

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE OF ALDERMEN
Tuesday, 6 February 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Tuesday, 6 February 2024 at
10.30 am

Present

Members:

Alderman Sir William Russell (Chairman)
Alderman Sir Charles Bowman (Deputy Chairman)
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mayor Ald. Michael Mainelli
Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley
Alderman Sir Peter Estlin
Alderman Vincent Keaveny, CBE
Alderman Alastair King DL
Alderman Alison Gowman
Alderman Timothy Hailes
Alderman Robert Howard
Alderman Prem Goyal, OBE
Alderman Professor Emma Edhem
Alderwoman & Sheriff Dame Susan Langley, DBE
Alderman and Sheriff Bronek Masojada
Alderman Alexander Barr
Alderman Christopher Makin
Alderman Tim Levene
Alderwoman Jennette Newman
Alderwoman Susan Pearson
Alderwoman Martha Grekos
Alderman Simon Pryke

Officers:

Ian Thomas, CBE	- Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Greg Moore	- Deputy Town Clerk
Polly Dunn	- Town Clerk's Department
Gemma Stokley	- Town Clerk's Department
Rhiannon Leary	- Executive Officer to the Court of Aldermen
Caroline Al-Beyerty	- The Chamberlain
Michael Cogher	- Comptroller and City Solicitor
Caroline Jack	- Executive Director, Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor
Benjamin Chen-Sverre	- Chamberlain's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Alderman Nicholas Lyons, Alderman Gregory Jones, KC, Alderman Robert Hughes-Penney and Alderman Kawsar Zaman.

2. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES**

The Committee considered the minutes of the last meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen held on 5 December 2023.

RESOLVED: - That the minutes of the last meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen held on 5 December 2023 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Chairman's Congratulatory Remarks

The Chairman, on behalf of the Court of Aldermen, offered congratulations to Alderman Alison Gowman who had been made a Doctor of Civil Law at Durham University and who had also been appointed as one of the City Corporation's Policy Leads of Sustainability.

He went on to congratulate Alderman Vincent Keaveny who had been offered an Honorary Fellowship by UCL in recognition of his work to reestablish the link between the Mayoralty and the University which the current Lord Mayor was continuing.

Finally, congratulations were offered to Alderman Alastair King who had become an Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment (CISI).

4. **THE OPERATION OF THE 6-YEAR CONVENTION FOR ALDERMEN**

The Committee considered a report of the Comptroller & City Solicitor and Deputy Chief Executive concerning the operation of the 6-year convention for Aldermen.

The Comptroller introduced the item, highlighting that discussion had been held at the last meeting of this Committee highlighting that the '6-year convention', adopted in 1998 had not been incorporated into the Undertakings document signed by all taking up the office of Aldermen adopted in 2003. Neither did the convention as drafted take into account those obligations potentially operating in conflict with it. The report presented today therefore sought the Committee's views as to re-casting the 6-year convention as additional paragraphs 1.1 – 1.3 granting both this Committee and the Nominations Committee of the Court of Aldermen the power to relax the convention upon written application from an individual Alderman in appropriate circumstances.

He went on to state that other matters impacting upon the conventions such as Purdah were set out within Aldermanic Standing Orders and had not been set out in the redraft proposed here, although this Committee might have further views on this matter and on the conventions more generally.

An Alderman queried whether references to the Magistracy (currently at paragraphs 1.4 and 1.6 of the conventions) should make it clear that this was

where applicable only given that some new Aldermen went down the magistracy route but others did not.

An Alderwoman spoke on the fact that the current conventions did not and had never mentioned the Purdah period following a Mayoralty and queried why this had not been included in the consolidation now proposed. Officers clarified that reference to Purdah currently featured in the Court of Aldermen's Standing Orders. The Alderwoman responded to state that, for reasons of transparency and clarity, she felt that the relevant Standing Order (39) ought to also be referenced within the Aldermanic conventions. She suggested that Purdah should be referred to a rule as opposed to a convention as it was clearly something that all those stepping down from the Mayoralty were required to observe. She also spoke to state that she was opposed to the convention of Purdah in and of itself as she felt it was undemocratic for an elected representative be put in a position whereby were seemingly unable to represent their constituents for a period of six months.

An Alderman commented that the Conventions document was one applicable to all Aldermen upon taking office whereas the Purdah period was only associated with the office of Lord Mayor.

Another Alderman clarified that the period of Purdah did not prevent proper representation of an Alderman's constituents as it applied primarily to civic functions and that the individual concerned was able to attend Committee meetings and the like.

Others spoke to agree that it was a valid point that Purdah should be referred to as a rule as opposed to a Convention going forward.

The Alderwoman then spoke on paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 of the draft conventions, stating that both of these would permit an Alderman to extend their six-year term of office by up to six months as long as the other Aldermen consider that it is 'reasonable to do so in all the circumstances'. She commented that she did not feel it was reasonable in any circumstances for someone elected to public office to stay in that office for one day more than their elected term. She added that she did not feel that this Committee had a democratic right to seek to extend this given that they were not the electorate. She recognised that whilst, technically, Aldermen were elected for life, the six-year convention had clearly been introduced as a means by which to make the office more democratic rather than introducing flexibility. She added that these issues could be avoided by those who knew they were in line for Lord Mayor or Sheriff planning sufficiently ahead and surrendering office early as had already been demonstrated by some on the Court.

The Chairman responded to state that there needed to be a degree of pragmatism applied for those serving the offices of Sheriff and Lord Mayor as the planning that went into this was critical and this was in the best interests of democracy and the City of London.

Another Alderman stated that they felt that the word 'reasonable' within paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 was helpful. She cautioned against introducing fixed terms with no flexibility. She went on to query whether it was helpful to be prescriptive in terms of permitting a maximum six-month extension of office.

Another Alderwoman agreed that it was unacceptable to extend a period of office given that Aldermen were elected and not selected. In terms of those likely to be put forward as future Lord Mayors, there was now a clear continuum which had been publicly communicated and should make for more precise forward planning in terms of both holding office and any period of Purdah thereafter. She went on to query what 'reasonable circumstances' might encompass.

The Chairman commented that, whilst there was a continuum at present, this was not always the case.

An Alderwoman re-visited the point regarding extension of office and stressed that this option was not available to Common Councillors or indeed to Members of Parliament. She also queried what a 'reasonable' circumstance might be and disagreed that this should include illness.

An Alderman spoke to underline that even continuum plans could change due to unforeseen circumstances such as extreme illness and that a degree of flexibility was therefore pragmatic to help cover the unforeseen.

Another Alderman stated that, fundamentally, this came down to the fact that Aldermen were elected officials and that things such as ill health had to be managed. He cautioned against the use of 'reasonable' which could be deemed to be a catch all term by some.

An Alderwoman moved on to speak on enforceability. Whilst the preamble to the Aldermanic Conventions document stated 'that the Town Clerk be instructed to inform all newly elected and existing Aldermen/women that individual members were expected to follow the following undertakings and that failure to do so would be one of the factors taken into account in assessing their suitability for any office' it was actually the electorate who now assessed the suitability or otherwise of someone to fulfil the office of Alderman. The only offices in which the Court of Aldermen had a say in terms of suitability was in terms of those coming forward for the Shrievalty and Mayoralty. Someone who had held both offices almost therefore fell out of scope here, making these words somewhat redundant. She went on to state that any Alderman who had failed to ensure that their term was able to comfortably encompass a term as either Sheriff or Lord Mayor should simply face the consequences and be obliged to submit a letter surrendering office at either the conclusion of their six-year term or on the occasion of their 75th birthday – whichever was sooner. There should be no ability to bend the rules in this respect.

The Comptroller and City Solicitor commented that the Aldermen could indeed seek to make the convention around the 6-year rule an absolute, however, this would likely lead to enforceability issues if an Alderman were to present with

reasonable circumstances for seeking an extension. The convention was a self-created rule that did not alter the legal position which could lead to judicial review were the Court to seek to remove an Alderman from office. Having the ability to review and 'flesh out' any such reasonable circumstances presented would therefore seem sensible. Ultimately, this was a matter for the Aldermen to decide upon. He added that there was the ability to allow Common Councillors and Aldermen alike not to discharge their duties for a six-month period where there were good reasons for doing so which was a modification to the rule in Local Government whereby Members who did not attend meetings for a period of six months would automatically lose office unless they had sought a leave of absence from the Council beforehand. The Comptroller added that the period of extension available to those applying was entirely within the hands of this Committee. He also made the point that, ultimately, the electorate would have the opportunity to judge any Alderman outstaying their period of office were they to then seek re-election.

An Alderman stated that the report had been drafted in such a way that each individual circumstance would now require the consideration of the Court of Aldermen which made the process more democratic, albeit it was not the electorate making a decision. He went on to speak of enforcement and commented that the approach here would depend on the circumstance that gave rise to the particular issue. He was of the view that, short of re-writing the law, which would require primary legislation, this seemed to be a good outcome. He added that the intent was always to comply with obligation to the electorate but that there would always be circumstances from time to time where it would not be possible to do so. He stated that, at this point in time, he was therefore content with the approach set out here.

An Alderwoman commented that there was a clear distinction between an extension to a term of office of six months and a leave of absence of six months which concerned discharge of duties.

The Alderwoman proposed a motion that paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 of the conventions as drafted here be deleted. The motion was seconded and debated. The seconder stated that the inclusion of these paragraphs left a seemingly open door for all to apply for such an extension. She was of the view that any exceptional circumstances should be brought forward as and when they arose which was presumably rarely.

Another Alderman queried how many times serving Aldermen had outstayed their terms of office in recent years. A senior Aldermen commented that it had occurred 2-3 times in his service as Alderman which had been over 23 years.

An Alderman agreed with the deletion of paragraph 1.3 in order to make the conventions more concise.

An Alderwoman asked that the term 'reasonable' be more carefully defined.

The Committee proceeded to vote on the Motion before them, namely the deletion of both paragraphs 1.2 and 1,3 as drafted within the report. Votes were cast as follows:

IN FAVOUR – 3 Votes
OPPOSED – 18 Votes

There were no abstentions.

The Motion was therefore not carried.

A second motion, concerning the deletion of paragraph 1.3 only was put and seconded. The Committee agreed to proceed straight to a vote on this.

The Committee proceeded to vote on the Motion before them. Votes were cast as follows:

IN FAVOUR – 17 Votes
OPPOSED – 2 Votes

There were 2 abstentions.

The Motion was therefore carried.

An Alderwoman proposed a further motion, seeking to amend the wording at the end of paragraph 1.2 to make reference to 'exceptional circumstances'. The motion was seconded and debated.

An Alderman suggested that it would be helpful to hear from the Comptroller and City Solicitor on this point and stated that there was lots of case law around 'reasonable' and the judicial interpretation of that concept. The wording of the convention as drafted referencing 'where it was considered reasonable to do so in all the circumstances' gave the Aldermen the latitude to look at a situation in the round, considering all of the circumstances that were relevant whether exceptional or not.

The Comptroller and City Solicitor agreed that reasonableness was a concept well understood in legal terms and still allowed the Aldermen to say that they felt that extensions were only reasonable in exceptional circumstances and to set the bar within this wording going forward. He went on to query how exceptional might be helpfully defined. He pointed out that 'reasonable' did not set the bar particularly low and gave the discretion to the Aldermen collectively to decide on where the bar was set. He added that there was also a duty for the Aldermen to take into account all relevant matters but that the final wording of the conventions was a decision for them to take.

The Motion to amend the wording set out within paragraph 1.2 to read 'The General Purposes Committee of the Court of Aldermen may, on the written application of the Alderman/woman concerned extend the last day for the tendering of their resignation under 1.1 above by a period of up to six months

where it considers that *there are exceptional circumstances to do so*'; was put to the vote.

Votes were cast as follows:

IN FAVOUR – 3 Votes

OPPOSED – 18 Votes

There were no abstentions.

The Motion was therefore not carried.

The Committee therefore proceed to vote on the recommendations, as amended, with the deletion of paragraph 1.3 and it being clarified that references to the Magistracy being only where applicable. It was clarified that this would be for onward reporting to the Court of Aldermen later this afternoon.

RESOLVED: - That, having considered the draft consolidated Aldermanic Conventions appended to the report, the Committee make such recommendations to the Court of Aldermen as it considers appropriate and as articulated within the minutes in relation to their adoption.

5. **DRAFT HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 - MANSION HOUSE & OFFICE OF LORD MAYOR AND SHERIFFS (TOWN CLERKS)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director & Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor presenting for approval the high-level Business Plan for the Mansion House & Office of Lord Mayor and Sheriffs (Town Clerks) Department for 2024/25.

The Executive Director & Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor introduced the report by commenting that this was designed to give a longer-term strategy to the Mansion House and Shrieval corridor following a period of stabilisation and consolidation. She went on to draw attention to the fact that the Mansion House were seeking to work with parallel institutions to better develop both its commercial contacts and performance measures. Going forward, the aspiration was to produce a five-year business plan to align with the wider Corporate Plan 2024-2029.

In response to a question, the Executive Director & Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor, clarified that ELB referred to Executive Leadership Board, an Officer based Group.

An Alderman recognised that this Committee acted as the service committee for the Shrieval apartments and the Mansion House but that there was a split in responsibility for the Old Bailey. He commented that he was keen to see this Committee have service responsibility for and oversight of those areas of the Old Bailey associated with the Shrievalty. The Executive Director & Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor offered to seek further clarity on this point and report back to the Alderman on the matter.

Another Alderman commented on a desire to dig deeper in terms of the Climate Action Strategy and to ensure that Officers felt supported in terms of its delivery and accessing funding available for this for the Mansion House as a flagship building. She also referenced external partners and queried whether St Paul's could be explored as such.

An Alderman stated that it was important to see and be able to track trends/direction of travel. He spoke specifically on staff engagement and queried how frequently staff surveys were being undertaken.

Another Alderman referred to the risk table and stated that it would be helpful to have this presented in the standard corporate format going forwards to include likelihood, an impact analysis and also target risk.

An Alderman revisited the issue of staff engagement, querying why the outcome was only 51% positive and what might be done to improve this. He also questioned what action was being taking to increase the ethnic diversity of staff.

The Executive Director & Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor agreed with the points made around the importance of capturing key data and identifying trends, stressing that she was working with central functions including HR and IT in an attempt to do so. It was therefore hoped that much of this would be presented in the next iteration of the business plan.

RESOLVED: That, Members

- i. Note the factors taken into consideration in compiling the Mansion House & Office of Lord Mayor and Sheriffs Business Plan; and
- ii. Approve the departmental Business Plan 2024/25.

6. **KNOCKING IN AT THE OLD BAILEY**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Private Secretary to the Lord Mayor providing a summary of the history, background and current practice associated with the ceremonial custom of 'knocking in' at the Old Bailey.

The Chairman reported that this practice was currently optional for those Aldermen attending lunch. Where Sheriffs were hosting lunches, they did 'Knock In' wherever possible on that day.

An Alderman queried gowns for this purpose, where they were kept and laundered, when each gown should be worn and their relevance/what they represented. The Chairman commented that he had recently been informed that gowns were no longer worn for this purpose. The Town Clerk undertook to seek further clarification on this point and report back.

An Alderman stated that it was one of the civic duties of an Alderman to attend the Old Bailey on a regular basis and that this was not therefore optional.

The Chairman therefore also took this opportunity to remind all to respond to requests for Old Bailey lunch rota allocations.

RESOLVED: – That Members note the report.

7. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no additional, urgent items of business for consideration.

9. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That, in accordance with the Court of Aldermen's Disclosure Arrangement (Standing Order 25), the public shall be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen have determined, having had due regard to the Disclosure Arrangement, that disclosure should not be permitted.

10. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

The Committee considered and approved the non-public minutes of the last meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen held on 5 December 2023.

11. **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

The Committee considered and approved a report of the Town Clerk & Chief Executive relative to three applications for a leave of absence.

12. **WARD BEADLES AND HONORARY WARD CLERKS**

With the agreement of the Chairman, this item was withdrawn from the agenda post publication.

13. **REVENUE OUTTURN 2022/23**

The Committee received a joint report of the Town Clerk, the Chamberlain and the Remembrancer compares the revenue outturn for the services overseen by your Committee in 2022/23 with the final approved budget for the year.

14. **PROPOSED 2024/25 REVENUE BUDGET**

The Committee considered and approved a joint report of the Chamberlain, the Deputy Town Clerk and the Remembrancer presenting the annual submission of the revenue budgets overseen by this committee.

15. **MINUTES OF THE MAGISTRACY AND LIVERY SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the minutes of the last meeting of the Magistracy and Livery Sub-Committee held on 11 December 2023.

16. **STRATEGY GROUP THREE - COMMUNICATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT- UPDATE**

Members of Aldermanic Strategy Group Three updated the Committee on their work regarding Communications and Stakeholder Engagement.

17. **KEY COMMITTEE ISSUES**

There were no updates on wider Committee issues.

18. **NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions raised in non-public session.

19. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

Additional items of business including opportunities to access Mayoral activities, the Court of Common Council Aldermanic Rota and a Charitable Donation to the United Guilds Service were discussed in non-public session.

The meeting ended at 12.12 pm

Chairman

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