

# The Peter Cane Prize for Legal Reasoning by an Aspiring Lawyer, 2026

The Legal Reasoning Prize for 2026 is about local government administration. This is a feature of public law, where the broader focus is on how the law empowers and structures the activities of government decision-makers. Local authorities are one of the most important units within public administration. They perform various local functions, including relating to planning, education, healthcare, sanitation, amongst many others. At the same time, local authorities perform an important democratic function, insofar as they facilitate community engagement and participation in the process of decision-making on issues that arise at a local level. Section 1 of this document contains the brief. Section 2 contains the question.

## 1. Brief

Review Lord Sales' judgment in the R (*Spitalfields Historic Building Trust*) v *Tower Hamlets LBC* [2025] UKSC 11 and prepare a response of no more than 1,500 words which responds to the question in Section 2. The case is accessible through the following link: <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/uksc/2025/11>

In preparing your response, you may **only** refer the *Spitalfields* case and the statutory provisions considered in the judgment. The question can be answered from review of the case and the application of sufficient thought. There is no requirement to consult secondary case law or legal texts, and such materials may not be utilised in your written response. Use of generative AI in preparing your response is also **prohibited**. Where a response is found to have utilised generative AI, the applicant's school will be notified.

When referring to particular passages in the *Spitalfields* case, please refer to the paragraph number in the following form: (*Spitalfields*, [#]). For example: -

Lord Sales observed that a councillors' ability to vote "falls to be located in the wider context of the LGA 1972" (*Spitalfields*, [42]).

## 2. Question

Critically analyse Lord Sales' judgment in *Spitalfields*. Address the following questions in particular: -

1. Explain the scheme established by the Local Government Act 1972. What provisions were in question and what was Parliament trying to achieve by the Act?
2. Explain what *Spitalfields* decided. Identify the legal question the Supreme Court was required to resolve and the main steps in Lord Sales' reasoning.
3. What is, in your view, the greatest strength and the greatest weakness in Lord Sales' reasoning?
4. Consider the following two alternative hypothetical versions of the restrictive voting rule in Paragraph 11.4 of Tower Hamlet's Constitution. Explain whether, in light of your answers to questions (1)-(3), you think the *Spitalfields* case would have been decided differently. The amendments are signalled by underlining. You can assume that Paragraph 5.4 is similarly altered.
  - a. Assume that Paragraph 11.4 stipulates "Where an application is deferred and its consideration recommences at a subsequent meeting only Members who were not present at the previous meeting will be able to vote...". Tower Hamlets explains that, in its view, only councillors who consider the matter afresh would be sufficiently unbiased.
  - b. Assume that Paragraph 11.4 stipulates "Where an application is deferred and its consideration recommences at a subsequent meeting only Members who were present at the previous meeting will be able to vote. Alternatively, where a Member has, by virtue of their proximity to the applicants for planning permission and/or interested parties, has a special interest in the subject matter of the application, they will be entitled to vote even if they were not present at the previous meeting due to their capacity to represent those special interests."

When responding to these questions, make sure that you provide reasons for your answers.