

Attendance

Members of the Special Advisory Group

Cllr Andrew Johnson (Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Sandra Samuels OBE
Cllr Stephen Simkins
Cllr Paul Singh
Cllr Wendy Thompson

Employees

Dereck Francis	Democratic Services Officer
Jaswinder Kaur	Democratic Services Manager
Claire Nye	Director of Finance
Colin Parr	Head of Governance
Martyn Sargeant	Head of Democratic Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Roger Lawrence.
- 2 **Declarations of interests**
No declarations of interests were made.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (8 September 2017)**
Resolved:
 That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 September 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 5 **Polling Stations**
Martyn Sargeant, Head of Democratic Services presented the report on proposed minor changes to the Council's polling station arrangements in the Wednesfield and Graiseley wards, in advance of the elections to be held in 2018.

Councillor John Reynolds commented that polling district NDA (Graiseley) contained an electorate of almost 2000. He asked that the proposed reallocation of the electorate in the Northern districts of Graiseley ward not result in any further increase to the number of the electorate for polling district NDA. With that caveat he was content with the proposed arrangements for Graiseley ward. The Head of Democratic Services reported that he would investigate whether there were small changes that could be made to polling district NDA and consult the Chair of the Advisory Group accordingly.

Councillor Mary Bateman reported that she had no objections to the proposal for the St Albans area (Wednesfield North ward) but she had concerns with the distance the electorate living at the top of Kitchen Lane would have to travel to access their new polling station. Councillor Rita Potter added that she did not want the proposals and distances to new polling stations discouraging the electorate from voting. The Head of Democratic Services reported that he would consider whether suitable permanent alternative premises were available, but from previous investigations nothing suitable had been identified. He also undertook to run a campaign in the ward to increase the take up of postal votes.

Councillor Stephen Simkins stated that he was opposed to any closures of polling stations as he felt that it disenfranchised voters.

Other members of the Advisory Group made general observations on the location of polling stations in other wards of the city that would benefit from a review of polling districts. The Chair suggested that these issues be picked up during the statutory five year review of polling stations. He also asked that where members of the Group had individual issues that they raise them with the Head of Democratic Services.

Councillor John Reynolds also suggested that any voters affected by the changes to polling stations receive a letter of explanation with a map highlighting the location of their new polling station.

Resolved:

1. That Council be recommended to:
 - a. Approve that two polling stations in Wednesfield North ward be merged to be one double station and that the number of polling stations in Graiseley ward be reduced from seven to six.
 - b. Delegate authority to the Returning Officer to make such changes to polling station arrangements as may be operationally necessary to ensure the smooth and efficient delivery of the elections in 2018.
2. That the Head of Democratic Services be requested to deliver a campaign in the Wednesfield ward to increase the take up of postal votes.

Changes to the Constitution

Jaswinder Kaur, Democratic Services Manager presented the report on proposed changes made to the constitution for approval by the Council.

Claire Nye, Director of Finance requested a slight amendment to the proposed change to Part 4 - Financial Procedure Rules, to enable timely decisions in relation to new external funding received by the Council. It was requested that the words 'or Cabinet (Resources) Panel' be added following the word 'Cabinet' where it appeared. The Advisory Group supported the proposed change.

The Advisory Group also discussed the rationale for the proposed amendment to Part 4 - Contract Procedure Rules (Section 3.10) relating to the removal of the requirement for the Cabinet Member for Governance to approve agency staff above a day rate of £350. They also discussed the threshold above which engagement of agency staff should be approved by the Cabinet Member for Governance and the process for open and transparent reporting of engagements approved. It was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Governance be required to approve the engagement of agency staff above a day rate of £500 and for the Human Resources Business Partner to approve engagements with a day rate below £500; and that the quarterly report on the use of agency staff be submitted to Cabinet (Resources) Panel for information.

Councillor Sandra Samuels OBE also reported that she had concerns about day rates paid to interim employees. The Director of Finance advised the Group that any interim agency staff appointed above the threshold were reported to the Council's Strategic Executive Board for sign off.

The Chair congratulated the Democratic Services Manager and other employees involved in the work on the refresh of the Constitution.

Councillor Wendy Thompson added that the refresh had been a huge piece of work and important tidying aspects had been addressed. She indicated that there had been missed opportunities during work, and asked that as part of the iterative approach to maintaining the Constitution, consideration be given to the Rules of Debate in Full Council with a view to them more mirroring the House of Commons rules, and to the provision in the Constitution to support and encourage members of the public to attend and participate in Council meetings.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Adopt the new format of the Council's Constitution.
2. Adopt the changes to the current content as summarised in the report and detailed in Appendix 1 to the report subject to:
 - a. The proposed change to Part 4 – Financial Procedure Rules, to enable timely decisions in relation to new external funding received by the Council being amended by the inclusion of the words '**or Cabinet (Resources) Panel**' between the words 'Cabinet' and 'and' to read as follows:

“Where all of the following apply, an overall increase or decrease in the Council's total budget may be approved Cabinet **or Cabinet (Resources) Panel** and not require the approval by Council:”

and at the end of clause (iv) to read as follows:

“(iv) The Section 151 Officer agrees that approval may be granted by Cabinet or **Cabinet (Resources) Panel.**”

b. The proposed change to Part 4 - Contract Procedure Rules (Section 3.10) being amended to require the Cabinet Member for Governance to approve the engagement of agency staff above a day rate of £500 and for the Human Resources Business Partner to approve engagements with a day rate below £500; and

That quarterly report on the use of Agency Staff also be submitted to Cabinet (Resources) Panel for information.

3. Authorise the Director of Governance to implement the new format and the changes set out in Appendix 1 to the report, as now amended, with immediate effect.
4. Note that further amendments to the Constitution would be presented in May 2018.

7 **Calendar of Meetings 2018-2019**

A revised timetable for Council and committee meetings for the next Council Year (2018-2019) was tabled.

The Chair reported that he had asked for comments on the revised calendar from the political groups on the Council by next Friday with a view to the schedule of dates being submitted to Council on 13 December 2017 for approval.

Resolved:

1. That the revised City of Wolverhampton Council Calendar of Meetings for 2018-2019 be endorsed for recommendation to Full Council on the 13 December 2017.
2. That consultation with the political groups on the City of Wolverhampton Council Calendar of Meetings for 2018-2019 be approved.
3. That any amendments to the City of Wolverhampton Council Calendar of Meetings for 2018-2019 be delegated to the Chair of Special Advisory Group in consultation with the Director of Governance following consultation with political groups.