires a similar or greater council size then this would be considered. It is for the council to determine what it wants to do, how it wants to do it, and why a specific council size is required.

CS – The council size discussion provides the council with an opportunity to review working and management arrangements. All Commission decisions are evidence based.

MC – Discussed likelihood of mix pattern of single, two and three-member wards for Hackney post-review.

IS – Concerns over protecting the representative role of the councillor. Own example where Cazenove ward has 6 surgeries per month split between three members. This wouldn't be possible with fewer members per ward.

CS – This could be cited as part of the evidence base for a multi-member pattern.

IS – Raised concerns of breaking current community cohesiveness in wards, built up over years by members with knowledge of local area. Cited own experience in Cazenove where Jewish and Muslim communities work closely together. A single-member pattern could divide these communities to the detriment of both.

MC – Community cohesiveness is also a key part of the evidence base.

CS – Community identity is part of the statutory criteria and one of the reasons that the commission undertakes a tour of the area prior to approving recommendations.

ML – Is a three-member ward the maximum allowed?

MC – It is the maximum that would be considered by the LGBCE. Any more members per ward would dilute the representative role of the councillor. Evidence from previous reviews shows that electorate prefer single and two-member wards.

IS – How does the Commission deal with shifting populations and its impact on variances?

MC – The Commission places great weight on electorate forecasts and will work closely with council officers to produce a robust set of figures that will take into account new developments etc.

ML – Some parts of the community are notoriously difficult to engage. How will the Commission overcome this?

MC – The Commission will work with council and other key stakeholders to undertake full consultation throughout the review process. However, it is important to clarify that the review is only concerned with elector numbers and not whole populations.

CS – Confirmed the review timescales, including the plan to present to full council in November. A 'minded to' decision on council size will be made in Feb 2012. The role of the group leaders in raising awareness of the review amongst members and the wider electorate was emphasised.

IS – Is the council size decision in Feb final?

MC – It is a 'minded to' decision that may differ by ± 1 . However, important to consider arguments and influence the process between now and Feb.

Meeting closed at 11.50am

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
LONDON BOROUGH HACKNEY**

Full Council Meeting

18:00pm, Monday 5th December 2011

Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA

LGBCE Attendees:

Dr. Colin Sinclair	Lead Commissioner, LGBCE
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Members Present

Cllr Geoff Taylor, Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas, Cllr Michelle Gregory, Cllr Ian Sharer, Cllr Rick Muir, Cllr Ann Munn, Cllr Jessica Webb, Cllr Saleem Siddiqui, Cllr Sally Mulready, Cllr Phil Glanville, Cllr Simche Steinberger, Cllr Michael Levy, Cllr Benzion Papier, Cllr Abraham Jacobson, Cllr Dawood Akhoon, Cllr Daniel Stevens

Welcome and introductions

Gifty Edelia, Director for Legal, HR & Regulatory Services, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

CS introduced the team, provided an introduction to the role of the LGBCE and provided an overview of the electoral review process, emphasising the importance of agreeing council size.

RB provided a presentation on the Hackney FER.

Q&A

Questions on council size

Q. Does the Commission have a preconceived view on council size?

The Commission has no preconceptions on Council size and will depend on submitted evidence specific to Hackney.

Q. Will the Commission push for a reduction of council size because of its mayoral system?

The recent experience of the Commission is that authorities with a mayor have generally reduced council size. However this has been because of evidence submitted to the Commission from those reviews. The Commission makes no prejudgement with regards to Hackney. It will depend on the robustness of the rationale provided to the Commission. We will want a dialogue with you as you develop your rationale.

Q Is there a benchmark for council size based on total electorate or council type?

There is no optimum ratio for council size. Each council is considered on its own merits.

Q. Is the diversity of the borough a consideration for council size?

We recognise that Hackney is a diverse borough. Specific communities may share services and community amenities and facilitates. It is these practical examples of community links which are a key consideration at warding stage. The Commission will not seek to segregate communities based on ethnicity or religion or any other factor.

Q. Is gender a consideration for council size i.e. ensuring more female members?

Studies have shown that where an elected body is representative of its electorate, this can help in providing effective representation for the electorate. However, this is more an issue for political parties in selection of candidates. Workload issues in this regard should be fed into the consideration of council size and not warding arrangements.

Questions on councillor workload

Q. How does the review process and warding arrangements take into account member workload?

Q. How does the review take into account general population and elector growth projections which increase member workload?

Member workload should be considered at council size stage. The Commission will not 'weight' its warding arrangements to take account of workload.

Questions on the review process

Q. Will the Commission undertake a tour with members?

The Commission will tour the borough and view boundaries 'on the ground' independently of members. However, if requested, an additional tour can be considered by the Commission. It would need to be undertaken with a cross-party group of members.

Q. What is the Commission's view on a uniform three-member pattern?

Each ward whatever its size, will need to be evidenced on its merits. Hackney has the opportunity to move away from a uniform three-member pattern and adopt a mixed pattern if it feels this will reflect community identities across Hackney. The Commission will consider each ward on the evidence provided.

Q. How did the Commission identify variances?

Electorate data assessed for all local authorities annually and checked with Council officers to verify variances are unlikely to correct.

Q. Can the authority excuse itself from the review?

No, as Hackney meets the Commission criteria to trigger a review. Only requesting authorities that do not meet the criteria may withdraw.

Q. How does the review take into account fluctuations in electorate, e.g. that of the Olympic site?

Year 5 forecasts from the date of the completion of the review are required by legislation and agreed with officers. Variances can accommodate forecasts to ensure good electoral equality five years after the completion of the review.

Q. How does the LGBCE take into account developments that may or may not happen?

Forecasts should look at the impact of developments that will definitely happen in the five years post review. It is recognised that forecasting presents many challenges and is an inexact science. Forecasts should distinguish between permanent and temporary growth. Forecasts should be realistic rather than too ambitious.

Questions on community engagement

Q. How does the Commission ensure local communities are fully engaged in the review process?

All periods of consultation are published in the local press, on the Commission website and advertised locally via the Council. We will also produce posters for local display. The Council is also encouraged to undertake its own additional consultation if possible and provide us with information about language groups in the borough so we are able to provide translations of these materials where necessary. The Commission will also seek to do a presentation to local community groups with the support of the Council.

Actions

DE to email abridged timetable with key milestones

DE to email LGA survey on member workload

Meeting closed at 19:45pm

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
HACKNEY COUNCIL**

Meeting with Cllr Steinberger

4pm, Monday 9th January 2012

Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA

Attendees:

Cllr Steinberger	Conservative Group, LB Hackney
Dr Colin Sinclair	Lead Commissioner, LGBCE
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Notes

Meeting held at the request of Cllr Steinberger.

Cllr Steinberger raised concerns, on behalf of the Conservative Group, with the information received from Hackney Council that has triggered the review. In Cllr Steinberger's opinion, several current variances will correct naturally as a result of developments in the north of the borough that may have meant that the review would not have gone ahead. Cllr Steinberger wanted to know if, by bringing this information to the notice of the Commission, the review of Hackney would be stopped. Cllr Steinberger also raised concerns with an advance copy of projected electorates that had come into his possession.

Cllr Steinberger was advised that it was very unlikely that the review would not go ahead now that it had begun, especially as despite Cllr Steinberger's observations, current electoral variances would not correct in time for the next elections in 2014.

Cllr Steinberger was also advised that any concerns with electorate forecasts should be raised in the first instance with council officers. Any concerns with the electoral review of Hackney, or with the information received by the Commission as part of the review, could be brought to the Commission's attention formally in writing. Any information received by the Commission would be taken into consideration.

Contact details supplied.

Meeting closed at 4.30pm

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND
HACKNEY COUNCIL**

**Further Group Leaders Meeting
Council Size Discussion**

3pm on Monday 9th January 2012

Town Hall, Mare Street, E8 1EA

Attendees:

Jules Pipe	Mayor of Hackney
Cllr S Steinberger	Conservative Group, LB Hackney
Cllr I Sharer	Liberal Democrat group, LB Hackney
Joanna Sumner	Asst Chief Executive, LB Hackney
Dr Colin Sinclair	Lead Commissioner, LGBCE
Richard Buck	Review Manager, LGBCE
Danny Edwards	Review Officer, LGBCE

Apologies: None

Notes of discussion

CS welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the team from the LGBCE.

JS summarised the draft council size submission from Hackney Council. The key points from the submission are:

- 1 Recommends no change in council size (57 members)
- 2 Recognises the heavy workloads currently placed on elected members
- 3 Workload is expected to increase
- 4 Increase considered but not thought viable politically. Members should be expected to absorb additional work.

JP considered that the current council size enabled more effective representation. Current crop of members are younger and more diverse and have additional demands placed on them e.g. family, day job etc. Cutting the number of councillors could make demands untenable on some and reduce the current diversity of members.

CS asked if the council had considered the case for an increase and/or decrease that further justified the retention of existing council size.

IS stated that a smaller council would reduce the ability of members to effectively represent a diverse population.

JP noted that Hackney has one of the least homogenous communities in London and ensuring effective representation warranted retaining or enlarging the size of the Council. However, the public would be unlikely to accept a council size increase in the current economic climate, especially as council workers are being asked to take on more work in the face of financial cuts.

SS argued that workload has increased and the council should resist possible negative public opinion and evidence an increase in council size. CC cited demands on councillor time including rapidly growing population and demands resulting from governance, scrutiny and committee functions. It was likely to become harder to attract good councillors in this environment.

CS asked about the evidence base that demonstrates this increase in workload.

JS cited the 21st Century Councillor Project, results of which will be shared with the Commission.

CS asked about the mayoral system, and how current governance arrangements impacted on council size.

JP stated that cabinet members serve in a full time capacity so doesn't demands don't necessarily place additional strain on cabinet members or interfere too much with their ability to represent electors or manage ward workload.

IS noted that the mayoral system has meant a drop in workload for members in certain areas.

CS asked about demands of managing scrutiny and committee functions effectively.

JP stated that the scrutiny is pro-active but will not choose to do less so not much scope to reduce workload. 95% of planning functions are already delegated and the Council is powerless to influence the volume of licensing workload.

SS asked about the Commission view of councillors supporting unregistered voters, which added to councillor workload. As a result, some of the smallest wards in terms of electorate can place the highest demands on members.

RB stated that the Commission can only have regard for registered electors. CS said that it is for the authority to fine tune its working arrangements to balance the demands placed on members.

RB outlined the next steps of the review:

- 1 Council submission goes before full council on 25 Jan

- 2 Submission date to Commission 27 Jan
- 3 Mid-Feb commission meeting will issue a 'minded to' decision on council size
- 4 Consultation on council size will only take place if a significant change is recommended
- 5 Helpful for council to state where there is consensus on council size within submission
- 6 Submissions will also be accepted from other key stakeholders

Meeting closed at 4pm