

Governance and Ethics Committee

10 December 2021

Time 10.00 am **Public Meeting?** Yes **Type of meeting** Advisory group

Venue Council Chamber- Civic Centre, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1SH

Membership

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)
Vice-Chair Cllr Jonathan Crofts (Con)

Labour

Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.
Cllr Claire Darke
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Sandra Samuels OBE

Conservative

Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Wendy Thompson

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

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

Contact Donna Cope
Tel/Email 01902 554452 or Email: donna.cope@wolverhampton.gov.uk
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Some items are discussed in private because of their confidential or commercial nature. These reports are not available to the public.

Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Apologies for absence |
| 2 | Declarations of interest |
| 3 | Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 3 - 8)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 October 2021 as a correct record.] |
| 4 | Matters arising
[To discuss any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.] |
| 5 | Update from the Monitoring Officer on Governance Matters
[To receive an update on governance matters from the Monitoring Officer – Report to follow.] |
| 6 | Freedom of the City
[To consider a report on Freedom of the City – Report to follow.] |
| 7 | Information presented to Independent Remuneration Panel
[To note the information to be presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel – Report to follow.] |
| 8 | Electoral Services - Outcomes from Association of Electoral Administrators health check and postal vote audit
[To note the outcomes from the Association of Electoral Administrators health check and postal vote audit – Report to follow.] |
| 9 | Annual report on Code of Conduct matters
[To receive an update on Code of Conduct matters – Report to follow.] |
| 10 | Councillor Enquiries - Update including ICT and Digital Developments Roadmap
[To receive a presentation on the ICT and digital developments roadmap of Councillor Enquiries.] |

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 (Virtual)
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Sandra Samuels OBE
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Wendy Thompson

Employees

David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Jin Takhar	Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Laura Gittos	Head of Governance
Jas Kaur	Democratic Services Manager
Donna Cope	Democratic Services Officer
Jacob Stokes	Democratic Services Assistant

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted by the Leader of the Council.

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Minute 6 – Overview of Electoral Cycles

Some members of the Committee disputed the resolution detailed in the minutes, that Council were not recommended to move to all out elections and that instead the matter had been deferred to Council for further consideration.

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, stated that the recording of the previous meeting had been checked several times and despite some confusion, a recommendation had been moved and seconded that Council move to all out elections. He added therefore, that the minutes before Members were a correct and accurate record.

The matter was debated by Committee.

Councillor Paul Birch moved an amendment that the minutes of the previous meeting be corrected to state that no recommendation had been made to Council to move to all out elections by this group, but a recommendation for the matter to be discussed at Council.

Councillor Rita Potter seconded the amendment.

The amended motion was debated by the Committee.

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, stated that the minutes before Committee were a legally accurate record of the meeting and if they were amended, they would not be a legally accurate record and therefore unlawful and advised Committee to vote against the motion.

Councillor Paul Birch withdrew his amendment and requested a written transcript of the previous meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.
2. That Councillor Paul Birch be provided with a transcript of the previous meeting.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising discussed.

5 **Update from Monitoring Officer**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, provided an update on the work programme and other matters within the scope of the Governance and Ethics Committee's remit.

The Chief Operating Officer reported that following the May 2021 election a peer assessment from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) had been carried out to assess where the election planning had worked well and where it could be improved. A draft report had been received from the AEA and would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee were informed that the overall canvass completion rate had reached the target of 90% and was expected to rise significantly over the next few days.

In relation to the Local Government Boundary Review, the Chief Operating Officer advised that the council were writing to the Secretary of State to seek to move the fallow year from 2025 to 2024.

The Committee were informed that a paper on the proposed approach for public questions at full Council would come to the next Committee meeting in November.

In light of the tragic murder of Sir David Amess MP, Members were advised that a substantial amount of work was being undertaken to ensure the safety of elected representatives. The Chief Operating Officer outlined the work being done and responded to questions asked. He assured Members that the safety of buildings would be considered as part of the updated risk assessment, and invited Members to contact him with any concerns or suggestions.

It was noted that further reports on Freedom of the City, and the Code of Conduct would be brought to the next meeting, and following a previous discussion on minute writing, it was noted that the key principles could be found at paragraph 3.13 of the report.

Councillor Tersaim Singh moved the recommendation within the report. Councillor John Reynolds seconded the recommendation.

Resolved:

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

6 **Revised Petitions Scheme**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented a report on the Revised Petitions Scheme. The scheme had been revised following a review of the process to ensure that it was legal, fair, transparent and efficient.

The proposed key changes, as detailed in section three of the report, were outlined to the Committee.

Councillor Jonathan Crofts moved the following motion to amend the petition scheme:

“Through prior arrangement with Democratic Services, paper petitions can be delivered to the Mayor (or in their absence the Deputy Mayor or other chair) at Ordinary Meetings of the Council when invited to do so. Upon receipt of petition(s) the Mayor will detail to the Council the name of the petition and the number of signatories.”

Councillor Jonathan Crofts outlined the rationale for the amendment. Councillor Simon Bennett seconded the motion.

The amended motion was debated by Committee. The amended motion was lost.

The Committee agreed to receive a six monthly or annual report which detailed the petitions received and how they were dealt with.

Councillor Tersaim Singh moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor John Reynolds seconded the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That Council be recommended to approve the revised Petitions Scheme, as detailed in Appendix 1.
2. That a report on how petitions were dealt with be brought to a future meeting.

7 Changes to the Constitution

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented the report on Changes to the Constitution for recommendation to Council.

The proposed key changes, as detailed in section three of the report, were outlined to the Committee, and the Chief Operating Officer responded to questions asked.

To ensure fairness for virtual attendees where speeches were timed, the use of a visible timer for those speaking online was suggested.

Councillor Tersaim Singh moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor John Reynolds seconded the recommendations.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Approve the amendments to the Constitution as detailed in the report.
2. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to implement the changes.

8 Adopting a Definition of Islamophobia

Jin Takhar, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, presented a report on Adopting a Definition of Islamophobia, inviting of the Committee to recommend that Council approved the adoption of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) definition of Islamophobia.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, discussed the background into the adopted definition of Islamophobia and outlined the importance of obtaining Councils' approval.

Members of the Committee welcomed the report and requested a progress report be brought back before the Committee in six to twelve months' time.

Councillor Tersaim Singh moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor John Reynolds seconded the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That Council be recommended to:
 - a. Approve the adoption of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPG) definition of Islamophobia as follows: "Islamophobia is

rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”

- b. Confirm that it will continue to prioritise tackling hate crime and Islamophobia in partnership with all stakeholders; listen to their concerns and develop policies that will continue to ensure we live in an inclusive city.
2. That a progress report be brought back before the Committee in six to twelve months' time.

9 **Councillor Enquiries**

Laura Gittos, Head of Governance, presented an update on Councillor Enquiries progress following the launch of the Councillor Enquiry Unit in April 2021. The benefits of the Councillor Enquiries process were outlined and feedback following a recent survey with Councillors was shared.

The Committee were invited to provide feedback on how the system could be improved and their responses included the following:

- The staff were great, but the system was slow.
- Members had to chase for updates on their enquiry.
- There was no audit trail, and the system didn't provide details of what had been done.
- A case management system or app would be preferred.
- The system didn't go back more than three months.
- Members didn't use it much as the response time was too slow.
- There were issues with the dashboard.
- It was not slick enough and needed more work.
- Consultation with the system users was needed to ensure it met their needs.

The feedback was discussed, and it was agreed that Members would be consulted on the development of the system to ensure it met their needs, and that a representative from ICT would attend the next meeting.

A Member of the Committee suggested that it would be useful to Members if they could see statistics of the individual complaints received per ward and requested that this information to be provided.

Resolved:

1. That the update on Councillor Enquiries be received.
2. That Members be consulted on the development of the system to ensure it met their needs.
3. That a representative from ICT would attend the next meeting.
4. That Members be provided with statistics of the individual complaints received per ward.

10 **Process for Setting Councillor Allowances**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented a report on the Process for Setting Councillor Allowances. It was noted that the current councillor allowances scheme was due to expire in May 2022 and a new scheme had to be set in 2022.

The Chief Operating Officer outlined the process that would be undertaken in setting Councillor Allowances.

The committee requested that the information to be presented to the Independent Remuneration Panel be brought before the Committee.

Resolved:

1. That the process for reviewing Councillor Allowances be noted.
2. That the information to be presented to Independent Remuneration Panel to undertake a review of the allowances be brought before the Committee.