

[REDACTED]

From: FOI
Sent: 14 March 2017 08:56
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI 09/17 - Tower Hamlets Application

OPMTransferOnSend: Transfer

Dear [REDACTED],

Our Ref: FOI 09/17

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 dated **12 February 2017** received by the Commission on **13 February 2017**.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and regrets that on this occasion we have not done so. Due to unforeseen delays in our internal processes we are unable to provide you with a response to your first request. However we have answered questions two to five, and we seek to provide you with the response to question one by Friday 17 March.

Your request is in bold below followed by our response.

You have requested:

- 1. Please supply all notes and emails connected with this application.**
- 2. Please supply timetable for this application progress.**
- 3. Please supply an explanation of the criteria for benchmarking the assessment of this application.**
- 4. Please explain given the commitment to transparency of the Electoral Commission an official refuses to divulge this information without a struggle.**
- 5. Why was the Electoral Commission Chief Executive collaborating with the Met police and the Crown Prosecution Service recently at the Inquiry of the London Assembly Police Committee especially as the later organisations are suspected of obstructing the law in relation to vote rigging?**

Our response is as follows:

2. Please supply timetable for this application progress.

When assessing an application to register a political party, the Commission will take such time as it needs to gather any necessary information and be satisfied it is taking the right decision. The Commission took a decision in relation to this application on 23 February 2017.

3. Please supply an explanation of the criteria for benchmarking the assessment of this application.

The rules in relation to the registration of political parties are set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 ('PPERA'). Particularly relevant to registration is Part II and Schedule 4 of PERA.

In order to become registered, in accordance with PPERA, a party must have:

- made a complete application including the appropriate declarations, which is accompanied by a copy of the party's constitution and a draft financial scheme;
- adopted a financial scheme;
- proposed to register a name which does not contravene any of the tests set out at paragraph 28(4) of PPERA. In summary those tests mean that the Commission determines not to register a party with a name that it considers:
 - is likely to mislead voters as to the effect of their vote;
 - is the same as another registered identity mark which is on the same register;
 - is the same as an identity mark from a deregistered party which was on the same register and is protected until the end of that party's financial year in the year they were deregistered;
 - is likely to result in voters confusing it with another party identity mark that is already registered or protected;
 - is likely to contradict or hinder instructions or guidance given for voting;
 - is obscene or offensive;
 - contains certain prohibited words;
 - is longer than six words;
 - is not in Roman script;
 - is likely to amount to an offence if published.

There are also rules in relation to what descriptions and emblems a party may register, however, they do not effect whether or not a party can be registered.

More about the registration process and how the Commission assesses registration applications on our website using this link:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/guidance-for-political-parties/registering-and-maintaining-a-party>

4. Please explain given the commitment to transparency of the Electoral Commission an official refuses to divulge this information without a struggle.

The Commission is committed to transparency, but in some circumstances we cannot responsibly release requested information. With that important balance in mind, we have answered queries from members of the public in relation to this application, where appropriate, as openly as possible.

5. Why was the Electoral Commission Chief Executive collaborating with the Met police and the Crown Prosecution Service recently at the Inquiry of the London Assembly Police Committee especially as the later organisations are suspected of obstructing the law in relation to vote rigging?

Claire Bassett, the Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission was invited to attend the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee meeting on 9 February 2017 by the Chair of the Committee, Steve O'Connell AM. Ms Bassett was present to explain the role of the Electoral Commission in relation to tackling electoral fraud.

I trust that this information satisfies your request. The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority. I apologise for the delay in this response and for any inconveniences this may have caused. We will provide you with the outstanding response by the end of the week.

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information-requests/how-do-i-make-an-foi-request>

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: <http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Kind regards


Information Officer

The Electoral Commission

3 Bunhill Row

London EC1Y 8YZ

Tel: 020 7271 0569

Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk

electoralcommission.org.uk

yourvotematters.co.uk

[Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Blog](#)



Register to vote by Thursday 13 April
gov.uk/register-to-vote

[REDACTED]

From: FOI
Sent: 23 March 2017 16:54
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI 09/17 - Tower Hamlets Together Application

OPMTransferOnSend: Transfer
SharePointLocationUrl: [http://skynet/dm/Functions/IM/Requests_FOI_DPA/Tower Hamlets Together Application](http://skynet/dm/Functions/IM/Requests_FOI_DPA/Tower_Hamlets_Together_Application)
SharePointAbsoluteFileUrl: [http://skynet/dm/Functions/IM/Requests_FOI_DPA/Tower Hamlets Together Application/FOI 09_17 - Tower Hamlets Together Application_1r86bt5g.msg](http://skynet/dm/Functions/IM/Requests_FOI_DPA/Tower_Hamlets_Together_Application/FOI_09_17_-_Tower_Hamlets_Together_Application_1r86bt5g.msg)

Dear [REDACTED],

Our Ref: FOI 09/17

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('FOI Act') dated **12 February 2017** received by the Commission on **13 February 2017**.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and regrets that on this occasion we have not done so.

Your request is in bold below followed by our response.

You have requested:

- 1. Please supply all notes and emails connected with this application.**
- 2. Please supply timetable for this application progress.**
- 3. Please supply an explanation of the criteria for benchmarking the assessment of this application.**
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- 5. Why was the Electoral Commission Chief Executive collaborating with the Met police and the Crown Prosecution Service recently at the Inquiry of the London Assembly Police Committee especially as the later organisations are suspected of obstructing the law in relation to vote rigging?**

Our response is as follows:

We responded to request number 2-5 above separately on 14 March 2017. This response only addresses request 1 above.

In relation to request number 1, we attach a set of documents. These are the notes and emails that the Commission holds up to the date of your request, 13 February 2017, in relation to the consideration of an application to register a political party 'Tower Hamlets Together (THT)'.

Copies of these documents are attached.

Some of the information contained in these documents contains personal data which is exempt from disclosure under Section 40 of the FOI Act. These documents have been redacted prior to release. Further explanation of the exemption is provided below.

Section 40(2) and (3)(a)(i) of the FOI Act

Section 40(2) provides for an exemption where the information requested constitutes personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 2000 (DPA), and where release of the information requested would breach one of the data protection principles.

Some of the information contained in the requested information falls within the description of personal data as defined by section 1 of the DPA because the information relates directly to an identifiable living individual.

Some of the redactions we have made relate to direct contact information of staff members and the names and contact details of junior staff members. Other personal data has been withheld as it relates to sensitive personal data of individuals. Disclosure of both types of personal data would contravene the first principle of the DPA.

The first data protection principle states that personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully. The Commission considers that it would be unfair to release the information requested as it would be reasonably expected by those individuals

Due to the large number of attachments for this response, we have employed the use of our secure cloud-based document storage system 'Objective Connect'. You will receive a 'Invitation to **Objective Connect** Email Notification' (sent to the inbox of [REDACTED]). This notification will contain a link to enable you to start using **Objective Connect**. Please find below details on how to access the specific area we have set up for your documents.

1. You will be prompted to set up your username and password. Your username will be your email address, and your password can be whatever you like.
2. With your username and password, enter both details at the login screen and click 'login'.
3. You will now see your personal page, which will show the Share '**FOI 09/17 - Tower Hamlets Application**'.
4. By clicking on the share, you will then find the folder 'supporting documentation'.
5. Within this folder you will find the documents which are relevant to the FOI request. You may view any of these documents by selecting the 'download' option, and then 'open'.
6. In addition you may download a copy to your personal computer by selecting the 'download' option and then 'save as'.

This service will be closed 1 month **24 April 2017** after the official response has been dispatched.

I trust that this information satisfies your request. The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority, but in some circumstances we cannot responsibly release requested information, and we ask for your understanding in this regard.

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at:
<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information-requests/how-do-i-make-an-foi-request>

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: <http://www.ico.gov.uk>

Information Officer

The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
Tel: 020 7271 0569

Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

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Register to vote by Thursday 13 April
gov.uk/register-to-vote

----- Original Message -----

From: Majella La Praik

Received: 17/02/2017 08:49

To: Majella La Praik

Subject: FW: Lutfur Rahman - new political party - Tower Hamlets Together (THT)

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 24 January 2017 22:40

To: Partyreg; [REDACTED] PEF Inbox; [REDACTED]

Subject: Fw: Lutfur Rahman - new political party - Tower Hamlets Together (THT)

Please forward to Claire Bassett.

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, 24 January 2017 10:37 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED] Francis Hoar

Subject: Lutfur Rahman - new political party - Tower Hamlets Together (THT)

Dear Ms. Bassett,

I wish to object to this new application made by Lutfur Rahman and his cronies.

You will remember that Mr. Rahman was convicted as a vote fraudster in 2015 and banned for 5 years. It is quite wrong that he be allowed to reinvent his party which has done so much wrong and abused the democratic system.

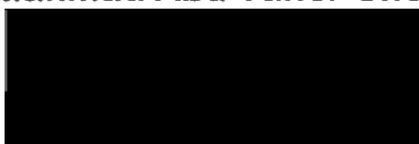
I am writing to ask you to strike out this application.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

Kalam Mahmud Abu Taher Choudhury



Party and Election Finance
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8YZ

15th December 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

Registration of a new political Party

Please find enclosed my application to register a new political party.

I attach the following documents for your perusal:

- RP1 GB, completed party registration form
- Constitution of the party
- Financial scheme of the party
- a postal order of £150, payable to The Electoral Commission
- Emblem of the party

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

I look forward to receiving the acknowledgment and subsequent confirmation.

Yours faithfully,



Kalam Mahmud Abu Taher Choudhury

RP1 GB: Application to register a political party in Great Britain

The Electoral Commission



Important: the accompanying explanatory notes should be read before completing this form.

1 Your political party details

Name of party	English	Tower Hamlets Together (THT)
	Welsh	
	Other language	
	English translation	Tower Hamlets Together
Address (party headquarters (HQ) or correspondence address if no HQ)		
Telephone number		
Fax number		
Email address		
Website address		

2 Your party officers

Party leader

Title/name	Mr. Kalam Mahmud Abu Taher Choudhury
Address	
Telephone number	

Fax number

Email address

If leader for a specific purpose,
please specify

Will continue as Leader to the first AGM.

Nominating officer

Title/name

Mr. Kabir Hussain

Address

Telephone number

Fax number

Email address

Treasurer

Title/name

Mr. Jahed Bokth Choudhury

Address

Telephone number

Fax number

Email address

Campaigns officer (if applicable)

Title/name

Address

Telephone number

Fax number

Email address

Other officer (if applicable)

Title/name

Address

Telephone number

Fax number

Email address

3 Your descriptions and emblems

Descriptions (not more than six words)

1 Description

Translation

2 Description

Translation

3 Description

Translation

4	Description	Together We Can
	Translation	
5	Description	Standing up for Tower Hamlets
	Translation	
6	Description	On your side
	Translation	
7	Description	Yes We Can
	Translation	
8	Description	Let's go Together
	Translation	
9	Description	Let's do it Together
	Translation	
10	Description	
	Translation	
11	Description	
	Translation	
12	Description	
	Translation	

Emblems

Number submitted on a separate sheet (if applicable)

Three

4 Declarations (must be signed by all registered officers)

The party named above is applying to be registered in accordance with the requirements of Part II of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

The party named above intends to contest one or more relevant elections in Great Britain (which will not be confined to parish (England) or community (Wales) elections) and is accordingly applying to be registered in the following part(s) of the Great Britain register. Please tick:

England Scotland Wales

The party has in place the appropriate mechanisms to comply with the regulations which govern the election and financial activities of political parties.

I hereby declare that I am authorised to sign this application on behalf of the above named party.

Party leader

Signed  Print name
Date

Nominating officer

Signed  Print name
Date

Treasurer

Signed  Print name
Date

Campaigns officer (if applicable)

Signed Print name
Date

Other officer (if applicable)

Signed  Print name
Date

5 Additional information

Non refundable fee of £150 enclosed?

Yes

Delete as applicable

Copy of party's constitution enclosed?

Yes

Delete as applicable

Copy of financial scheme enclosed?

Yes

Delete as applicable

6 Accounting units

This section should only be completed if your party intends to have accounting units that manage their finances separately. Your party central organisation does not need to be registered as an accounting unit.

Total number of accounting units

Details enclosed?

Yes / No

Delete as applicable

Your completed application form should be returned to:

Party and Election Finance

The Electoral Commission

3 Bunhill Row

London EC1Y 8YZ

Electoral Commission use only

Date

Checked by

Date of compliance check

Checked by

Approved/Rejected

Date

Date entered in database

Checked by

Party reference number

----- Original Message -----

From: Majella La Praik
Received: 30/01/2017 14:02
To: Louise Edwards
Subject: FW: Political party registration application CCM:0185069

From: Majella La Praik
Sent: 30 January 2017 10:32
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Louise Edwards
Subject: RE: Political party registration application

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for arranging for myself and Louise Edwards, Head of Regulation to have a teleconference with Will at 2:00 pm on 31 January 2017. As Tom mentioned in his email, we wanted to speak with Will about an application the Electoral Commission has received to register a political party which appears to have specific links to Tower Hamlets. Specifically, we are seeking to understand if/how the application is related to the deregistered party, 'Tower Hamlets First'.

The application is to register a party called 'Tower Hamlets Together (THT)'. The details of the application have been published on our website for public comment and can be viewed here under the notices published on 19 January 2017:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/guidance-for-political-parties/pending-registration-applications/current-applications>

The names of the officers on the application, which we are sharing with you in confidence are:

- Kalam Mahmud Abu Taher Choudhury (leader)
- Kabir Hussain (nominating officer)
- Jahed Bokth Choudhury (treasurer)
- Hodayra Begum (other officer)

I would be grateful if you would pass those details on to Will in advance of the teleconference.

We will phone Will at the arranged time. Please let me know the best number to call him on.

Yours sincerely,
Majella La Praik

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 26 January 2017 14:57
To: Tom Hawthorn
Cc: Majella La Praik
Subject: RE: Political party registration application
Importance: High

Hi Tom,

I will pass this onto Will.

Majella – please give me a call on the number below to arrange a time for you to speak to Will. Thanks.

[REDACTED]
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London E14 2BG

[REDACTED]
www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

From: Tom Hawthorn [REDACTED]
Sent: 26 January 2017 11:05
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Majella La Praik
Subject: Political party registration application

Hi [REDACTED]

My colleague Majella La Praik (Acting Registration Manager) would appreciate the opportunity to have a quick conversation with Will, as Chief Executive of the council and Returning Officer, about an application the Electoral Commission has received to register a political party which appears to have specific links to Tower Hamlets. I've copied Majella into this email so that she can discuss with you how best to arrange a suitable time to speak to Will.

I hope that is all OK, please don't hesitate to let me know if you need any more information.

Best wishes,

Tom

Tom Hawthorn
Head of Policy
The Electoral Commission

[REDACTED]
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Putting voters first

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Working Together for a Better Tower Hamlets
Web site : <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>

London Borough of Tower Hamlets E-Mail Disclaimer.

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If your request relates to a Freedom of Information enquiry, please resend this to foi@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Please consider your environmental responsibility: Before printing this e-mail or any other document , ask yourself whether you need a hard copy.

Chris Skidmore MP
Parliamentary Secretary (Minister for the Constitution)
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

9 February 2017

Dear Chris (if I may),

Thank you for your letter of 2 February about the Electoral Commission's consideration of an application to register a political party named Tower Hamlets Together. The view that democratic participation needs to be accompanied by strong checks and balances is one that we share and take very seriously.

The Commission considers all registration applications carefully in line with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 ('PPERA'). In assessing the application to register Tower Hamlets Together, we will apply the statutory party registration tests in PERA, ensuring we treat all applicants fairly.

We are of course fully aware of the history of Tower Hamlets First and the strong public interest in the registration of political parties in this particular borough. I can assure you that we will undertake a robust assessment of all applications accordingly. As part of our assessment of the application of Tower Hamlets Together, we will want to be sure that the party have and operate within a satisfactory constitution, and adopt and operate within a satisfactory financial scheme.

While the Commission must only apply the rules set out in PERA in relation to the registration of a political party, we have taken steps to enable the transparency of the party registration process. For example, all complete applications that are submitted to the Commission are placed on our website and members of the public or political parties are invited to submit their views on the application. These are taken into account before the Commission makes any final decision on an application to register.

The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ

Tel: 020 7271 0500
Fax: 020 7271 0505
info@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Your vote matters

An independent body established by Act of the UK Parliament

At our meeting on 1 February you indicated that you would welcome further advice on how the system for registering political parties can be improved. The Commission has previously urged government to consider reviewing this part of PPERA. For example:

- At present, there is no transparency about, or controls over, the sources of money for new parties before they register. Financial information is only provided in a party's first statutory Statement of Accounts, which, depending on when they register, may not be submitted for publication for up to 18 months after registration. In our 2013 review of the UK's party and election finance laws, we made recommendations that would improve transparency and provide voters with more timely information about the financial capacity of newly registered parties. These include requiring parties to report on their total assets and liabilities as part of the registration process and to confirm the accuracy of their financial scheme on an annual basis. A change to the law as outlined above would ensure that any individuals who wish to apply to register a political party know that right from the outset their finances will be subject to detailed scrutiny.
- In May 2014 we wrote to Greg Clark MP, the then Minister for Cities and Constitution requesting consideration of changes in the rules on party registration, in that instance specifically and urgently on the rules on party descriptions to address voters being confused or misled by the current use of party descriptions on ballot papers. That could be achieved by requiring that all ballot papers should show the registered name of the political party to which a candidate belongs, as currently at most elections there is no requirement for the party identity to be clear to voters – or – removing the facility to use party descriptions altogether on ballot papers, so that only the party name appears. This change could be accompanied by new provisions to allow larger parties to indicate via their party name their country specific identities, as exists within the Scottish election rules, e.g. Scottish Conservatives; Welsh Labour.

You enquire whether the involvement of a particular individual behind an application for registration of a new political party should be grounds for refusal. That is not presently the case. Apart from the restriction at s.24(8) PPERA that you identify on holding office as a Treasurer if convicted of an electoral offence, there are no other applicable provisions in PPERA of this nature. This is another area where a review of the PPERA

provisions to see if the law should be improved could be considered. That might include prohibiting a person disqualified from holding elected office being able to be an officer of a registered political party.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with your officials how and when these changes could be implemented by legislative change.

Yours sincerely



Sir John Holmes
Chair

CC: Marcus Jones MP, Minister for Local Government

Chris Skidmore MP

KINGSWOOD



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir John Holmes

Chairman

Electoral Commission

2nd February 2017

Dear Sir John,

Electoral Commission's consideration of political party registration in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

In April 2015, an Election Court disqualified the then Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman, for a series of corrupt and illegal electoral practices. He was disqualified from any public office for five years under Section 160 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Part of the judgment highlighted a series of concerns related to the registration, financial administration, and declarations of his political party, Tower Hamlets First.¹ Following the disqualification of the Mayor, this subsequently led to the de-registration of the political party by the Electoral Commission. The remaining Tower Hamlets First councillors, originally elected under the Mayor's ticket, have continued as (fragmented) independent groups on the council.

It has now been reported that Lutfur Rahman is launching a new political party, entitled, "Tower Hamlets Together" ahead of the 2018 Tower Hamlets Council and Mayoral elections, and that this new party has submitted an application to the Electoral Commission.²

When registering, a political party must submit to the Electoral Commission a financial scheme (procedures for handling loans and donations, authorising spending and accounting) and a constitution (outlining the party's governance, structure and rules).

In light of: (a) the electoral fraud proven previously in the Election Court; (b) the Government's stated intention to tackle electoral fraud robustly; (c) this Borough remaining a high risk area as identified by the Electoral Commission; and (d) Government-appointed Commissioners continuing to oversee the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, I believe there is a strong public interest in the Electoral Commission forensically reviewing any application.

This should include establishing whether proper processes are in place for complying with the legal obligations under the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000, both at

¹ "The financial affairs of THF were, at best, wholly irresponsible and at worst, dishonest. While documents were produced apparently showing that 'donors' had paid some expenses of the party, those payments had obviously not passed through the treasurer or been recorded in any books of account. True returns of expenses were made to the Electoral Commission (incomplete as it turned out in the case of the party's most generous donor) but beyond a few invoices addressed to people who were not officials of THF, which they seem to have paid, the finances of THF were shrouded in mystery" (para 277); "All one may say, with the greatest of respect for the Commission, that the enquiries into the structures of THF cannot have been excessively rigorous" (para 274). *Erlam & Anor v Rahman & Anor* [2015] EWHC 1215 (QB) (23 April 2015).

² <http://lovewapping.org/2017/01/lutfur-rahman-makes-comeback-with-new-political-party-tower-hamlets-together/>

registration and moving forward, especially given such a new political party would appear to be a re-branded version of the previously de-registered party.

In addition, I would be grateful if you could indicate whether you feel it appropriate that an individual currently under a Section 160 disqualification for electoral offences should be involved with the registration of a political party. One may wish to consider the broader provisions of Section 24(8) of PPERA which may be guiding when considering a political party registration, and the fact that Section 160 also disqualifies the individual from being a registered elector and consequently from being a permissible donor under PPERA. When the Electoral Commission considers whether there is a necessary level of assurance in the financial scheme and constitution of a party, I would suggest that assurance is unlikely to be provided by the involvement of such individuals.

As the Government's recent response to Sir Eric Pickles' review of electoral fraud noted, we need to ensure democratic participation goes hand in hand with checks and balances to strengthen electoral integrity.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Chris Skidmore.

Chris Skidmore MP
Minister for the Constitution

cc. Marcus Jones MP, Minister for Local Government.