

Governance and Ethics Committee

Minutes - 3 September 2021

Attendance

Members of the Governance and Ethics Committee

Cllr Tersaim Singh (Chair)
Cllr Jonathan Crofts (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.
Cllr Claire Darke (Virtually)
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Sandra Samuels OBE
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Wendy Thompson

In Attendance

Cllr Paula Brookfield, Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities (Virtually)

Employees

David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Laura Noonan	Electoral Services Manager
Laura Gittos	Head of Governance
Jacob Stokes	Democratic Services Assistant
Donna Cope	Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor John Reynolds and Councillor Rita Potter.

The Committee stood in silent tribute to the late Gill Reynolds.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest made.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting**
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.
- 4 Matters arising**

Councillor Wendy Thompson noted that members of the Conservative Group were not named where they had made important points. Councillor Thompson felt it important that Councillors were named in the minutes where points had been made.

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, advised Councillor Thompson that the minutes would be amended to ensure they were an accurate record of the meeting.

Resolved:

1. That delegated authority be given to the Chief Operating Officer, to ensure the minutes of the previous meeting were an accurate record of the meeting.

5 **Update from the Monitoring Officer on Governance Matters**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, provided an update on the work programme for the forthcoming year, as detailed in paragraph 2.2 of the report, and asked the Committee to provide feedback or offer any other business that should be added to the work programme.

The Chief Operating Officer noted that he intended to bring further revisions to the Constitution and Petitions Scheme to the October meeting.

The Chief Operating Officer provided the Committee with an update on the Annual Canvass. He noted that the current completion rate was 86% and that the Council was on track to reach its target response rate of 90%.

Councillor Tersaim Singh moved the recommendation and Councillor Paul Birch seconded the recommendation.

Resolved:

1. That the update from the Monitoring Officer is noted.

6 **Overview of Electoral Cycles**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented the report on the process for changing electoral cycles for Local Authorities that had been requested at the 24 June 2021 Committee meeting.

The Chief Operating Officer noted that City of Wolverhampton Council currently elects Councillors by thirds, with a fallow year in the fourth year.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee of the process that Local Authorities must follow if they wish to change their electoral cycle to from thirds to all-out and vice-versa, as outlined in section 2.6 of the report.

The Chief Operating Officer provided the Committee with a list of pros and cons for the two election cycles, as outlined in section 3.1 of the report.

The Committee debated the pros and cons for all out elections and elections by thirds and highlighted the positives and negatives for both systems. A majority of the Committee were of the view that decision of whether the Council should change its electoral cycle was one for Council to decide and debate upon and not this Committee.

Responding to questions, the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that he had drawn up the list of pros and cons based on his professional expertise and research from other Local Authorities.

Councillor Jonathan Crofts moved an amendment to the recommendation contained in this report, that Council be recommended to move to an all-out electoral cycle, as per the process set out in the report. Councillor Simon Bennett seconded the amendment and outlined the rationale to the amendment.

The amended motion was debated by the Committee.

The amendment was carried.

Resolved:

1. That Council be recommended to move to all out elections and follow the process for adopting an all-out election cycle as set out in this report.
2. That detailed statistics on all out elections be provided in the report to Council.

7 **Proposed Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Consultation**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, delivered the report on the Council Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) Draft Warding Proposal.

The Chief Operating Officer noted that the LGBCE agreed to delay their implementation from May 2022 to May 2023, but that the recommendation to bring forward the fallow year from May 2025 to May 2024 was rejected, on the basis that only the Secretary of State, and not the LGBCE, had that power.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that he intended to liaise with the three other authorities in the same position and liaise with the Secretary of State jointly.

The Committee noted that the Conservative Group would be submitting their own views, alongside the Council's proposal.

The report was carried.

Resolved:

1. That Council's response to the draft recommendations published by the LGBCE be approved.

8 **Conferring the Title of Honorary Alderman**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented a report on whether to confer the title of Honorary Alderman onto former Councillor Roger Lawrence who ceased to be a Member of the Council in May 2021.

Councillor Wendy Thompson moved the recommendation and Councillor Tersaim Singh seconded the recommendation.

The Committee commended the former Councillor for his years of service and supported the proposal.

The Committee were requested to review access to councillor meeting rooms for Honorary Alderman.

Resolved:

1. That Council be recommended to convene an extraordinary meeting on 15 September 2021 to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on former Councillor Roger Lawrence.