

Report – Policy and Resources Committee

Bill for an Act of Common Council – Annual Election of Ward Beadles

To be presented on Thursday, 9th January 2025

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons
of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

The accompanying Bill is intended to address issues associated with the existing overlap of Aldermanic and Beadle terms of office, which have arisen following the relatively recent change from annual to four-year terms for Ward Beadles.

In order to effect the proposed change of a reversion to prior arrangements, a Bill for an Act of Common Council is required. 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. In accordance with Standing Order No. 46, the terms of the Bill must be considered by the appropriate Committee(s) and must be submitted to the Recorder of London for settling prior to its submission to the Court of Common Council for its first, second and third reading.

Your Policy and Resources Committee agreed to progress this matter at its meeting in October 2024. The draft Bill at Appendix 1 has since been settled by the Recorder, prior to being presented for its first reading and second reading at the December 2024 meeting of the Court of Common Council. Having been approved by the Court at that stage, it is now presented for a third and final reading in January 2025, so as to take effect for any Annual Wardmotes from March 2025 onwards.

RECOMMENDATION(s)

Approval be given to:-

1. Proposals around a reversion to the prior arrangements whereby Beadles are once again elected annually.
2. The draft Bill for an Act of Common Council to effect this change, as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

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 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 lead and has led, however, 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 also 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. In accordance with Standing Order 46, the Bill was settled by the Recorder of London and presented for its first and second reading at the Court of Common Council on 5 December 2024. Following the Court's approval at that stage, it is now presented for a third and final reading and will be made an Act of Common Council, if approved. It will then be in force in time for the elections in March 2025.

Conclusion

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.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Bill for an Act of Common Council
- Appendix 2 – Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 17th day of October 2024.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Christopher Michael Hayward
Chairman, Policy and Resources Committee

To be considered at the Court of Common Council

2024

A BILL

For an Act of Common Council to –

Revert to the annual election of Ward Beadles.

WHEREAS:-

- (1) From time immemorial there has existed and still exists in the City of London (“the City”) a Common Council consisting of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons in Common Council assembled (“the Common Council”) which has made such Acts, Ordinances, Rules, Orders and Regulations for the regulation and good government of the City and its Liberties as it has from time to time found necessary and expedient;
- (2) From at least 1663, until 2005, Common Councilmen and Ward Beadles were elected annually at the same Wardmotes, and on several occasions Acts of Common Council were passed to ensure that the dates of those elections continued to take place on the same dates;
- (3) With effect from 2005, Common Councilmen were elected every four years, and further Acts of Common Council were passed to ensure that the elections of Common Councilmen and Ward Beadles continued to coincide;
- (4) By an Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013 it was enacted that elections of Ward Beadles would take place on the same date as ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen, as determined in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Common Council of 13 September 2012 or any other Act of Common Council from time to time amending or replacing it;
- (5) It is expedient that elections of Ward Beadles should revert to an annual cycle, so that there is a more frequent opportunity for the Alderman of each Ward to put forward one or more candidates of their choice for nomination;
- (6) His late Majesty King Edward the Third by his Charter made and granted to the City in the fifteenth year of his reign afterwards confirmed and ratified by Parliament did (amongst other things) grant that if any existing customs in the City were in any part hard or defective or any things in the City newly arising in which no remedy had been ordained should need amendment the Mayor and Aldermen of the City and their successors with the assent of the Commonalty of the City might ordain fit remedy as often as it should seem expedient to them so that such ordinance should be profitable to the King and to the citizens and to all other liege subjects resorting to the City and agreeable also to reason and good faith.

IT IS THEREFORE ENACTED by the Common Council **AS FOLLOWS:**

Elections of Ward Beadles

1. For section 1 of the Act of Common Council of 17 January 2013 substitute –

“1. (1) Subject to subsection (2), elections of Ward Beadles shall take place at the annual Wardmotes in March, on a date to be determined by each Alderman in respect of their own Ward.

(2) In any year in which ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen are scheduled to take place, as determined in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Common Council made and passed on the 13th day of September 2012 or any other Act of Common Council from time to time amending or replacing it, elections of Ward Beadles shall take place on the same date as those ordinary ward elections.”

Commencement

2. The provisions of this Act will come into force on the day on which it is made and passed as an Act of Common Council.

GIFFORD, Mayor



A Court of Common Council holden in the Guildhall of the City of London on Thursday, the seventeenth day of January, 2013.

Act of Common Council to:-

Change the date of the elections of Ward Beadles;

Make incidental and consequential changes to the term of office of Ward Beadles;

Provide that any casual vacancy occurring in the office of Ward Beadle shall be filled by the Alderman of the ward in which the vacancy occurs;

Repeal the Act of Common Council made and passed on the 4th day of December 2003.

WHEREAS:-

- (1) From time immemorial there has existed and still exists in the City of London (“the City”) a Common Council consisting of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons in Common Council assembled and the Common Council have made, passed, ordained and established divers Acts, Ordinances, Rules, Orders and Regulations for the regulation and good government of the City and its Liberties as to them from time to time has been found necessary and expedient;
- (2) By an Act of Common Council made and passed on the 4th day of December 2003 it was enacted that as from the coming into force of that Act the elections of Ward Beadles shall take place on the second Friday of March in every fourth year after 2005, which at that time coincided with the date of ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen;
- (3) By an Act of Common Council made and passed on the 13th day of September 2012 it was enacted that ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen shall take place on a date to be determined in accordance with the provisions of that Act;
- (4) It is desirable that the elections of Ward Beadles should continue to take place on the same date as ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen;
- (5) It is desirable to make certain incidental and consequential changes to the term of office of Ward Beadles;

- (6) It is also desirable that the Aldermen of the several wards in the City should continue to be authorised to fill by appointment any casual vacancies occurring in the office of Ward Beadle in their respective wards;
- (7) His late Majesty King Edward the Third by his Charter made and granted to the City in the fifteenth year of his reign afterwards confirmed and ratified by Parliament did (amongst other things) grant that if any customs in the City before that time obtained and used were in any part hard or defective or any things in the City newly arising in which no remedy had been ordained should need amendment the Mayor and Aldermen of the City and their successors with the assent of the Commonalty of the City might put and ordain thereto fit remedy as often as it should seem expedient to them so that such ordinance should be profitable to the King and to the citizens and to all other liege subjects resorting to the City and agreeable also to reason and good faith.

BE IT THEREFORE and IT IS HEREBY ENACTED ORDAINED AND ESTABLISHED by the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, the Right Worshipful the Aldermen and the Commons of the City of London in Common Council assembled and the authority of the same **AS FOLLOWS:**

Elections of Ward Beadles

1. Elections of Ward Beadles shall take place on the same date as ordinary ward elections in relation to the whole number of Common Councilmen, as determined in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Common Council made and passed on the 13th day of September 2012 or any other Act of Common Council from time to time amending or replacing the same.

Term of office of Ward Beadles

2. (1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3) any Ward Beadle shall, unless he resigns his office or it otherwise becomes vacant, cease to hold office on the election of his successor, who shall hold office from that point.
 - (2) The Alderman of the Ward may instead direct that a Ward Beadle shall cease to hold office at some later point in the Wardmote at which his successor is elected, or on the closing of the said Wardmote, in which case his successor shall hold office from that later point.
 - (3) If no successor to a Ward Beadle is elected at a Wardmote held in accordance with section 1, that Ward Beadle shall cease to hold office on the closing of the said Wardmote.

Casual vacancies in the office of Ward Beadle

3. On a casual vacancy occurring in the office of Ward Beadle, the vacancy shall be filled by appointment by the Alderman of the Ward in which the vacancy has occurred.

Repeal

4. The Act of Common Council made and passed on the 4th day of December 2003 is hereby repealed (except in relation to its repeal of certain provisions of Acts of Common Council made and passed on the 14th day of June 1984 and the 10th day of October 2002 respectively).

Commencement

5. The provisions of this Act shall come into force on the day on which it is made and passed as an Act of Common Council.