

Governance and Ethics Committee

Minutes - 9 July 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 Rita Potter (Virtually)
Cllr Sandra Samuels OBE
Cllr Simon Bennett (Virtually)
Cllr Wendy Thompson

In Attendance

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

Employees

David Pattison	Director of Governance
Laura Noonan	Electoral Services Manager
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 Councillor John 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 24 June 2021 be approved as a correct record.
- 4 Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.
- 5 Evaluation of 2021 Elections**
David Pattison, Director of Governance, introduced the report on the evaluation of the 2021 elections.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services Manager, identified the key themes from the election, noting both the best practice and the areas for improvement, as detailed in section three of the report.

The Electoral Services Manager outlined the plan and timetable for the annual canvass, as detailed in section 15 of the report.

The Committee commended the council for all the hard work in delivering a successful election in the face of the challenges presented by COVID-19. The Committee also noted many of the areas for improvement.

The Director of Governance responded to questions asked by the Committee.

Councillor Jonathan Crofts asked for a breakdown of the costs of the election. The Director of Governance assured the Councillor that the election was within budget, and a full detailed breakdown would be brought to a future meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the evaluation on the 2021 elections be noted.
2. That the plan for the 2021 Annual Canvass be noted.

- 6 **Update from the Monitoring Officer on Governance Matters**
David Pattison, Director of Governance, 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 Director of Governance also flagged the issue of Councillor allowances, noting that the current scheme expires in May 2022, and thus needs to be reviewed.

The Committee agreed that the issue of Councillor allowances should be looked at, with members offering several reasons as to why it should be increased. The Director of Governance assured the Committee that the review would cover all the points raised.

Responding to questions, the Director of Governance assured the Committee that the council would assist the Independent Remuneration Panel with any information it needs, and any report would be brought before the Committee.

Councillor Paul Birch suggested the Committee rest the discussion and ask the relevant officers to come back to the Committee with recommendations on finding a way forward. Councillor Sandra Samuels OBE seconded this recommendation but added that any discussion should happen promptly.

Resolved:

1. That the feedback provided on this report be noted.
2. That the proposed work programme for the Municipal Year 2021/2022 at paragraph 2.2 of this report be agreed.

- 7 **Changes to the Constitution**

David Pattison, Director of Governance, delivered a report on changes to the constitution, that would help ensure continuing lawfulness and effectiveness. He outlined the proposed amendments and rationale for these amendments.

The Director of Governance responded to questions asked and confirmed that any report regarding due diligence would be brought before the Committee.

The recommendations within the report were carried.

Resolved:

That the Council be recommended to:

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

8 **Electoral Review: Local Government Boundary Commission for England Draft Recommendations**

David Pattison, Director of Governance, shared the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) draft recommendations and outlined the proposed approach for signing off the Council's response to these recommendations.

The Director of Governance confirmed that the paper suggested by Councillor Jonathan Crofts on all out elections at the last meeting would be brought before the Committee at the next meeting.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services Manager, and the Director of Governance responded to questions asked about the proposed variations to warding patterns, as outlined in paragraph 3.7 of the report.

The Electoral Services Manager clarified that the proposed variances for each ward all fall within the 10% margin of tolerance as set out in the LGBCE's report and explained that the method by which the LGBCE reached their variances is outlined in their report.

Councillor Paul Birch moved the recommendations within the report.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed approach to preparing the Council's response to the draft recommendations be approved.
2. That the draft recommendations received from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be noted.

9 **Code of Conduct Matters**

David Pattison, Director of Governance, outlined the proposal that the Committee adopt a social media protocol in line with the revised Code of Conduct. This proposed protocol was outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report. The Director of Governance explained that if the protocol was supported, it would be brought before the Committee for adoption at the next meeting.

The Director of Governance explained that a report would be brought to the next meeting detailing the proposals for appointment of a further Independent person, in line with best practice.

The Director of Governance detailed that a report would be brought to the next meeting with the annual report on the Code of Conduct complaints received.

It was anticipated that some hearings would be taking place shortly, so the Director of Governance sought to update the hearings procedure, detailed in Appendix 1.

Councillor Paul Birch moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor Wendy Thompson seconded the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That the comments on the Social Media Protocol be noted.
2. That the revisions to the hearing procedure attached at Appendix 1 to this report be agreed.

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Awarding the Freedom of the City

David Pattison, Director of Governance, presented the report on proposed changes to the procedure for awarding Freedom of the City. At present, there were no guidelines or protocols governing how the Council makes such awards.

Councillor Paul Birch moved the recommendation within the report. Councillor Celia Hibbert seconded the recommendation.

Resolved:

1. That the Council be recommended to approve the protocol for awarding Freedom of the City.