

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Governance and Ethics Committee

25 March 2022

Report title	Preparations for Local Elections and East Park By-Election	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
Accountable employee	Laura Noonan	Electoral Services Manager
	Tel	01902 55 4939
	Email	Laura.noonan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Election Board	8 March 2022
	Cabinet Member Briefing – Governance and Ethics	17 March 2022

Recommendation for action:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and provide feedback on the preparations underway for the forthcoming elections.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on preparations underway for the East Park by-election taking place on 7 April 2022, and the local elections taking place on 5 May 2022.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Proper Officer received a request to hold a by-election in the East Park ward from three electors. Pursuant to Section 89 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council was required to hold a by-election within 35 working days. The date for the by-election is Thursday 7 April 2022.
- 2.2 On Thursday 5 May 2022, Local Elections are taking place in Wolverhampton, where a third of Councillor seats are up for election.

3.0 Risk management

- 3.1 A detailed risk register is reviewed by the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers at monthly Election Board meetings. The key risk relating to these elections is the overlapping timetables running two local election in close succession.
- 3.2 This risk will be mitigated by the dividing the lead responsibilities for each election between the Electoral Services Manager and Deputy Electoral Services Manager to ensure there are adequate resources to run both polls effectively.

4.0 Covid measures

- 4.1 Since the change the national guidance, the health and safety measures have been reviewed and the following arrangements will be in place, this will be regularly reviewed based on national and expert advice:
 - All employees working at the elections will be required to undertake two lateral flow tests: one two days before working and one on the day of work. Anyone who tests positive will not be able to work.
 - Candidates and agents will be strongly encouraged to take a lateral flow test prior to attending the count.
 - All employees, electors, candidates and agents will be strongly encouraged to wear a face covering at electoral events.
 - Electors will be advised that they can bring their own pen or pencil to the polling station if they wish.

- Hand sanitiser will be available at various points around venues, and everyone is recommended to regularly use it.
- Polling station staff will be supplied with cleaning equipment to regularly clean polling station touchpoints.
- Cleaners will regularly clear touch points at the count venue.
- There will be double width tables (at a depth of 29 inches/ 2.4 ft per table) between count staff and observers to create some distance.

5.0 East Park by-election

- 5.1 The designated polling stations for East Park are available and booked for the by-election, so there are no changes to the schedule of polling stations.
- 5.2 There will be daily opening sessions in Committee Room 3, Civic Centre on Wednesday 6 April and Thursday 7 April, including the final postal vote opening session at 9pm on Thursday 7 April. Candidates and agents are required to notify Electoral Services of attendance at sessions at least 24 hours in advance.
- 5.3 The verification and count will take place on the ground floor of the Civic Centre on Thursday 7 April at 10pm. It is anticipated that the count will finish by 1am.

6.0 Local election

- 6.1 There will be daily postal vote opening sessions in the City Suite, Civic Centre every weekday from Monday 25 April until election day. Candidates and agents are required to notify Electoral Services of attendance at sessions at least 24 hours in advance.
- 6.2 The final postal vote opening session will take place at Aldersley at 9pm on election night.
- 6.3 The count will take place at Aldersley. All wards will be verified at the same time. The count for each ward will commence as soon as verification for that ward is complete. It is anticipated that the count will finish by 3am at the latest.
- 6.4 Please see Appendix 1 for a list of polling stations for the elections. The polling stations for East Park are also the same for the by-election.

7.0 Youth elections

- 7.1 Electoral Services worked with the Youth Engagement and Co-Production team to run the two national youth elections in Wolverhampton. This is the first time that the city has conducted the elections in person with all secondary schools taking part and all 11 – 18 year-olds having the opportunity to cast their vote in person at the polling booth. Young people were voting for two youth MPs to represent them in Youth Parliament, and they

also voted in Make Your Mark, which gives young people a chance to have a say on the biggest issues facing young people.

- 7.2 Over 10,000 votes were cast for each ballot, with a turnout of 47%, which is a record high for these elections in Wolverhampton.
- 7.3 There has been a positive increase in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds registering to vote as attainers in the run up to the Youth Election, with 55 young people registering to vote in February, which is a significant increase outside of the annual canvass period. This means that they will be on the register of electors as an attainer and will be able to vote as soon as they turn 18.

8.0 Financial implications

- 8.1 There is a £192,000 budget currently set aside to cover the cost of local elections each year. The cost of running local elections to the Council in any year is dependent on whether they are standalone or combined with Parliamentary, Police and Crime Commissioner or Combined Authority Mayoral elections. Combined elections costs are effectively shared, part funded by Government or the Combined Authority. In these circumstances significant underspends against the local elections budget are expected and provide scope for contributions to the Elections Reserve. Standalone election costs are conversely expected to exceed the local elections budget. In these years the additional costs are to be funded from the Elections Reserve.
- 8.2 The cost of the East Park by-election is currently anticipated to be in the region of £20,000. The standalone local election in May 2022 is estimated to cost in the region of £260,000 at this stage. The combined cost is expected to exceed the local elections budget by almost £90,000 and will be funded from the Elections Reserve established specifically for this purpose.

[GE/14032022/Z]

9.0 Legal implications

- 9.1 All preparations outlined in this report are in line with the statutory provisions covering the delivery of local elections and by-elections.

[DP/160322/A]

10.0 Equalities implications

- 10.1 Planning for these elections complies with the Public-sector equality duty. Reasonable adjustments to vote are made available for electors with disabilities in the polling stations, and staff working election duties receive substantial training on this. A communications

campaign is underway to continue to advise electors on the options that they have available to them to vote – either in the polling station, by post or by proxy.

11.0 All other implications

11.1 There are no other implications arising from this report at the current time.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 Preparations for May 2022 Local Elections, Governance and Ethics Committee, 14 January 2022.

13.0 Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 – List of polling stations