

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Governance and Ethics Committee Meeting

Friday, 10 December 2021

Dear Councillor

GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 10TH DECEMBER, 2021

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Friday, 10th December, 2021 meeting of the Governance and Ethics Committee, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No Item

- 6 **Freedom of the City (Pages 3 - 6)**
[To consider a report on Freedom of the City.]
- 7 **Information presented to Independent Remuneration Panel (Pages 7 - 20)**
[To note the information to be presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel – Appendix 3 to follow.]
- 8 **Electoral Services - Outcomes from Association of Electoral Administrators health check and postal vote audit (Pages 21 - 40)**
[To note the outcomes from the Association of Electoral Administrators health check and postal vote audit.]

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team:

Contact Donna Cope, Democratic Services Officer
Tel 01902 550320
Email democratic.services@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Address Democratic Services, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1SH

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CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Governance and Ethics Committee 10 December 2021
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Report title	Freedom of the City	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Democratic Services	
Accountable employee	David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
	Tel	01902550320
	Email	David.pattison@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be considered by	Council	26 January 2022

Recommendation for decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee recommends that Council:

1. Convene an extraordinary meeting to bestow the honour of Freedom of the City to Lisa Potts in recognition of her exceptional bravery in saving children in the City of Wolverhampton and charity work.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To consider bestowing the honour of Freedom of the City to Lisa Potts in recognition of her exceptional bravery in saving children in the City of Wolverhampton and charity work.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that an extraordinary Council meeting has to be held in order to confer the Freedom of the City, with no-less than two thirds of councillors voting having to approve the proposal.
- 2.2 Local Authorities may grant Freedom of the City or Freedom of Entry. The former is given to "persons of distinction and any persons who have rendered eminent services to the City". It is the most honourable distinction that a City can bestow and the recipient is thereafter referred to as Freeman.
- 2.3 The latter is granted to current serving uniformed organisations (usually, but not exclusively, the military) "which have rendered conspicuous service and which are associated with the City". Freedom of Entry grants the organisation the "freedom to march through the streets of the City with bayonets fixed, drums beating and colours flying".
- 2.4 Although being awarded the Freedom of the City does not carry any rights or responsibilities, it is a considerable honour that is bestowed exceptionally.
- 2.5 The conferral of the honour of being made a Freeman of the city is for the Council to determine.
- 2.6 Council agreed the protocol for awarding Freedom of the City on 21 July 2021. The nomination form received has been progressed in line with the nomination protocol. All the Group Leaders and the Mayor have been consulted about the proposed admission of Lisa Potts to Freeman of the City and were in agreement.

3.0 Lisa Potts

- 3.1 Lisa Potts is a former nursery teacher who had saved children from a machete attack at St Luke's Primary School in Blakenhall, in 1996. Lisa was 21 years old at the time and had suffered severe cuts to her head, back and to both arms. Lisa still keeps in touch with many of the children and has supported them through the years.
- 3.2 In 2001, Lisa founded a charity, *Believe To Achieve*, based in schools in Wolverhampton. The charity aims to encourage independence and to increase self-esteem in children.
- 3.3 In 2010 Lisa retrained as an Adult Nurse at Wolverhampton University and then went on to become a specialist Public Health Nurse.

4.0 Freedom Scroll

- 4.1 If the Committee is minded to approve the recommendation, a citation will be prepared for submission to Council which, together with the Resolution passed, will be transcribed

on to a Freedom Scroll, made of vellum, hand decorated and inscribed, which will be sealed with the City Council's Corporate Seal

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 It is traditional to hold a celebratory event in the Mayor's City Suite, the arrangements for which will be made in consultation with Lisa Potts. The total estimated cost of the Freedom Scroll and celebratory event is in the region of £4,000. This will be funded from existing budgets set aside for hospitality and equipment purchases within Governance Services. [GE/25112021/Q]

6.0 Legal implications

6.1 Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to admit to be honorary freemen or freewomen of the City persons of distinction or persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered imminent services to the City. The award of the title of Honorary Freeman has to be done by a resolution passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting at a meeting of the Council specially convened for the purpose. [TC/26112021/F]

7.0 Equalities implications

7.1 There are no equalities implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

8.0 All other Implications

8.1 There are no other implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

9.1 [Awarding Freedom of the City, Council, 21 July 2021](#)

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CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Governance and Ethics Committee 10 December 2021
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Report title	Information presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield, Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Democratic Services	
Accountable employee	David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
	Tel	01902 550320
	Email	David.pattison@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	N/A	

Recommendation for noting:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is asked to note:

1. The information to be presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the information that will be presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel for consideration when making recommendations on Councillor Allowances.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 An independent external review of the Councillors' Allowance Scheme by the Independent Remuneration Panel has been commissioned by the Council as the current scheme is set to expire in May 2022. **Legal Framework for Member Allowances** – The law relating to member allowances changed by virtue of the Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000).
- 2.2 The LGA 2000 introduced s.99 which altered the law on member allowances replacing s.15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 with a new provision which essentially provides that the details of what can be paid through member allowances scheme is to be set out in subordinate legislation.
- 2.3 The main provision in subordinate legislation is the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. These Regulations have had some amendments, a copy of the current version (as amended), are available from the Monitoring Officer on request.
- 2.4 **Key Provisions in the Law** - The law on member allowances is rigid as to what can and cannot be paid to members in terms of allowances. In short it provides that each authority must have a scheme for payment of member allowances approved each year before 1 April. The current scheme was set in 2018 and expires in 2022, a copy of the current scheme can be seen at Appendix 1, and therefore a new scheme must be put in place by May 2022.
- 2.5 Under the law, schemes can allow for a number of categories of allowance that an authority can chose to pay to its members these are:
 - a. Basic Allowance
 - b. Special Responsibility Allowance
 - c. Carers Allowance
 - d. Travelling & Subsistence Allowance

In deciding what level to set these allowances the authority must take into account the recommendations of that authority's Independent Remuneration Panel ("the IRP"). We will now deal with what the rules say about each of these payments to members of the authority. It is important to note that only these payments can be made and no other for the role as a member.

- 2.6 **Basic Allowance** – the rules provide that each member should be paid a basic allowance in respect of their functions along with any other allowance provided for by the

scheme. It also provides that if a member is in office for part of the year he/she is to get a proportionate payment.

The relevant guidance detailed below makes it clear that the allowance is not intended to serve as a salary as such, indeed as Councillors are office holders and not employees, rather it is intended to be a contribution to recognise the significant time commitment of all Councillors including calls on their time of meetings, and other council work and a contribution towards the incidental costs of being a councillor such as use of their homes, telephone calls and meetings.

The only guidance is old, ie from 2003 and can be found here [ARCHIVED CONTENT] Local Government Councillors and civic dignitaries in England: ODPM guidance: Part One: members' allowances (nationalarchives.gov.uk)

It is interesting to note that it states re basic allowances that:

Basic allowance

9. Each local authority must make provision in its scheme of allowances for a basic, flat rate allowance payable to all members of the authority. The allowance must be the same for each member. The allowance may be paid in a lump sum, or in instalments through the year.

10. Basic allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all Councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings with officers and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes.

It goes on to say that:

67. Paragraph 10 details the sorts of things basic allowance is intended to cover. Having established what local councillors do, and the hours which are devoted to these tasks the local authorities will need to take a view on the rate at which, and the number of hours for which, councillors ought to be remunerated.

68. It is important that some element of the work of members continues to be voluntary - that some hours are not remunerated. This must be balanced against the need to ensure that financial loss is not suffered by elected members, and further to ensure that, despite the input required, people are encouraged to come forward as elected members and that their service to the community is retained.

- 2.7 **Special Responsibility Allowance** – a scheme may provide for a special responsibility allowance to be paid (in addition to the basic allowance) to members with certain (specified) roles these include the leader of a political group, deputy leader of a political group, members of cabinet/leader (and deputy leader) of the Council, chairmen of committees/sub-committees or someone who is required to carry out such other activities as require the member an amount of time greater or equal to the other categories.
- 2.8 **Carers' allowance** – a scheme may provide for the payment to members in respect of expenses for care of children or dependents for attending certain meetings.

- 2.9 **Travelling and subsistence allowance** – a scheme may provide for the payment of an allowance in respect of travelling and subsistence in respect of travel undertaken in connection with or relating to certain specified duties such as attendance of Council/Committee meetings or other functions specified by the authority.
- 2.10 **Length of a scheme** - Whilst the scheme needs to be made for each year the law provides that a Council may choose to set a scheme for a period of years (subject to being re-approved each year by Council) with an annual adjustment by reference to an index, where it does so it may set the scheme for a period of no more than 4 years without going back to the Panel.
- 2.11 **Claims by a certain date** - Where payments are made under the Carers' or Travelling and Subsistence Allowances the scheme must provide a date for these payments to be claimed by.
- 2.12 **Publicity for schemes** - There are also detailed rules concerning publicity for the making or amendment of a scheme including advertising it in the local paper and also in relation to the recommendations of the Panel.

3.0 Independent Remuneration Panel

- 3.1 The Panel is a critical part of the process. The Panel is designed to ensure that there is independent oversight as to how much the allowances are set at. The responsibilities are set out at Regulation 21, the relevant parts of which I repeat here:

(1) An independent remuneration panel shall produce a report in relation to the authority or authorities in respect of which it was established, making recommendations—

(a) as to the responsibilities or duties in respect of which the following should be available—

(i) special responsibility allowance;

(ii) travelling and subsistence allowance; and

(iii) co-optees' allowance;

(b) as to the amount of such allowances and as to the amount of basic allowance;

(c) as to whether dependants' carers' allowance should be payable to members of an authority, and as to the amount of such an allowance;

(d) as to whether, in the event that the scheme is amended at any time so as to affect an allowance payable for the year in which the amendment is made, payment of allowances may be backdated in accordance with regulation 10(6);

(e) as to whether adjustments to the level of allowances may be determined according to an index and if so which index and how long that index should apply, subject to a maximum of four years, before its application is reviewed;

3.2 The Panel must have at least 3 members and cannot be a member of the authority or disqualified from being a member and may pay the members of the Panel. The Panel is appointed by Council – it currently comprises:

- Mr Miceal Barden – Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Wolverhampton University
- Mrs Sylvia Parkin – Formerly Deputy Lieutenant
- Reverend David Wright – Representing the Rector of St. Peters Church Wolverhampton (Chair)

The IRP at this authority is not paid for their assistance. The IRP can be added to by Council if it so wishes.

3.3 **Comparative Allowances** – The Panel will look at the allowances paid to Councillors performing similar roles at similar sized Councils. The Panel will review allowances for Councils in the CIPFA family group, Black Country authorities and West Midlands Metropolitan Authorities, these are detailed in Appendix 2.

3.4 **Survey on Councillor Allowances** – The Panel will look at the responses received by Councillors to understand the views of councillors and time commitment involved for various roles, a copy of the survey and responses are detailed in Appendix 3.

4.0 Financial implications

4.1 The overall budget for members allowances, inclusive of provision for employers national insurance and pension fund contributions, is currently just under £998,000. Any financial implications emerging through the process of review of allowances will be considered as part of the 2022-2023 budget setting process and MTFS preparation, with the intention that allowances are set at the budget setting meeting of the Council on 2 March 2022.
[GE/26112021/G]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 The detailed legal position is set in the report above. Under the LGA 2000 a scheme must be set and can be set for a maximum of 4 years. The approach above is legally compliant.
[TC/26112021/G]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 Equalities implications will carefully be taken into account when the allowances are set by the Council and during the process of the Independent Remuneration Panel's consideration of the issues.

7.0 All other Implications

7.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

8.0 Schedule of background papers

8.1 Process for Setting Councillor Allowances, Governance and Ethics Committee, 22 October 2021.

9.0 Apprentices

9.1 Appendix 1: Current Scheme of Councillor Allowances

9.2 Appendix 2: Comparative Data on Councillor Allowances

9.3 Appendix 3: Survey on Councillor Allowances

Councillor Allowances Scheme

Councillor Allowances Scheme

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Councillors' Allowances Scheme was made by the Council on 31 January 2018, in accordance with the statutory provisions in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

The Council has had regard to the Guidance on Consolidated Regulations for Local Authority Allowances issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Inland Revenue in July 2003.

In January 2018, the Council established its own Independent Remuneration Panel under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

In March 2021, the Council established its own Independent Remuneration Panel under the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 to consider minor amendments to the scheme.

The Council has had regard to the recommendations of the Panel in approving the levels of allowances set out in this scheme.

- 1.2 A copy of the Panel's report is available from Democratic Services, Civic Centre, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton, WV1 1SH. Telephone: 01902 550320 and on the Council's website.

1.3 Definitions

"Regulations" means the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and any Regulations which may from time to time replace, amend or revoke them.

"Regulatory or other Committee" means, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Committees, Sub-Committee or Panels comprising Councillors or other persons established to deal with functions which are neither reserved to the Council nor are Cabinet functions.

- 1.4 Sections 2 to 16 of this Scheme describe the types of allowances which may be paid to Councillors and the arrangements for administering the Scheme.
- 1.5 Section 17 contains a Schedule of Allowances approved by the Council for 2014/15. The Schedule will be re-issued annually when the annual adjustment has been made and at any time when the Scheme is amended.

2. Basic Allowance

- 2.1 This is a basic, flat rate allowance payable to all Councillors. The allowance is the same for each Councillor and is paid in instalments through the year.

Councillor Allowances Scheme

2.2 Where the term of office of a Councillor begins or ends otherwise than at the beginning (1 April) or end of a year (i.e. 31 March), his/her entitlement shall be to payment of such part of the basic allowance as bears to the whole the same proportion as the number of days during which his/her term of office as Councillor bears to the number of days in that year.

2.3 Basic allowance is intended to recognise the time commitment of all Councillors, including such inevitable calls on their time as meetings with employees and constituents and attendance at political group meetings. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the cost of telephone rental and calls and home office expenses such as postage, stationary and the use of their homes.

3. Special Responsibility Allowance

3.1 Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) may be paid to those Councillors who have significant responsibilities. The Regulations prescribe the categories of responsibility for which SRAs may be paid.

3.2 The Council has determined that SRAs be paid to Councillors holding the following posts:-

Leader
Deputy Leader
Leader of the Main Opposition Group
Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group
Cabinet Member
Chair – Scrutiny Board
Chair – Scrutiny Panel
Chair – Planning Committee
Chair – Licensing Committee
Chair – Pensions Committee
Chair – Audit Committee
Chair – Governance and Ethics Committee

Vice-Chair – Scrutiny Board and Panels
Vice-Chair – Planning Committee
Vice-Chair – Licensing Committee
Vice-Chair – Pensions Committee
Vice-Chair – Audit Committee
Vice-Chair – Governance and Ethics Committee

Leader of a Minority Opposition Group *
Councillor Champions

“Special Responsibility Allowance for the Leader of a Minority Opposition Group to be paid only if a Minority Opposition Group comprises five or more Councillors”

Councillor Allowances Scheme

- 3.3 Where a Councillor undertakes duties which would entitle him/her to more than one Special Responsibility Allowance under this Scheme then he/she shall receive only the higher allowance.
- 3.4 Where a Councillor does not have throughout the whole of a year any such responsibilities as entitle him/her to a SRA, his/her entitlement shall be to payment of such part of the SRA as bears to the whole the same proportion as the number of days during which he/she has such special responsibilities bears to the number of days in that year.

4. Dependants' Carers' Allowance

- 4.1 A dependants' carers' allowance is payable to those Councillors who incur expenditure for the care of their children or other dependants whilst undertaking particular duties. These duties are specified in the Regulations and are as follows:
- a. attendance at a meeting of the Cabinet or of a Committee of the Cabinet (i.e. the Cabinet or a Cabinet Panel)
 - b. attendance at a meeting of the Full Council or any Regulatory or other Committee (i.e. a Committee or Sub-Committee or Panel of the Council)
 - c. attendance at a meeting of some other body to which the Council make appointments or nominations, including attendance at a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee of the body and for the avoidance of doubt shall include attendance at a meeting of the West Midlands Combined Authority
 - d. attendance at a meeting which has both been authorised by the Council, or a Regulatory or other Committee of the Council or a Joint Committee of the Council and one or more other authorities, or a Sub-Committee of a Joint Committee and to which representatives of more than one political group have been invited
 - e. attendance at a meeting of a local authority association of which the Council is a member
 - f. duties undertaken on behalf of the Council in pursuance of any standing order (Contracts Procedure Rules) requiring a Councillor or Councillors to be present while tender documents are opened
 - g. duties undertaken on behalf of the Council in connection with the discharge of any function of the Council conferred by or under any enactment and empowering or requiring the Council to inspect or authorise the inspection of premises
 - h. duties undertaken on behalf of the Council in connection with arrangements made by the Council for the attendance of pupils at a

Councillor Allowances Scheme

school approved for the purposes of section 342 of the Education Act 1996 (approval of non-maintained special schools)

- i. any other duty approved by the Council in connection with discharging the duties of the Council or its Regulatory or other Committees (i.e. Committees or Sub-Committees).

4.2 The amount of the dependants' carers' allowances payable in respect of the duties listed above will be the reasonable actual costs incurred up to a total annual maximum amount of 10% of the basic allowance.

5. Travelling and Subsistence Allowance

5.1 Travel and subsistence allowance is payable in connection with undertaking duties specified by the Council. The duties specified are those set out in section 4.1 of this Scheme.

5.2 Travel and subsistence within the West Midlands County area

No separate amount will be payable for travel and subsistence. The basic allowance will be deemed to include an element for travel and subsistence.

5.3 Travel and subsistence outside the West Midlands County area

Councillors required to travel outside the West Midlands County area in connection with the duties specified in section 4.1 of this Scheme are encouraged to travel by public transport. The costs of such travel if incurred directly by the Councillor will be reimbursed. Alternatively, the Council will obtain and pay for travel warrants or tickets etc. for use by the Councillor.

Where it is not possible to use public transport, mileage rates applicable to Council employees, equivalent to the cost of standard class rail fare, will be reimbursed. All claims for mileage should be accompanied by a VAT receipt.

Where Councillors are unable to take main meals i.e. breakfast, lunch and dinner, in their normal place then the reasonable costs of purchasing a meal and beverage or appropriate refreshment will be reimbursed.

Councillors must obtain receipts when paying for transport and meals/refreshments. In the case of alcoholic drinks, only expenditure for reasonable refreshment or business purposes will be reimbursed.

5.4 Councillors who are required to return to Wolverhampton to attend Council meetings or attend to other Council business while away from home on personal business or in connection with their employment will not normally be reimbursed any travel or subsistence costs by the Council. In exceptional personal, compassionate or other mitigating circumstances, the reimbursement of such travel costs will be considered by the Chief Operating Officer and Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Political Group Leaders.

Councillor Allowances Scheme

6. Co-opted Members and Independent Person's Allowance

- 6.1 The Council has determined not to pay any allowance to co-opted Members or Independent Persons (i.e. a person who, not being an elected Councillor, has been appointed to membership of a Regulatory or other Committee of the Council) or persons or representatives of external organisations (i.e. a person who, not being a Councillor, has been invited to attend a Regulatory or other Committee of the Council) in respect of attendance at meetings.
- 6.2 Co-optees and persons or representatives of external organisations will be entitled to travel and subsistence allowance.
- 6.3 Travel and subsistence within the West Midlands County area – co-optees and persons or representatives of external organisations will be paid on the same basis as that applying immediately before the coming into operation of this Scheme.
- 6.4 Travel and subsistence outside the West Midlands County area – co-optees and persons or representatives of external organisations will be paid allowances on the same basis as Councillors as set out in section 5.3 of this Scheme.

7. Withholding Allowances

- 7.1 If a Councillor has been suspended from membership of the Council then his/her basic allowance, any SRA and all travel and subsistence allowances will be withheld during the period of suspension. If a Councillor has been partially suspended e.g. prevented from exercising particular functions or having particular responsibilities, then his/her basic allowance will not be withheld but travel and subsistence allowances and any SRA related to the suspended duties and responsibilities will be withheld.
- 7.2 Where payment of any allowance has already been made in respect of any period during which the Councillor concerned has been suspended or ceased to be a Councillor or is in any other way not entitled to receive the allowance in respect of that period, then any such allowances will be repaid by the Councillor.

Note: References to suspension and partial suspension refer to the provisions of Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 and any Regulations made thereunder.

8. Forgoing of Allowances

- 8.1 A Councillor may forgo all or any part of any allowances to which he/she is entitled under this Scheme. Notice in writing must be given by the Councillor to the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Allowances Scheme

9. Backdating of Allowances

- 9.1 If this Scheme is amended and any amendment is made which affects an allowance payable for the year in which the amendment is made then the entitlement to such allowance as amended may apply (if the Council so determines) with effect from the beginning of the year in which the amendment is made.

10. Annual Adjustments of Allowance Levels

- 10.1 Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances for the municipal year commencing 4 June 2014 will be paid as set out in the Schedule to this Scheme.

11. Tax and National Insurance Treatment of Councillors' Allowances

- 11.1 For tax and national insurance purposes Councillors and non-Councillors are treated in the same way as any other individual who holds an office or is an employee. Guidance received by the Council will be made available to Councillors who should also contact their tax office for advice as necessary.

12. Amendments and Revocation of the Scheme

- 12.1 Before the beginning of each year the Council will make a Scheme as required by the Regulations for the payment of allowances in respect of the year.
- 12.2 The Scheme may be amended at any time but may only be revoked with effect from the beginning of a year.

13. Claims and Payment

- 13.1 Claims for dependants' carers' allowance, travelling and subsistence allowances must be claimed within one month of the date on which entitlement to the allowance arose.
- 13.2 Unless otherwise agreed payment of basic allowance and SRA's will be made monthly in advance.

14. Records of Allowances

- 14.1 The Council will keep a record of payments made by it in accordance with the Scheme. The record will contain the information required by the Regulations.
- 14.2 As soon as reasonably practicable after the end of a year to which the Scheme relates the Council will publish details in accordance with the Regulations of allowances paid.

Councillor Allowances Scheme**15. Publicity**

- 15.1 The Council will as soon as reasonably practicable after the making of this Scheme or any amendment thereto make arrangements for publication as required by the Regulations.

16. Schedule of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances

Basic Allowance (All Councillors) – £9793.00

Description	Rate
Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)	
Leader	25,000
Deputy Leader	20,000
Leader of the Main Opposition Group	15,000
Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group	2,500
Cabinet Member	15,000
Chair – Scrutiny Board	15,000
Chair – Scrutiny Panel	10,000
Chair – Planning Committee	15,000
Chair – Licensing Committee	15,000
Chair – Audit Committee	10,000
Chair – Pensions Committee	10,000
Vice-Chair – Scrutiny Board and Panels	2,500
Vice-Chair – Planning Committee	5,000
Vice-Chair – Licensing Committee	5,000
Vice-Chair – Audit Committee	2,500
Vice-Chair – Pensions Committee	2,500
Councillor Champion	2,500
Ceremonial Mayor (inclusive of £2,500 clothing allowance)	20,000
Ceremonial Deputy Major (inclusive of £1,250 clothing allowance)	5,000
Chair – Governance and Ethics Committee	10,000
Vice-Chair - Governance and Ethics Committee	2,500

(Note: Where a Councillor undertakes duties, which entitle them to more than one SRA under the Scheme, they will receive only the higher allowance. However, they will still be entitled to the mayoral clothing allowance if they qualify for the Ceremonial Mayor or Deputy Mayor SRA.)

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Comparison with Other Local Authorities

Authority	Number of Councillors	Basic Allowance	Leader	Deputy Leader	Leader of the largest Opposition group	Deputy Leader of largest Opposition group	Cabinet Member	Deputy Cabinet Member	Scrutiny Co-ordination Chair	Scrutiny Co-ordination Deputy Chair	Scrutiny Chairs	Audit Chair	Audit Deputy Chair	Planning Chair
Black Country Councils:														
Dudley	72	10,737	25,213	19,940	11,290	8,919	14,355		9,560	4,609	9,560	9,560	4,609	11,172
Sandwell	72	11,353	28,092	25,282	9,569		16,856		9,355	5,618	9,355	9,355		11,237
Wolverhampton	60	9,793	25,000	20,000	15,000	2,500	15,000		15,000	2,500	10,000	10,000	2,500	15,000
Walsall	60	11,369	23,298	15,214	7,579		11,660		7,579		7,579	7,579		7,579
Average		10,813	25,401	20,109	10,860	5,710	14,468		10,374	4,242	9,124	9,124	3,555	11,247
West Midlands Metropolitan Councils:														
Coventry	54	14,490	26,081	18,832	5,345	2,673	11,593	3,940	11,593	2,901	7,248	7,248	2,901	7,248
Dudley	72	10,737	25,213	19,940	11,290	8,919	14,355		9,560	4,609	9,560	9,560	4,609	11,172
Sandwell	72	11,353	28,092	25,282	9,569		16,856		9,355	5,618	9,355	9,355		11,237
Solihull	51	10,000	24,215	11,623	9,686		9,686		7,748		7,748	826		7,748
Wolverhampton	60	9,793	25,000	20,000	15,000	2,500	15,000		15,000	2,500	10,000	10,000	2,500	15,000
Walsall	60	11,369	23,298	15,214	7,579		11,660		7,579		7,579	7,579		7,579
Average		11,290	25,317	18,482	9,745	4,697	13,192	3,940	10,139	3,907	8,582	7,428	3,337	9,997
CIPFA Nearest Neighbours:														
Coventry	54	14,490	26,081	18,832	5,345	2,673	11,593	3,940	11,593	2,901	7,248	7,248	2,901	7,248
Bolton	60	11,644	31,294	18,775	10,555	6,333	7,140		5,100		5,100			8,177
Bradford MBC	90	13,463	37,056	18,528	25,939	16,675	25,939		12,970		12,970	12,970		12,970
Derby	51	11,523	34,569	25,927	8,642	4,321	17,285		8,642	2,161	8,642	6,050		8,642
Dudley	72	10,737	25,213	19,940	11,290	8,919	14,355		9,560	4,609	9,560	9,560	4,609	11,172
Kirklees	69	14,002	26,364	19,772	11,577	3,860	12,863		11,577		6,432	2,572		6,432
Oldham MBC	60	9,709	29,128	20,390	14,564	5,826	17,477	7,282	8,738			2,148		8,738
Peterborough	60	10,508	31,524	21,017	7,881		15,762				7,881	7,881		9,457
Rochdale	60	10,451	31,353	15,677	10,850		14,109		7,838			6,271		10,451
Sandwell	72	11,353	28,092	25,282	9,569		16,856		9,355	5,618	9,355	9,355		11,237
Sheffield	84	12,339	19,091	9,545	7,890		9,545		7,890		7,890			5,536
Wolverhampton	60	9,793	25,000	20,000	15,000	2,500	15,000		15,000	2,500	10,000	10,000	2,500	15,000
Walsall	60	11,369	23,298	15,214	7,579		11,660		7,579		7,579	7,579		7,579
Average		11,645	28,313	19,146	11,283	6,388	14,583	5,611	9,654	3,558	8,423	7,421	3,337	9,434

Notes:

1. Comparator local authorities are those identified by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy using a model that identifies the closest match across a range of socio economic indicators including population, demograp
2. Comparison data from local authority websites.
3. There are some variations to the way in which local authorities report their figures which may mean that they are not all directly comparable
4. Roles for which authorities pay an SRA vary and are not always comparable. The figures included here are where the title of a role appears to match most closely a similar role in Wolverhampton.
5. Some authorities pay allowances for roles not included in Wolverhampton's scheme.
6. Four of the West Midlands Metropolitan Councils (Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall) are also identified as CIPFA nearest neighbours and appear in both tables

7. As civic allowances are governed by different legislation from that dealing with Members Allowances schemes, some authorities do not include them in their actual spend and for others its not immediately apparent.
8. The way payments are made to opposition leaders, deputies and spokesperson vary more from one authority to another than most other payments. Some pay only allowances only for the largest opposition group, while many link the level of payment to the number of members in the group. eg the level of allowance in Sandwell ranges from £1,367 to £9,569 depending on the size of the opposition group. The rates shown here are the highest given - further analysis can be provided if required.
9. Where included, co-opted allowances can vary based on the role co-opted e.g. the level of allowance in Birmingham ranges from £602 to £1,082.
10. The rate for Kirklees' Fostering Panel Members is a day rate.
11. Some (but not all) Member Allowance Schemes include provisions for applying Carer's allowances, without specifying rates for Independent and Professional Care.

Comparison with Other Local Authorities

Authority	Planning Deputy Chair	Licensing Chair	Licensing Deputy Chair	Ethics Cttee Chair	Fostering Panel Member	Adoption Panel Member	Co-optee	Mayor/ Lord Mayor	Deputy Mayor/ Deputy Lord Mayor	Travel and subsistence				
										Car Higher rate	Lower Rate	Motor Cycle	Bicycle	
Black Country Councils:														
Dudley	5,234	9,560	4,609											
Sandwell	5,618	11,237	5,618	9,355	5,618	5,618		21,380	8,552					
Wolverhampton	5,000	15,000	5,000	10,000				20,000	5,000					
Walsall		4,737												
Average	5,284	10,134	5,076	9,678	5,618	5,618	#DIV/0!	20,690	6,776	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
West Midlands Metropolitan Councils:														
Coventry	2,901	7,248	2,901	1,125	2,901	2,901	525							
Dudley	5,234	9,560	4,609											
Sandwell	5,618	11,237	5,618	9,355	5,618	5,618		21,380	8,552					
Solihull		3,875		3,875	2,906	2,906		15,447	1,005					
Wolverhampton	5,000	15,000	5,000	10,000				20,000	5,000					
Walsall		4,737												
Average	4,688	8,610	4,532	6,089	3,808	3,808	525	18,942	4,852	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
CIPFA Nearest Neighbours:														
Coventry	2,901	7,248	2,901	1,125	2,901	2,901	525							
Bolton	2,813	7,740	2,521							0.48	0.43		0.20	
Bradford MBC		12,970		3,706	2,965	2,965	597			0.45	0.45	0.24	0.20	
Derby	4,321	8,642	4,321					8,642		0.45	0.45	0.15	0.15	
Dudley	5,234	9,560	4,609											
Kirklees		5,147			119	1,285		15,289	6,798	0.45	0.45	0.24	0.20	
Oldham MBC		8,738		679			397	15,233	2,993	0.45	0.45			
Peterborough		7,881					250	12,000	3,600	0.45	0.45			
Rochdale		10,451								0.45	0.45	0.24	0.20	
Sandwell	5,618	11,237	5,618	9,355	5,618	5,618		21,380	8,552					
Sheffield		5,536	3,182				744			0.45	0.45	0.24	0.20	
Wolverhampton	5,000	15,000	5,000	10,000				20,000	5,000					
Walsall		4,737												
Average	4,315	8,837	4,022	4,973	2,901	3,192	502	15,424	5,389	0	0	0	0	0

Notes:

1. Comparator local authorities are those idihics and deprivation
2. Comparison data from local authority wel
3. There are some variations to the way in w
4. Roles for which authorities pay an SRA val
5. Some authorities pay allowances for roles
6. Four of the West Midlands Metropolitan (

7. As civic allowances are governed by differ include them in their actual spend and for o
8. The way payments are made to oppositio
- Some pay only allowances only for the large of allowance in Sandwell ranges from £1,36
- analysis can be provided if required.
9. Where included, co-opted allowances can
10. The rate for Kirklees' Fostering Panel Me
11. Some (but not all) Member Allowance Sc

Comparison with Other Local Authorities	Subsistence	Carers	Professional
Authority	Subsistence	Independent	Professional
		Care	Care

Black Country Councils:

Dudley			
Sandwell			
Wolverhampton			
Walsall			
Average	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!

West Midlands Metropolitan Councils:

Coventry			
Dudley			
Sandwell			
Solihull			
Wolverhampton			
Walsall			
Average	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!

CIPFA Nearest Neighbours:

Coventry			
Bolton			
Bradford MBC			
Derby			
Dudley			
Kirklees			
Oldham MBC			
Peterborough			
Rochdale			
Sandwell			
Sheffield			
Wolverhampton			
Walsall			
Average	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!

Notes: SR_ Specified rates for different meals etc

1. Comparator local authorities are those id
2. Comparison data from local authority wel
3. There are some variations to the way in w
4. Roles for which authorities pay an SRA va
5. Some authorities pay allowances for roles
6. Four of the West Midlands Metropolitan t

7. As civic allowances are governed by differ include them in their actual spend and for o
8. The way payments are made to oppositio
- Some pay only allowances only for the large of allowance in Sandwell ranges from £1,36.
- analysis can be provided if required.
9. Where included, co-opted allowances can
10. The rate for Kirklees' Fostering Panel Me
11. Some (but not all) Member Allowance Sc

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON C O U N C I L	<h1>Governance and Ethics Committee</h1> <p>10 December 2021</p>
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Report title	Electoral Services – Outcomes from AEA health check and postal vote audit	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
Accountable employee	Laura Noonan	Electoral Services Manager
	Tel	01902 554939
	Email	Laura.noonan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Election Board	4 November 2021

Recommendations for noting:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is asked to note:

1. The outcome of the external and internal review of Electoral Services functions.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To present the outcome of the external review of Electoral Services carried out by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), the internal audit carried out by the Audit Team of postal votes, and to provide an update on work underway to improve areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Returning Officer requested that the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) conduct a health check to provide an independent and confidential assessment of Electoral Services. The purpose of this was to help validate good practice and offer constructive and practical guidance to help the council to continue to improve the way we conduct our elections.
- 2.2 The audit of postal votes was scheduled as part of the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/2022 due to the fact that a combined poll and an increase in postal voters took place this year. The objective was to provide assurance that postal votes are administered and processed in accordance with the Electoral Commission's guidance.

3.0 Association of Electoral Administrators Report – Executive Summary

- 3.1 Overall, the report is positive as the AEA recognised that electoral events are seen as the responsibility of the entire council with buy in from across all services areas to ensure they are run efficiently.
- 3.2 The AEA recognised that Wolverhampton has a strong Election Board and all legislation, employment law, GDPR and information governance is clearly understood and adhered to.
- 3.3 There is also an emphasis on the comprehensive lesson learnt exercises that are carried out after the elections, where the service is seen to gather feedback to improve and enhance service. Noting that this feedback is reported into the Governance and Ethics Committee, as measure of best practice by the service.
- 3.4 The AEA have recommended that Election Board should ensure there is a focus on postal vote opening for the 2022 election to provide the necessary oversight and support. Following this recommendation, a member of SEB has been appointed as the lead Deputy Returning Officer for postal vote opening, and employees from Finance and Audit will be supporting the review of paperwork and processes to improve efficiencies. Finance employees will also be recruited to work as postal vote opening assistants, due to their experience and skillset.
- 3.5 It was recommended that the role of receipting the ballot boxes is essential to the elections and therefore an experienced Officer will be given overall responsibility for this,

and to review the process. The Business Improvement Team are working with Electoral Services to review this process and make the necessary enhancements.

- 3.6 Another recommendation was to integrate electoral registration into other areas of the Council where possible. Electoral Services do work closely with council tax to keep the register of electors up to date, there is further work that could be done to improve this. The Business Improvement Team are working with Electoral Services to integrate electoral registration into Customer Services, Council Tax and Housing.
- 3.7 The final area of improvement raised was to ensure there is resilience across the council and in the core team to meet the demands that will be placed on Electoral Services when implementing the Elections Bill in 2023. They recommended that, in advance of the implementation, the one council approach is strengthened, and the core team structure is reviewed. The structure of the team is currently being reviewed and the one council approach is being strengthened with meetings already taking place with key services such as HR, Finance, and the Events Team to plan for the 2022 local elections.
- 3.8 For a copy of the full report please see **Appendix 1**.

4.0 Postal Vote Audit – Executive Summary

- 4.1 The overall outcome of the internal audit review on postal vote opening was that there is substantial assurance over the adequacy of the controls reviewed. A substantial outcome states there is 'A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited'.

The scope of the audit included:

- Processing of postal vote applications
- Changes to postal vote applications
- Cancellation of postal vote applications
- Receipt and verification of returns

- 4.2 There were five actions identified to further strengthen processes, the actions were all given a green status which means 'action is advised to enhance risk control or operational efficiency'.

Work is already underway to address these actions, which are detailed below:

Action	Electoral Services Response
1. Review retention of postal vote cancellation forms.	Amendments have been made to the scanning system and associated procedure to retain cancellation forms in the system for one year.

2. Rectify one error where permanent postal vote was put in place instead of one off.	The elector has been informed, and all postal vote applications made this year are being re-checked.
3. Enquire whether system can automatically flag postal voters who have changed their name to send a new application.	Functionality does not currently exist within the system. Existing procedure improved to ensure that any postal voter who changes their name is informed of requirement to make a new application due to signature change.
4. To review whether system provider can improve reporting of reason for cancelled postal vote applications.	This will be raised with Civica. Up until the audit, there has been no use for this specific report.
5. Regularly review postal vote redirections and liaise with counter fraud team to seek advice.	This will be reviewed ahead of the May 2022 elections.

4.3 For a copy of the full report please see **Appendix 2**.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 The improvements identified as part of these reviews will be pursued utilising existing resources. Any financial implications arising from the review of the core elections team structure will be assessed on completion of that work. [GE/09112021/V]

6.0 Legal implications

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report at the current time [DP/16112021/A].

7.0 Equalities implications

7.1 Whilst there are no direct equalities implications associated with this report, equalities considerations relating to electoral matters are taken into account when processes and procedures are looked at and the same will be done as the procedures are reviewed as a result of these reports.

8.0 All other Implications

8.1 There are no other implications associated with this report at the current time.

9.0 Apprentices

9.1 Appendix 1: AEA Health Check Report

9.2 Appendix 2: Postal Vote Audit Report

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The Association of Electoral Administrators



REPORT ON THE PROVISION OF ELECTORAL SERVICES AT

**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L**

Report compiled by:

Laura Lock, Deputy Chief Executive

Angela Holden, Policy Manager

September 2021

Health check report into the provision of electoral services at City of Wolverhampton Council

Introduction

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) is a membership body for those involved in the delivery of electoral services. The City of Wolverhampton Council have asked that we conduct a health check on their electoral service. The health check was undertaken by Laura Lock, AEA Deputy Chief Executive and supported by the supported by the AEA's Policy Manager.

Background

The City of Wolverhampton has an Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Returning Officer (RO) with over ten years' experience delivering elections, with over three years as Returning Officer. The Council also have a very knowledgeable Electoral Services Manager who works with the ERO/RO.

For the purposes of City of Wolverhampton local government elections, Tim Johnson, the Chief Executive, has been appointed as the Proper Officer for electoral matters and acts as the Council's Returning Officer (RO) for local government, Combined Authority Mayor and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

He has also been appointed as the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) under section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and accordingly acts as the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for any UK Parliamentary elections held within the City of Wolverhampton Council area.

They requested the AEA undertake this health check to ensure the electoral services function is appropriately structured, resilient and sufficiently resourced to meet the statutory obligations and demands facing the service with the knowledge of forthcoming legislative change, such as the recently tabled Elections Bill. They also requested we specifically look at their processes for both postal vote opening and the receipting of ballot boxes.

Provision of electoral services at the City of Wolverhampton Council

Areas of excellence

Ensuring residents can register to vote and cast their ballot is a key priority for the Council. Having meet with officers at all levels of the organisation, resourcing democratic provision to meet the needs of the electorate is clearly of fundamental importance.

Electoral events are seen as the responsibility of the entire Council with buy-in across all service areas thanks to a top-down approach from senior managers.

There is a drive to continue to improve that leads to original thinking which supports the democratic process.

It is acknowledged that electoral services is a highly specialised area and as such needs skilled staff who can ensure legislation is followed. It is equally clear that senior officers appreciate that the election team, due to legal changes, no longer have the capacity to deliver an electoral event without council-wide support.

There are many areas of excellent practice imbedded into electoral provision in Wolverhampton including –

- Having an Election Board with a robust project management approach and reporting, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive.
- There being a comprehensive lessons learnt exercise after every election with clear mechanisms for reporting and implementing improvement including formally reporting to the Elections Board and Governance and Ethics Committee.
- The clear 'One Council' approach to service delivery with senior officers acutely aware of their role in delivering a major project with immovable deadlines.
- Wider legislation, including GDPR, employment law and information governance, is clearly understood and adhered to.

Areas for review

Postal Vote Opening

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council took a proactive approach to providing postal votes for residents ahead of the 2021 polls.

This was done to ensure no one was disenfranchised because they were nervous attending a polling station.

The promotion of postal votes saw the number of voters wanting their ballot papers sent to them at home grow from 23,000 to almost 37,000.

This increase undoubtedly supported Wolverhampton residents in engaging with the 2021 polls. However, an inevitable consequence was longer and more complicated postal vote opening sessions in the fortnight before polling day. The impact of the increase was compounded by the level of combination at the May polls where voters received three ballot papers.

The City of Wolverhampton Council will likely retain a high level of postal voters for the foreseeable future. This growth means a new approach to opening returned packs is required a review of the process should be undertaken with necessary corporate support and resource.

We feel the Elections Board should make postal vote opening a priority area for improvement in 2022 and ensure it provides necessary oversight and support.

Ballot Box Receipting

As a result of the vaccination rollout, the venue usually used for elections counts was unavailable. While the new venue worked well for the counting of votes, the receipting of ballot boxes did not go as smoothly as it had previously.

Having looked at the challenges that existed in May 2021, it does appear that these were largely due to the new venue and adjustments relating to Covid-19.

We were reassured that when returning to usual venue many of the issues will be resolved. However, we see merit in someone outside of the core election team being given overall responsibility for the receipting of ballot boxes and other equipment. We would also advise a review of close of poll procedures given to Presiding Officers, especially the completion of the ballot paper account.

Registration

There is an obvious drive to ensure Wolverhampton residents can register to vote easily and work being undertaken to explore further opportunities for joined up working.

There has been a drive to integrate registration into other Council services, such as council tax. Also, before the Covid-19 pandemic there

were some fantastic outreach work being undertaken which has understandably stopped.

We believe there is merit in the Elections Board reviewing the overarching framework for registration at the City of Wolverhampton Council. This strategic oversight would help ensure all opportunities to maintain a complete and accurate register while improving the residents experience and delivering financial savings.

Elections Bill

There is significant change on the horizon for elections and electoral registration. The core team are clearly sighted on the challenges ahead with a plan to keep all stakeholders informed.

While much of the detail is still to be laid out in secondary legislation, the RO/ERO and his senior leaders are acutely aware that there are resource and working practice implications. The Elections Board is committed to reviewing the Bill and devising an implementation plan as more detail is available.

We would signpost the need to ensure, as with other areas of election delivery, the 'One Council' approach is adopted for new burdens. We would also see merit in considering whether the current core team structure provides sufficient expert resilience.

Conclusions

The City of Wolverhampton Council has an Electoral Services Team it should be proud of. They are delivering an outstanding service to the residents of Wolverhampton and continue to look for improvements to the service. They understand the importance of customer service and have made continued personal sacrifice to ensure all electoral requirements are properly met. The May 2021 polls were a huge success despite having to contend with the complexities brought about by Covid and three-way combination.

While there are areas of challenge on the horizon, we believe the corporate oversight that is already in place means the Council is well prepared to meet future demands.

To supplement this report, we will send some detailed recommendations for minor service enhancements to the Electoral Services Manager to assist with their ongoing drive for continuous improvement.

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Final Internal Audit Report: Postal Votes 2021/2022



1 Executive Summary

Introduction

An audit of postal votes was undertaken as part of the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2021/2022. For the May 2021 local elections there was 65% increase in postal votes compared to the previous local elections in 2019. The increase in postal votes has been primarily driven by the pandemic.

Voting by post is an alternative to voting in person at a polling station. An application to vote by post is required and can be for a particular election or referendum, for a set period of time or for all future polls. To apply for a postal vote, the applicant must be on the electoral register and be eligible to vote.

Objectives, potential risks and scope of audit work

Our audit was conducted in conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and considered the following:

Objectives:	To provide assurance that postal votes are administered and processed in accordance with the Electoral Commission's guidance.
Potential Risks:	Failure to comply with the Electoral Commission's guidance could see the Council being exposed to a number of risks such as: reputational damage, financial penalties, or potential postal fraud.
Scope:	The review will seek assurance that postal votes have been administered in accordance with the Electoral Commission's guidance and will focus on the recent elections that have taken place including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Processing of postal vote applications;• Changes to postal vote applications.• Cancellation of postal vote applications;• Receipt and verification of returned postal votes for the appropriate election.
Limitations to the scope of our audit:	The review will be limited to the above scope areas and will not cover the process around the counting of votes.

Overall Conclusion

Our audit provides **substantial** assurance over the adequacy of the controls reviewed as part of the process to mitigate risks to an acceptable level.

No Assurance	Limited	Satisfactory	Substantial
Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Key issues identified

We did not identify any significant red or amber issues where improvements were required to be made.

Five issues classified as green were identified, where action is advised to enhance risk control or operational efficiency which are detailed in section two of this report.

Examples of good practice identified

During our review we identified the following examples of good practice in the management of risk, as achieved through the effective design and application of controls:

- The increased number of postal vote applications resulting from the pandemic were planned for by the Election Teams through the recruitment and training of additional temporary staff;
- Processes for receipting and processing of postal vote applications met the requirements of the Electoral Commission's guidance;
- The Electoral Commission's guidance had been met for address changes made for voters on the Elections system;
- Receipt and verification of returned postal votes for the appropriate election met the requirements of the Electoral Commission's guidance.

Acknowledgment

Several employees gave their time and co-operation during this review. We would like to record our thanks to all those concerned.

1. Cancelled Postal Votes – retention / evidence of application forms**Finding:**

Based on information provided by the Elections Team it was established that the application forms used for the cancellation postal votes, are scanned into the Election system. These documents appear in the absent vote queue for processing. Once processed, these are then deleted in the system. However, once the postal vote has been deleted all postal vote scanned images are subsequently deleted and a paper copy is not retained.

Implication:

In the absence of retained documents to support cancelled postal votes, evidence of instruction to cancel postal votes could not be provided which could expose the Council to accusations and reputational damage.

Agreed Recommendation:

The retention of Postal Vote Cancellation forms will be reviewed to ensure there is sufficient evidence in place should decisions be challenged or scrutinised.

The Elections System's software provided will be contacted to ensure the system supports the Council's retention requirements.

Responsible Officer:

Electoral Services Manager, Laura Noonan

Target Date:

31 December 2021

2. Processing of postal vote applications**Finding:**

Testing was performed in respect of the processing of postal vote applications. The results of this testing identified one case out of a random sample of 20, where the applicant completed the application form to indicate they only wanted to vote by post for the May 21 election. However, a review of the system identified the individual's application requested had been incorrectly entered on the system resulting in them being permanently set to vote by post. The permanent postal vote was subsequently confirmed in writing to the applicant, who had not raised this as an error at the time of this review.

Implication:

Postal voting requests are not accurately processed which may lead to complaints and reputational damage.

Agreed Recommendation:

The error identified as part of this review will be rectified and the applicant will be notified of the amendments in writing.

Responsible Officer:

Electoral Services Manager, Laura Noonan

Target Date:

30 November 2021

3. Postal votes - name changes**Finding:**

Testing of a sample of name changes identified that in two cases, out of five tested, a new postal vote application form was not sent to the voter to collect the applicant's new signature. Further enquiries made with the Elections Team established that system does not automatically flag the record for a form to be generated or add it to a queue to be actioned. At present a manual quarterly check is undertaken of name changes for postal voters so a new form can be sent out. However, it was noted that in one of the two cases a new signature was not collected for a period of more than three months.

Implication:

Changes of name applications actioned on the system without the collection of a new signature on a new postal voter application may result in a rejected vote.

Agreed Recommendation:

Enquiries will be made with the system provider for a potential fix to the Elections system (Civica Xpress System) so that an automatically flag to the record for a form will be generated and added to an action queue. In the interim a new postal vote application form for the collection of new signatures, will be sent to voters in order for records to be updated.

Responsible Officer:

Electoral Services Manager, Laura Noonan

Target Date:

31 December 2021

4. Cancelled postal vote applications - audit trail / reports**Finding:**

It was not possible to obtain a report from the Elections system to separately identify and test the cancellation of postal vote applications. This was because reports from the system included automatic cancellations where postal voters did not renew their existing postal vote in place and postal votes where people had passed away or moved out of the City. Planned sample testing of cancellation postal vote applications has not therefore been possible.

Implication:

The absence of a report of cancel postal vote instructions does not provide a clear audit trail or reporting ability of cancellation instructions.

Agreed Recommendation:

A review with the system provider will be undertaken to see if a fix is available to develop a report of cancelled postal vote instructions from voters.

Responsible Officer:

Electoral Services Manager, Laura Noonan

Target Date:

31 December 2021

5. Postal vote redirections**Finding:**

Based on information provided by the Elections Team it was established that reports are available from the Elections system to identify postal vote redirections. These reports are not currently extracted from the system, and interrogated, to identify unusual patterns which may imply fraudulent activity.

Implication:

Levels of postal vote redirections are not monitored to identify emerging patterns of redirections resulting from fraudulent activity.

Agreed Recommendation:

Regular reporting from the Elections System will be undertaken on redirections for review and monitoring. The Elections Team will liaise with the Council's Counter Fraud Team to seek advice on the checks that need to be made.

Responsible Officer:

Electoral Services Manager, Laura Noonan

Target Date:

31 March 2022

This report has been prepared solely for the Council in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the terms of reference. Internal audit does not accept or assume any liability of duty of care for any other purpose or to any other party. This report should not be disclosed to any third party, quoted or referred to without prior consent. Internal audit has undertaken this review subject to the limitations outlined below.

Internal control

- Internal control systems, no matter how well designed and operated, are affected by inherent limitations. These include the possibility of poor judgement in decision making, human error, control processes being deliberately circumvented by employees and others, management overriding controls and the occurrence of unforeseeable circumstances.

Responsibilities of management and auditors

- It is management's responsibility to develop and maintain sound systems of risk management, internal control and governance for the prevention and detection of irregularities and fraud. Internal audit work should not be seen as a substitute for management's responsibilities for the design and operation of these systems.
- Internal audit endeavours to plan audit work so that it has a reasonable expectation of detecting significant control weakness and if detected, will carry out additional work directed towards identification of consequent fraud or other irregularities. However, internal audit procedures alone, even when carried out with due professional care, do not guarantee that fraud will be detected.
- Accordingly, these examinations by internal auditors should not be relied upon solely to disclose fraud or other irregularities which may exist.

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Date: 25 October 2021

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