

Attendance

Members of the Governance and Ethics Committee

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

Employees

David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Laura Gittos	Head of Governance
Tim Clark	Civic Support Manager
Laura Noonan	Electoral Services & Scrutiny Manager
Jas Kaur	Democratic Services & Systems Manager
Donna Cope	Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1** **Apologies for absence**
There were no apologies for absence.
- 2** **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3** **Minutes of the previous meeting**
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.
- 4** **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 **Municipal Calendar of Meetings 2023-2024**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Municipal Calendar of Meetings 2023-2024. The annual report outlined the proposed timetable for Council and committee meetings for the next Council Municipal Year (2023-2024).

Jaswinder Kaur, Democratic Services and Systems Manager, outlined the report, highlighting the key points. It was noted that there would be an additional Scrutiny Board in March 2024, and at the request of the Finance Team, the February 2024 Cabinet meeting was scheduled to take place in half term week.

The report was considered by Committee, and David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, responded to questions asked.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Approve the City of Wolverhampton Council Municipal Calendar of Meetings for 2023-2024.

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Approved consultation with the political groups on the City of Wolverhampton Council Municipal Calendar of Meetings for 2023-2024.
2. Delegated any amendments to the City of Wolverhampton Council Calendar of Meetings for 2023-2024 to the Chair of Governance and Ethics Committee in consultation with the Chief Operating Officer following consultation with political groups.

6 **Local Election Fees and Charges 2022-2023**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Local Election Fees and Charges 2022-2023. The report outlined the proposed schedule of election fees for May 2023 and highlighted the key changes. The fees and charges had to be set locally and were regularly reviewed across the West Midlands region to ensure consistency.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager, outlined the report and summarised key changes from the previous year. The fees had largely remained the same except for polling staff pay and training fees in order to reflect the additional responsibilities as a result of the Election Act.

The report was considered by Committee.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Approved the proposed schedule of fees for May 2023.

7 **Update on Preparations for Local Elections**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Update on Preparations for Local Elections. The report provided an update on the preparations underway for the local elections taking place on 4 May 2023.

The Chief Operating Officer welcomed further suggestions from members on the current arrangements and thanked the Elections Team for their hard work.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager, outlined the report, noting that since the agenda had been published the number of Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) applications had increased to 376 and Voter ID leaflets had been printed in the most widely spoken languages across the city.

The report was considered by Committee, and members commended the Elections Team on their hard work. The Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager responded to questions asked and it was noted that:

- The recommendation to publicise the most common forms of acceptable voter ID would be raised with the Communications Team and fed back to the Chair of Governance.
- Posters advertising the acceptable forms of voter ID and other key election information were currently displayed in libraries, leisure centres and other council venues.
- A list of acceptable voter ID was located inside each polling card.
- British Sign Language students from Wolverhampton University had been recruited to some polling stations across city, and details of these locations could be viewed on the council website.
- The Elections Team proposed to incorporate banners at the bottom of all council internal and external emails, detailing key information regarding voter ID and postal votes.
- Letters would be sent out to those who had not yet returned their annual postal vote signature refresh.
- Following consultation with the Leader, the Leader of the Opposition, and ward councillors, all polling stations were now in place.
- The training for count assistants was scheduled for early April, and as requested by committee, would be filmed, and shared with members.
- Food arrangements would be in place for staff during the election count, and the use of plastic water bottles would be considered.
- Additional measures, including extra staff and venues, had been put in place for processing postal votes to ensure a more efficient approach.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Noted and provided feedback on the preparations underway for the forthcoming elections.

8 **Councillor Enquiry Unit Update**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the Councillor Enquiries Unit (CEU) Update. It was noted that delays were still being experienced with individual service areas and these were being addressed.

Laura Gittos, Head of Governance, presented an overview of cases received by the CEU over the last municipal year and thanked members for utilising the system.

The update was debated by Committee, and although some members thought the CEU worked well, other members queried the data presented and felt it could be misleading.

The Head of Governance and Chief Operating Officer, replied to questions asked and it was noted that:

- The data obtained by the CEU was used to highlight areas of concern and seek to improve council performance in those areas.
- To avoid confusion, CEU cases that had not been resolved entirely at that time, could be marked as 'paused' instead of 'closed'.
- Digital developments of the CEU system were being looked into and a report on the matter would be taken to the Councillor Development Advisory Group.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Noted the Councillor Enquiries Unit update.

9 **Councillor Induction Programme and Handbooks (Councillor and Mayoral) 2023-2024**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Councillor Induction Programme and Handbooks (Councillor and Mayoral) 2023-2024.

The report outlined the proposed roll out of the new Councillor Induction Programme 2023-2024 for new and existing councillors to take place after the local elections held on 4 May 2023.

Laura Gittos, Head of Governance, outlined the report, highlighting key improvements, including additional Councillor sessions and the introduction of city tours. Copies of the new Councillor and Mayoral Handbooks were provided, and the Head of Governance welcomed feedback from members.

The report was considered by Committee, and members thanked officers for their hard work. The importance of Councillor training was acknowledged, and the Chair requested that during their induction, new Councillors be encouraged to access papers via their electronic device.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Approved the City of Wolverhampton Councillor Induction 2023-2024.
2. Approved the City of Wolverhampton Councillor Handbook 2023-2024.
3. Approved the City of Wolverhampton Mayoral Handbook 2023-2024.

10 **Schedule of Petitions**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Schedule of Petitions. The report provided an overview of petitions received by the Council over the last six months and outlined the actions taken.

Jaswinder Kaur, Democratic Services and Systems Manager, outlined the report, highlighting the key points. It was noted that petitions were dealt with in line with council's Petitions Scheme, and in cases where the number of signatures was not met, officers would contact residents offering guidance on the requirements.

The report was debated by Committee.

The Democratic Services and Systems Manager responded to questions asked and it was agreed that future reports on the schedule of petitions would include details of what had been done by the service area as a result of the petition.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Noted the actions taken in relation to all petitions received by the Council during the last year.

11 **Monitoring Officer Update**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, provided the following verbal update:

- A workshop to consider the Constitution would be arranged over the next two weeks for members of the Governance and Ethics Committee. This would allow for any changes to be implemented before the next Governance and Ethics Committee in July 2023. The workshop would be hybrid, allowing members to attend physically or online.
- The webcasting equipment in the Council Chamber would be updated at the end of May 2023, and the equipment in there currently would be moved into Committee Room 3, thus allowing the webcasting of meetings from both rooms.

The update was considered by committee, and the Chief Operating Officer responded to questions asked.

Resolved:

That Governance & Ethics Committee:

1. Noted the update from the Monitoring Officer.

12 **Presentation on Fairtrade Provision**

The presentation on Fairtrade Provision had been withdrawn from the agenda.

The Chair closed the final meeting of the Municipal Year by thanking Members and officers for their support throughout the previous twelve months. The Committee reciprocated it's thanks to the Chair.

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