

Committee(s): General Purposes Committee of Aldermen Policy and Resources Committee	Date: 15 October 2024 17 October 2024
Subject: Act of Common Council – Annual Election of Ward Beadles	Public
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Report of: Town Clerk and Chief Executive, Comptroller and City Solicitor, Remembrancer	For Decision
Report author: Gemma Stokley, Principal Governance and Member Services Manager	

Summary

At the September 2023 meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen, queries were raised in relation to the role of Ward Beadles and the mechanisms related with their appointment.

A report thereon was subsequently considered by the General Purposes Committee in March 2024. One of the resolutions passed was the bringing forward of changes to relevant Acts of Common Council in order to address issues arising from the existing overlap of Aldermanic and Beadle terms of office, which had arisen following the relatively recent change from annual to four-year terms for Beadles

This report seeks to progress that specific request and sets out the terms of a draft Bill for submission to the Court of Common Council to achieve this. The effect of the Bill would be to return to the long-standing practice of Ward Beadles being elected on an annual cycle once again, in order to address some of the unanticipated practical concerns that have materialised since the change.

As the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen have no direct reporting mechanism to the Court of Common Council, it is proposed that the draft Bill be presented by your Policy and Resources Committee (that Committee having the relevant remit from the Court of Common Council) in line with previous, similar, Acts of Common Council such as that concerning Aldermanic Qualifications, passed in 2023.

Recommendation(s)

- That the **General Purposes Committee of Aldermen** approve the report for onward submission to the Policy and Resources Committee with the recommendation that they recommend to the Court of Common Council the passing of an Act of Common Council in the form set out in Appendix 1 for the reasons articulated here.

- That the **Policy and Resources Committee** recommend to the Court of Common Council the passing of an Act of Common Council in the form set out in Appendix 1.

Main Report

Background

1. At its meeting on 19 March 2024, the General Purposes Committee of Aldermen considered a report in relation to the roles of Ward Beadles and Honorary Ward Clerks and how these might both be better regularised going forward. One of the specific resolutions arising from this meeting was that Officers be instructed to seek an Act of Common Council to revert to the annual election of Ward Beadles in order to provide the opportunity to address various issues arising from the overlap of Aldermanic and Beadle terms of office that exists at present.
2. The role of Ward Beadle is one of the oldest elected offices in the City, with references to them found at least as early as the end of the 13th century. These show that their duties in the Middle Ages included the maintenance of public order, in which they worked with the constable and the watch, and the safeguarding of public morality. The role has consistently been closely connected to that of the Ward Alderman, supporting them in the discharge of their duties. The Ward at this date was practically a self-contained unit for many purposes and possessed its own officers, for whom it was responsible for the remuneration thereof. The Ward Beadles were elected by the Wardmotes and their names, with those of the Common Councillors and other officers, were sent in annually in the Ward presentments.
3. An Act of Common Council for the Election of Beadles was passed on 10 October 1663 and has subsequently been amended several times. This speaks of the Beadle as 'an ancient Office in every Ward of the City, and very useful to the Alderman for the Common Business and Affairs of the Ward...' It goes on to refer to recent elections of 'very unfit Persons' and to remedy the situation ordains that the Alderman, with the consent of the Deputy and the Common Councilmen or the major part of them, should nominate 'one or more honest, sufficient and discreet person or persons' for election at the wardmote.
4. In a report to the Special Sub Police Committee in 1947 the (Acting) Comptroller and City Solicitor and the Deputy Keeper of the Records advised that the City Corporation had never regulated the duties of the Ward Beadles and had no power to do so, the Beadles being responsible primarily to their Aldermen and the ward electors. A list of duties had been compiled in 1841 but it was emphasised that these were not duties fixed by the City Corporation but were 'a list of what appear to be more particularly the duties of that officer'.
5. When the Town Clerk wrote to a Ward Clerk on the subject in 1964, he emphasised that the Beadles were responsible primarily to their Aldermen and the Ward electors - 'It is generally assumed that while certain duties are obligatory, there are many others that cannot be specified in exact terms, some being of a domestic nature which spring from a spirit of co-operation between the Ward Officers'.

6. Beadles were previously expected to attend all meetings of the Court of Aldermen, as well as various other occasions. Today, attendance is broadly restricted to Wardmotes, Common Hall, the Admission ceremonies for the Sheriffs and Lord Mayor, the Lord Mayor's Show, and various church services.

Current Position

7. From the above, it is evident that Ward Beadles are elected officers of the Ward, not employees nor appointments of the Corporation or of the Alderman (albeit, intrinsically linked particularly with the latter). As previously explained, the elections of Ward Beadles are governed by Acts of Common Council, most recently through the Act of 17 January 2013.
8. Equally, it is clear that, whilst there is no formal role description, there is a set of understood roles and functions which have evolved over time. Historic aspects relating to electoral functions now rest now with the Town Clerk as Ward Clerk, through the Electoral Services office; the function is, therefore, now essentially limited to opening and closing the Wardmote, and attending on the Alderman at such ceremonial occasions as may be required.
9. The role being a ceremonial one, a connection and effective working relationship between the Alderman and Beadle is highly desirable. This is reinforced not only by the historic nature of the role, but particularly through the electoral arrangements: it is the Alderman, and only the Alderman, who may nominate candidates for election as Beadle. Thus, whilst the role is technically elected, it is in essence more akin to an appointment than might, on face value, be appreciated.
10. Until 2005, elections for Beadles were undertaken annually at Wardmotes, commensurate with arrangements for electing Common Councillors. Following change to the latter, the position was also changed for Ward Beadles by way of Act of Common Council, and elections are now for four-year terms. This can and has, however, led to occasions of some disconnect between individual Beadles and Aldermen, particularly where the incumbent of the latter office changes.
11. As Aldermanic elections are on a six-year cycle, with the added consideration of retirement at age 75, it can now be the case that there is a prolonged period for which a new Alderman is supported by a Beadle whom they have not personally nominated. This has raised the complementary query of how an Alderman is able to exercise oversight over the role, in keeping with the aforementioned exercise by the Court in this area in centuries past.
12. For the sake of clarity, the choice as to the appointment of a casual replacement, should it be required, rests solely with the Alderman (as provided by the Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013).

Proposal

13. A reversion to the prior arrangements whereby Beadles were elected annually is proposed, as it would provide greater discretion to achieve change more expeditiously if required where, for instance, there is a change of Alderman or there are concerns over the conduct of an incumbent Beadle. It would also bring the role back into alignment with the other Ward Officer role, that of the Honorary Ward Clerk, which is appointed annually.
14. The proposal requires a new Bill for an Act of Common Council (Appendix 1) to amend section 1 of the Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013 (Appendix 2). In consultation with the Remembrancer, the Comptroller and City Solicitor has taken the opportunity in the latest Bill to update and simplify some of the more dated terminology used in previous Acts of Common Council.
15. If Members wish to take the Bill forward then, in accordance with Standing Order 46, it will be submitted to the Recorder of London for settling. It is anticipated that the Bill will then be read a first and second time at the Court of Common Council on 5 December 2024, and read a third time and made an Act of Common Council at the following meeting on 9 January 2025, so that the new arrangements are in force in time for the elections in March 2025.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- Strategic implications – Given the ceremonial nature of these roles, the strategic implications are somewhat limited; nevertheless, the enhancing of a pool of candidates with greater mutual understanding of the rules and requirements of the roles will assist Aldermen in discharging their electoral and Ward duties.
- Financial implications – None.
- Resource implications – None.
- Legal implications – The regulation of the election of Ward Beadles is governed by Act of Common Council and is a matter for the City Corporation to determine.
- Risk implications – The risks associated with this proposal are relatively low, given that it simply seeks to revert to the previous, long-standing arrangement. Failure to react to the perceived current issues may, however, lead to a risk of continued lack of clarity and inconsistency in delivery.
- Equalities implications – There are no significant equalities implications associated with this proposal. Whilst it would allow an Alderman to nominate a person of their choosing to serve as Ward Beadle on a more regular basis, any nominees will continue to require the consent of the Deputy and Common Councilmen for the Ward (or a majority of them) and will need to be elected at the Wardmote. Associated plans to develop a pool of interested individuals, who can be identified in accordance with the City's equal opportunities recruitment policies and who can be provided with the relevant training in preparation for any future role, will provide Aldermen with a more diverse pool of trained individuals to draw on, should they find it helpful.
- Climate implications – none.

- Security implications – none.

Conclusion & Recommendations

16. The position of Ward Beadle is an important ceremonial office tied to the delivery of Ward business and, in particular, the support of the Alderman. Changes to the electoral procedure for Ward Beadles, to see these return to an annual cycle, is considered advantageous. This would need to be achieved by an Act of Common Council and a draft Bill is therefore appended here for your approval for submission to the Court of Common Council.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Bill for an Act of Common Council

Appendix 2 – Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013

Background Papers

None

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