

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY COUNCIL

## INDEPENDENT GOVERNANCE REVIEW

### THE ELECTION AND RESIGNATION OF FORMER COUNCILLOR TOM DEWEY

#### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Tom Dewey, a former Hackney Council officer and elected Member, was convicted of possessing indecent images of children on 18 July 2023, and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for 2 years, on 15 August 2023. He had served as a Support Officer in the Mayor's office between October 2015 and May 2017, and was elected as a Labour councillor for De Beauvoir ward on 5 May 2022; he resigned on 16 May 2022, after the National Crime Agency (NCA) informed the Council that he had been arrested on 29 April 2022 in connection with the offences for which he was subsequently convicted. Former Mayor Philip Glanville, his erstwhile superior and housemate, resigned in September 2023.
- 1.2. The headline is that the Council's Constitution and Governance processes worked as they should in dealing with a very difficult, rapidly evolving, situation; officers are commended for their cool heads and steady hands over a challenging weekend.
- 1.3. The focus of this review has been on the Council's governance and processes, rather than an investigation into individuals' actions and behaviours. On examining the root causes, however, it very quickly became clear that the primary causes of these events were individual failings; it was the practice that failed rather than the policy. Tom Dewey found his way into successive positions, firstly as an officer, then as housemate, and finally as candidate for election in May 2022. The normal checks and balances for maintaining distance between Members and Officers through culture and Politically Restricted Posts (PRPs) failed. Similarly, Tom Dewey managed to find his way through candidate selection, and only the excellent work of the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Council's senior Officers meant that he was only a councillor for 11 days, before he was presented with the facts and options, and resigned.
- 1.4. This has been a reputationally damaging episode for Hackney Council, internally and externally, which has detracted from the excellent work being done for residents and in communities; 3 additional elections have cost the Council significant expense, and Members and Officers have been distracted from their normal activities. Members can, however, take solace from the fact that, despite individual failings, the Council reacted as hoped and expected. The recommendations below focus on how to prevent a repetition of these events.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. It is suggested that the Council review the PRP list, and, more widely, the culture around political impartiality of your Officers.
- 2.2. It is suggested that political groups re-examine their candidate selection processes.

## **3. TERMS OF REFERENCE, CHRONOLOGY AND APPROACH**

- 3.1. This non-statutory review was commissioned by Ms Dawn Carter-McDonald, Interim Chief Executive of Hackney Council; it focuses primarily on the formal aspects of governance and safeguarding, before looking more widely at the causal factors. Specific aims in the Terms of Reference are:
  - 3.1.1. To review the decisions and actions taken by the Council following notification from the National Crime Agency of the arrest of former Councillor Dewey.
  - 3.1.2. Review the processes and guidance in place at the time for both Officers and Members.
  - 3.1.3. Make any recommendations for improving the Council's processes and guidance based on the review's findings.
- 3.2. In early discussions with senior Council officers, it was agreed that the timeline to be investigated should be extended from the immediate period around the time of Mr Dewey's arrest and resignation, to include his period as an Officer in the Council and former Mayor Glanville's resignation. It was also decided that, given the political and public interest in the subject, the Council's political leaders from the Labour, Conservative and Green Party Groups should be interviewed; this is in addition to the officers and external chairs and leaders of children's and adults' safeguarding bodies named in the Terms of Reference, who were principally involved in the safeguarding and legal leadership of the Council.
- 3.3. It should be noted that only current Officers of Hackney Council have any compulsion to cooperate, on the Chief Executive's instructions. It is regrettable that neither Mr Glanville nor Mr Dewey responded to requests to be interviewed, but it has been notable how cooperative and self-aware all other Members, Officers and external safeguarding leaders have been in support of this review.
- 3.4. The standard of proof in this review is "on the balance of probabilities", used in civil cases, rather than the more onerous "beyond reasonable doubt" used in criminal cases. This is a reasonable assumption in a case such as this where resources, specifically time, skills and capacity, and compulsion do not facilitate in-depth investigation. It requires a scrupulous adherence to considering only evidence, ignoring speculation and hearsay, and setting aside any scepticism or optimism.

- 3.5. There has been a great deal of discussion on events and timings in this episode; establishing a single recognised chronology of events was therefore a high priority. It is laid out in the next section.
- 3.6. Similarly, in some of the public discussions, there has been a tension between the rights of an individual, specifically to privacy and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, and the expectations of transparency and scrutiny of people who are in public life. Consequently, it was agreed that the review would look at the events and issues through 2 lenses: a straightforward legal and process interpretation of the laws and rules which governed what happened; and secondly, an additional examination looking at the events through the lens of Standards in Public Life - the Nolan Principles. Specifically, the questions that were asked were whether something could have been done differently, and whether it should have.

#### **4. TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

- 4.1. Tom Dewey's first formal contact with Hackney Council was when he was appointed to be a Support Officer in the Mayor's Office in October 2015, a position he held until May 2017. This was a PRP, which should have banned any political activity on his part. He left this appointment and worked subsequently for Kanda, a consultancy company run by the former Deputy Mayor, Karen Alcock. He was adopted as a Labour Candidate for De Beauvoir ward for the May 2022 election, and submitted his nomination papers prior to the closing date of 5 April 2022.
- 4.2. Mr Dewey was arrested at 07.07am on 29 April 2022 at the home that he shared with then Mayor Philip Glanville in a low-key operation by the NCA, using unmarked cars and a small number of plain clothes officers. This was a deliberate risk-based decision by the NCA. Mr Glanville was not at home. Officers removed 8 electronic items, and released Mr Dewey with bail conditions on his movement, association and access to electronic devices.
- 4.3. Mr Dewey was elected to represent De Beauvoir ward on 5 May 2022, one of 2 Labour councillors returned, along with Councillor Polly Billington, who received 1,400 votes to his 1,102.
- 4.4. In the early afternoon of Friday 13 May 2022, at 1.27pm, the NCA made a formal referral to Hackney Council's Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) informing the Council of Mr Dewey's arrest. The remainder of Friday afternoon was spent in briefings between Officers of the Council and of the NCA. Mayor Glanville was informed of the arrest in a telephone call from Mr Mark Carroll, the Chief Executive, on Saturday morning, 14 May 2022, after Mr Carroll had confirmed details with the lead officer of the NCA. Mr Glanville hosted a Eurovision party with Mr Dewey that evening in their shared home.

- 4.5. Monday 16 May 2022 commenced with a strategy meeting between senior safeguarding and legal officers of the Council and the NCA, chaired by the Chief Executive, followed by a series of meetings with officers and politicians, including Mayor Glanville and Councillors Adams and Rathbone. Mr Carroll requested a face-to-face meeting with Mr Dewey, which took place at 6.00pm, at which he was presented with the facts and his options, including an explanation on the practical implementation of his bail conditions. He decided to resign immediately, emailing his resignation to the CE at 6.58pm. He returned his Council laptop and security pass that evening, and Council Officers removed Mr Dewey from the Council website; they also offered him support. Mr Dewey did not attend the Labour Group Annual General Meeting that evening, withdrawing his candidature for an elected position.
- 4.6. The Council responded to a media enquiry on 18 May 2022 to the effect that Mr Dewey had stood down for personal reasons. In a by-election on 7 July 2022, Councillor Joe Walker won the seat in De Beauvoir Ward for Labour with 758 votes.
- 4.7. On 30 June 2023, the Hackney Citizen published an article stating that Mr Dewey had been charged with the offences to which he would plead guilty on 18 July 2023 at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court; on 15 August 2023 at Isleworth Crown Court, he was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for 2 years, with community service, rehabilitation activity and a 10-year sexual harm prevention order.
- 4.8. A photograph from the Eurovision party resurfaced in August 2023, contradicting Mayor Glanville's public statements on his association with Mr Dewey during the weekend of 14/15 May 2022, which led to his suspension from the Labour Party on 31 August 2023 and his resignation on 15 September 2023.

## **5. ANALYSIS AND DEDUCTIONS**

- 5.1. The headline deduction is that Hackney Council's safeguarding systems and processes worked perfectly in a very testing situation. Some effort was made early on by the Officers to ascertain whether there were any examples of councils dealing with similar challenges, but none could be found. Particular credit must go to Ms Dawn Carter-McDonald, the Interim Chief Executive, who was in May 2022 the Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral Services, and the Council's Monitoring Officer, for retaining a cool head and a steady hand in guiding the Council's elected Members and Officers through what was an unusually testing case. She was ably assisted by several other officers, of whom Ms Louise Humphreys and Ms Lucy Cobb stand out.

- 5.2. There has been some discussion as to whether the Council could have, or should have, been more open on the reasons for Mr Dewey's resignation. It must be remembered that Mr Dewey could have remained a councillor until his sentencing in August 2023<sup>1</sup>; he has an expectation to a private life, and a right to be treated as innocent until proven guilty. Put simply, the only person who could have made such an announcement is Mr Dewey, and he chose not to; for the Council or the Labour Party to have done otherwise would have been wholly wrong.
- 5.3. Similarly, Tom Dewey was arrested on 29 April 2022, after nominations had closed, but before the election on 5 May 2022. Even if he had withdrawn, which he evidently chose not to, his name would have been on the ballot paper. As to whether he told anybody of his arrest before the election, it is assessed, on the balance of probabilities, that he did not. The NCA arrest was low-key, he was alone at home, and, when he was presented with the facts on 16 May 2022, he was visibly shocked that the criminal justice system had worked as quickly as it had; this would suggest that he had hoped to put off the reckoning that he must have known was coming. There is evidence that Mr Glanville did not know of his arrest until Mr Carroll informed him on 14 May 2022, but there is also evidence that Mr Glanville ignored advice in continuing with the Eurovision party after being informed of the arrest.
- 5.4. It was suggested by one interviewee that Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks for all candidates seeking election would be a useful way of preventing candidates such as Tom Dewey from standing in future. Having taken wide advice on the subject, it is not felt that this would be something to be pursued. DBS checks are a negative vetting measure, only looking for major issues such as existing convictions, and only as good as the day on which they were performed; this would also have to be a national decision, rather than something that Hackney Council could implement of its own volition. Mr Dewey would almost certainly have passed a DBS check in early 2022, and there is a risk that they might give a false sense of reassurance. That said, there is certainly benefit to be had for political groups in reassessing their selection processes. As part of that process, it would be worth reconsidering whether the decision by Hackney Labour to conduct candidate selection at ward level should be revisited for the 2026 election.
- 5.5. More broadly, several members and officers spoke about overly close relationships between Members and Officers, which impacted formal activities, including performance management, as well as a familiarity that went beyond Members' brief attendance at farewell events. It would appear that those instances were relatively localised; many of those interviewed had not experienced this tendency directly, but were

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<sup>1</sup> A sentence of 3 months or more, served in custody or suspended, disqualifies a person from being a councillor. The Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022 broadens the criteria to include lower sentences for sexual offences such as those for which Mr Dewey was convicted. In either case, Mr Dewey would have been disqualified on sentencing in August 2023.

aware of it. The Officers' Code of Practice is very clear about the need for impartiality, and it is heartening to hear from the current Mayor that a professional and courteous relationship is what is sought; evidence from Officers who attend meetings with her confirm that this is the case.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1. A highly ambitious, but deeply flawed, young man decided to launch his political career in Hackney Council, firstly as an Officer, and subsequently as an elected Member. He developed a professional, political and personal relationship with the Mayor - by all accounts, including from political opponents, an effective politician, but probably naive in his dealings with Tom Dewey.
- 6.2. Clearly and thankfully, this case is an outlier, but Mr Dewey's adoption as a candidate damages other Councillors who work hard for their communities. Formal DBS checks are almost certainly not the answer, but it would be worth looking again at the motivation and background of candidates. Whether selection at ward level allows sufficient scrutiny would be worth examining.
- 6.3. As well as the unnamed victims of Mr Dewey's crimes, more locally in Hackney: a mayoral career lies in tatters; the Council has been obliged to spend large sums of money on 3 additional elections; member and officer time has been diverted away from their core tasks to dealing with these issues; and the excellent work that Hackney Council has done to establish a shining reputation among London councils has been tarnished. The United Kingdom has a long-established practice of democratically-elected politicians deciding policy and politically-neutral officials implementing it across government, local government and the armed forces. In Hackney, those boundaries between politicians and officials became blurred, which affected judgement and reduced mutual trust. It is reassuring that, under the leadership of the newly-elected Mayor and the Interim Chief Executive, a more recognisable culture is being re-established.