

Item number: **Standards Committee/ Full Council**

Title: Appointment of Political Assistants and updates to the Constitution to meet 1989 Local Government and Housing Act requirements.

Report authorised by: Fiona Alderman, Director for Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Lead Officer: Ayshe Simsek – Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager

Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non-Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 There has been recruitment and provision to two Political Assistant roles in Haringey since 2003 when these roles were created to support the smooth running of Council meetings, provide support to political groups meetings, support member officer relationships and to have a contact point for officers and members for the wider political groups.
- 1.2 These roles were evaluated by HR in 2022 and were assessed as PO3 roles. These roles have been filled in the past by the majority group and opposition group. The contracts for these roles have been recruited to on a fixed term contract basis until the annual meeting following the local election.
- 1.3 Following the local election results, there are now three political groups that qualify for a political assistant, and all three political groups have expressed the need to continue to appoint to these positions.
- 1.4 Given the increase in the number of roles, there is a requirement to approve the establishment of these roles at Full Council for 2026 and to complete a review of how these posts offer value for money to meet government guidance.
- 1.5 There is also a need to update the Council's Constitution in respect of the Political Assistants appointments as this has not previously been reviewed and the Council's Constitution needs additional wording to more clearly set out these provisions for the political groups.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

3. Recommendations for Full Council:

- 3.1 To note the current best value considerations for appointment of political assistants set out at section 7 of the report for three political groups noting that there is a maximum of 3 positions that can be appointed to meet legislative requirements.
- 3.2 Taking into account the government Guidance which suggests that there should be reviews of these particular posts to ensure value for money, to agree the appointment of three political assistants on a one-year fixed contract ending in September 2027 to allow a review of these roles between August and November 2026.
- 3.3 To agree a review of the roles, including potential options for employment on a full or part - time basis, taking account the operation of the roles and whether they continue to provide value for money, particularly in the light of the Council's challenging financial position.
- 3.4 To agree that the review findings and final decisions on the terms and conditions of the appointments and contracts are delegated to the Appointments Panel for final decision in November 2026, in time for consideration as part of the budget proposals if required.
- 3.5 To agree the updates to the Council's Constitution set out at Appendix 1.

4 Reasons for decision

- 4.1.1 The increase in the number of political groups with over 10% of council membership.
- 4.1.2 To meet government Guidance which suggests that there should be reviews of these particular posts to ensure value for money.
- 4.1.3 The need to update the Council's Constitution on these appointments as there is currently not the detail required by section 9 of the 1989 Act.

5 Alternative options considered

To not agree the continuation of the appointment of Political Assistants and delete these posts from the establishment of the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team. This was not agreed by the political group leaders and it is acknowledged that political assistants can play a valuable role in supporting the political decision-making of the Council.

6. Background

- 6.1 The purpose of appointing Political Assistants is to provide assistance to political groups represented on the Council. This is governed by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Local authority Political assistance Guidance dated 11th October 2021 published by the then Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).
- 6.2 Under section 9 of the 1989 Act, a local authority may appoint assistants for political groups, subject to specific conditions. The key features of this statutory provision are as follows:
- The appointment is described as being “for the purpose of providing assistance, in discharge of any of their functions as members of a relevant authority, to the members of any political group to which members of the authority belong”;
 - Any Council may only have up to 3 such posts at any given time, but appointments can only be made if posts are allocated to all groups who qualify;
 - The 3 largest political groups in each authority qualify for a political assistant if the membership of each group consists of at least 10% of the membership of the authority. The exception is where only one political group accounts for at least 10% of the membership, in which case the next biggest group also qualifies.
- 6.3 In Haringey this currently means one Political Assistant for the Green Group, one for the Labour Group and one for the Liberal Democrat Group.
- 6.4 In making a decision the Council will therefore need to satisfy itself that the overall appointment of Political Assistants represents value for money. In determining whether the appointments represent value for money the Council should have regard to the financial and other resources available to the Council, the role of the Political Assistants, the size of the respective Groups and that the Group may choose not to fill the post allocated to it.
- 6.5 Under section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 employees of a local authority must be appointed on merit. However, Section 9 provides an exception to this principle. This section advises that the appointment of each political assistant is down to the political group each post (political assistant) is to represent. The appointing group can take account of the candidate’s political activities during the selection process, although the posts are ‘politically restricted’, under the provisions of the 1989 Act.
- 6.6 The appointment of Political Assistants must be conducted in accordance with the Council’s procedures and statutory requirements. The maximum level of remuneration is determined by the Local Government (Assistants for Political Groups) (Remuneration) (England) Order 2021. The current remuneration for the Haringey posts is set out above at paragraph 1.3, with these roles graded at PO3.
- 6.7 An appointment of a Political Assistant is dependent on the Council passing a resolution in support of the principle of appointing Political Assistants and the Council’s Constitution containing a standing order relating to such appointments. Section 9(5) of the Act requires certain provisions to be included in the Constitution of a Council relating to Political Assistants as follows:

- A prohibition on the making of an appointment until the Council has allocated a post of Political Assistant to each group that qualifies for one;
- A prohibition on the allocation of a Political Assistant's post to a group which does not qualify for one;
- A prohibition on the allocation of more than one Political Assistant post to any one group.

6.8 The following governance actions are being taken forward.

- A report to full Council seeking continuing agreement to appointment of political assistants for 2026 – 2027 (this report).
- Undertaking a review of the political assistant roles and duties between August and November with a report to Appointments Panel in late November to meet government guidance and test current value for money considerations.
- Updates to the Council's Constitution setting out the prohibitions as outlined in section 6.10, as set out at Appendix 1

7. The current value for money considerations for these roles is as follows:

- 7.1 The political assistant roles respond to the requirements in the Council's Constitution at Part Three, Section B – sub section 8 Groups which sets out that Group meetings are generally conducive to the due process of the council business and that suitable accommodation, assistance with the production and distribution of agenda and minutes will be provided. These roles fulfil these requirements and further support the provision of official information, advice and reports to group meetings to ensure smooth running of the Council. They will help support briefings on forthcoming key decisions, policy decisions, budget preparations, and the annual meeting.
- 7.2 The level of demand for Political Assistant support will vary according to the size of the group being supported, with larger groups bringing greater complexity, administrative burden and a larger group membership to respond to. Nonetheless, regardless of the size of the group, each role will support over 30 meetings per year. This includes Political group meetings, budget briefings and Full Council meetings. Each political meeting and budget requires agenda and minutes compilation. Full Council meeting agendas require compilation of questions and motions and there is consultation by the political assistant to ensure that these reflect the current local issues and that these are responded to.
- 7.3 From a strategic and governance perspective, the roles support group leaders with either development of the corporate delivery plan which provides service delivery direction for the council or scrutiny and challenge of the administration to ensure that decision making is robust.
- 7.4 The posts help support and maintain the Member Officer Protocol and allow a contact point between officers of the Council and political groups. This can be helpful when you have several enquiries from group members. The Political Assistants can collate and seek the appropriate responses from directors

rather than having increased meetings and correspondence which can become an additional burden on the council's senior officer resources.

- 7.5 These posts are particularly crucial in ensuring agreement of the budget at Council which is a statutory requirement. This is due to the political group assistants facilitating and supporting consideration and agreement of the developing budget proposals and also alternative budget or budget amendments.
- 7.6 These posts reduce the need for additional meetings between senior officers and group leaders, deputy group leaders and chief whips by helping to manage group enquiries, Council meetings and access to decision making.
- 7.7 Although these roles are political, they indirectly support the democratic processes of the Council. The main group are supported by these officers in making informed decisions with the collation of information from officers which is shared with political group, and this supports the administration in their policy and budget making roles. The opposition party political assistants will have a role in holding the main party to account and support the questioning and challenge of their decision making to ensure that this is as robust as possible.
- 7.8 Given the close political proportionality between the group forming the Council's minority administration and the opposition groups, the political assistants will have significant contact with the leadership and membership of their group and they will have a key role in organising and facilitating the effective flow of various operational or policy proposals where likely views need to be clarified with the political groups.
- 7.9 The roles have also historically supported the additional Council meetings with the Youth Council ensuring that young people are able to participate in decision making.
- 7.10 The roles will support and help the development of back bench councillors into potential decision-making roles. They will support and facilitate the attendance of councillors at the Member training and development programme to support the development of newly elected councillors. These roles can help new councillors deal with a number of queries relating to their roles as a ward councillor, community leadership role, decision making responsibilities and advocacy role. Given the significant turnover of councillors in the 2026 local elections, the roles are critical for supporting new councillors to quickly understand and undertake their roles effectively and this will in turn support residents to obtain effective support from their councillors.
- 7.11 Over the last five years the roles have further provided value for money through their additional logistical support for Council meetings which have been held at Tottenham Town Hall whilst the Civic Centre is being refurbished. It is anticipated that these arrangements will become less burdensome once we return to the Civic Centre in 2027.
- 7.12 Nevertheless, while all the above considerations are important, Members of Full Council will also want to take into consideration the Council's financial

position when considering whether the roles continue to provide sufficient value for money. In some Councils the roles may be full or part-time, depending on the size of the groups being supported and the nature of the work expected from the political assistants, which can vary from council to council. This will be considered in the proposed value for money review and options brought back to the Appointments Panel for consideration.

Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026 High level Strategic outcomes

The Political Assistant positions support the achievement of the opportunities for residents to participate in decision making by facilitating Council meetings in which there is public participation. They also support the Young people's full Council meeting and connection with the Youth Council. They will also contribute to the theme of reducing inequality and promote equity of access, experience and outcomes by supporting councillors to be an effective ward councillor, community leader, decision maker and advocate.

Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

Finance

- 8.1 The report proposes increasing the number of Political Assistants from two to three and appoint all posts to one-year fixed term contracts whilst a review of the roles takes place to ensure value for money. The £61,470 one-year cost of the additional Political Assistant post will be funded from contingency in 2026/27.

Any financial implications arising from the review will be picked up as part of the 2027/28 budget planning process.

Legal

- 8.2 As set out within the report.
The Appointments Panel is the appropriate body to fulfil the employment procedure rules as set out in Part 4 Section K in relation to appointments. Part 4 Section K - includes a section on assistants to political group

Equality

The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act

Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not

Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

The recommendations relate to staffing matters and there are no equalities issues identified relating to the recommendations in the report. Recruitment processes for the role of Political Assistant will comply with equalities legislation

9. Use of Appendices

9.1 Changes to the Council's Constitution – Appendix 1

10 Background Papers

10.1 The Council Constitution.

10.1.1 Local authority Guidance Political assistance Guidance dated 11th October 2021.