

# Governance and Ethics Committee

Minutes - 12 January 2023

## Attendance

### Members of the Governance and Ethics Committee

Cllr John Reynolds (Chair)  
Cllr Jonathan Crofts (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.  
Cllr Celia Hibbert  
Cllr Louise Miles  
Cllr Phil Page  
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal  
Cllr Rita Potter  
Cllr Simon Bennett  
Cllr Wendy Thompson

### Employees

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| David Pattison        | Chief Operating Officer                                    |
| Laura Gittos          | Head of Governance   |
| Sarah Campbell        | Customer Engagement Manager                                |
| Laura Noonan          | Electoral Services Manager                                 |
| Alice Peacock         | Deputy Electoral Services Manager                          |
| Anna Zollino-Biscotti | Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer |
| Donna Cope            | Democratic Services Officer                                |

## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**  
There were no apologies for absence.
- 2 Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting**  
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.
- 4 Matters arising**  
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 **Preparations for May 2023 Local Elections**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the Preparations for the May 2023 Local Elections report. He confirmed that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had rejected the Council's request to move the fallow year from 2025 to 2024. He noted that preparations and planning had started for the upcoming elections and were in advanced stages compared to other Local Authorities.

Responding to questions, he confirmed that the DLUHC had rejected the request to move the fallow year as they did not consider it appropriate. Their approach was to favour all-out elections and therefore they were not prepared to move it back for Local Authorities who elected by thirds.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services Manager, presented the Preparations for the May 2023 Local Elections report. The report outlined Voter ID, accessibility preparations, key dates, the verification and count process, and improvements to the postal vote process.

Members of the Committee discussed the report and provided feedback.

Responding to questions, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that expired ID would still be accepted if the photo matched the elector. He noted that the primary responsibility for implementation and communication lay with the Electoral Commission and that there was a nationwide campaign to ensure a consistent message. He advised members that the Council was also working with regional Local Authorities to ensure a consistent approach across the region and that further communications would be sent to residents to ensure they did not lose their right to vote.

He advised members that measures would be put in place to avoid potential problems, and that the Council would continue to liaise with the Electoral Commission, other Local Authorities and West Midlands Police. He advised members that more information would be provided at the next All Councillor Briefing.

The Electoral Services Manager outlined the process for applying for Voter ID and noted that it would be a quick turnaround, provided there were no problems with an application. She advised that the deadline to apply would be six working days before polling day and that national research from the Electoral Commission had indicated between 4-6% of electors were not expected to have valid ID. She advised members that additional resources would be put in place to process those requests. She noted that the design of the Voter Authority Certificate would be shared with Councillors once it had been finalised.

For those residents without access to the internet or a means to travel to the Civic Centre, she advised members that the team could contact electors on an individual basis. She noted that the options of postal and proxy voting were also available.

Laura Gittos, Head of Governance, advised members that the verification process lay with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as the elector would need to provide a date of birth and a National Insurance number in any application.

The Electoral Services Manager advised members that the communications team was preparing a suite of local resources as well as resources and information for Councillors. It was emphasised that all information shared would follow Electoral Commission guidance and would be politically neutral and that Councillors would have the opportunity to offer feedback before anything was finalised.

The Head of Governance advised members that the postal voting team would be given more operational support and resources to avoid delays and that communications would be dispatched both digitally and on paper for those with accessibility issues.

The Electoral Services Manager advised members that the information provided would support Councillors to provide local outreach and that the team could contact residents who were struggling with the process. She confirmed that communications on Voter ID and communications on postal voting would be sent out separately.

The Chief Operating Officer recognised the importance of a politically neutral approach and advised members that all literature would be run through each group.

The Electoral Services Manager advised members that a spreadsheet with key dates for candidates and agents would be shared with Councillors and posted online. She clarified the timings of the verification and count process.

The Chief Operating Officer advised members that the Council would be transparent on its training for count assistants and on the count process itself.

Resolved:

1. That the report and feedback on the preparations underway for the May 2023 elections be noted.

## 6 **Evaluation of Annual Canvass 2022**

Alice Peacock, Deputy Electoral Services Manager, presented the Evaluation of the 2022 Annual Canvass report. The report outlined the process of the annual canvass as well as evaluations for route one, two and three properties.

Responding to questions, she noted that the Council had met its legal requirements regarding the annual canvass. She advised members that the number of properties who did not respond had significantly dropped year-on-year and outlined methods that the team used to gather a response from non-responders for properties such as care homes and student accommodation. For other unresponsive properties, she advised members that an increase in outreach and resources would likely see further falls in non-response rates.

Resolved:

1. That the report and feedback on the 2022 annual canvass be noted.

## 7 **Quarter One and Two 2022-2023 - Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints & Compliments Report**

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Quarter One and Two 2022 - 2023 - Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints and Compliments report. He

emphasised that the report was about transparency and that it was important that lessons were learned, and improvements were made from any complaints.

Sarah Campbell, Customer Engagement Manager, presented the report. The report included details of the complaints policy and training as well as an overview of the following areas: Corporate, Children's and Education, Adults and Public Health and Ombudsman Enquiries for Quarter 1 and Quarter 2.

Members of the Committee discussed the report.

Responding to questions, the Chief Operating Officer advised members that the data provided was not intended to be ward-based information, and that the Council often did not have the authority to pass on individual complaints to the relevant Ward Councillor. He clarified that the report was intended to show how the Council was meeting its legal duties and how the Council was addressing complaints and improving from them.

Anna Zollino-Biscotti, Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer, clarified that the Council would need the consent of complainants to share details of specific complaints. She advised members that the Council was its own data controller, so information could be shared with officers internally, if it was appropriate and consistent with the original complaint.

The Chief Operating Officer clarified that the Council was committed to sharing data with Councillors, but that any data would need to comply with information governance rules and with the Council's legal duties. He advised members that a further report on information governance and the rules regarding data would be brought to a future Committee meeting.

Responding to further questions, the Customer Engagement Manager outlined the complaint training. She advised members that for upheld complaints concerning officer conduct, training was administered on a one-to-one basis and action plans were used to ensure it was tracked and managed. She advised members that the figures on how many employees had completed the training would be shared.

She noted that training was administered by the relevant service and that the Customer Engagement Team worked with the services to avoid delays, achieve best outcomes, and remind them of the Council's statutory obligations. She advised members that customers were invited to meet and work with Council officers to resolve complaints and were updated if their outcome was delayed. She noted that any outcomes were recorded and implemented into the service.

The Chief Operating Officer noted that a report on the work of the Councillor Enquiries Unit would be brought to a future meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the contents of the Annual Social Care Public Health Complaints and Compliments Report for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 be noted.
2. That a further report on Information Governance be brought to a future meeting.

3. That a report on the Councillor Enquiries Unit be brought to a future meeting.

8 **Information Governance - Progress update - 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022**

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Information Governance - 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022 progress update. He noted that the report outlined the ways in which the Council was meeting its duties in relation to Information Governance.

The Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer presented the report. The report included a summary statement on the nine-month period between April and December 2022, a performance update for the period between April and November 2022, an update on identified risks and the Information Governance Forward Plan.

Responding to questions, she clarified the incidents that were reported to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the outcomes. She advised members that more analysis would be undertaken to understand why projected received figures for Information Requests were 15-20% lower than previous years and that this would include liaising with other regional Local Authorities. She noted that the results of this analysis would be brought back to the Committee in the next Information Governance progress update report.

Resolved:

1. That the Information Governance progress update report for the period April 2022 to December 2022, which provides a summary of the work carried out under the Information Governance function for the period, be noted.