

Governance and Ethics Committee

Minutes - 23 November 2023

Attendance

Members of the Governance and Ethics Committee

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Lovinyer Daley
Cllr Paul Brookfield
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Jonathan Crofts

Employees

David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Laura Gittos	Head of Governance
Jas Kaur	Democratic Services & Systems Manager
Laura Noonan	Electoral Services & Scrutiny Manager
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 received from Councillor Rohit Mistry.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
In respect of Item 7, David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, noted that four members of the Committee were members of the Wolverhampton Homes' Board, but as no decisions were being made, there was no need for those members to declare an interest or leave the room when the item was considered.

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

4 **Matters arising**

Item 5 – David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, stated that he would check that the DBS letter had been sent out by the Cabinet Member.

5 **Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023-2025**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023-2025. The report outlined the proposed polling district and polling place scheme for 2024 and recommended that the Council approved the proposals.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services Manager, outlined the report and highlighted key points. She thanked members for their engagement during the consultation sessions and noted that all feedback had been implemented where possible.

Councillor Rita Potter moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor Milkinder Jaspal seconded the recommendations.

The report was debated by Committee and the Electoral Services Manager responded to questions asked.

A Member of the Committee noted that although other local authorities in the West Midlands used more schools as polling stations than Wolverhampton, there was no impact on education as the schools remained open. The Chief Operating Officer assured members that the Elections Team worked hard to avoid the closure of schools and agreed to request information from other local authorities on the matter.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Approve the polling district and polling place scheme contained in Appendix 1.
2. Approve the necessary amendments to polling districts for the publication of 2 January 2024 electoral register.
3. Approve the delegation of authority to the Returning Officer and Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities, Leader, and Leader of the Opposition to make minor alterations to the polling station scheme prior to the next compulsory statutory review.

That Governance and Ethics Committee noted:

1. The annual publication of the revised register had been delayed to 2 January 2024 due to a by-election taking place during the annual canvass period.
2. The submissions made to the Council as part of the polling district and station consultation and the Returning Officer response to these were contained in Appendix 2.

6 **Elections Fees and Charges 2023-2024**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, introduced the report: Elections Fees and Charges 2023-2024. The report outlined the proposed schedule of fees and charges for the elections taking place next year and outlined the rationale behind the proposals.

Laura Noonan, Electoral Services Manager, outlined the report and highlighted the key changes. It was noted that due to an increase in the national living wage and the shared parliamentary constituency with Walsall, some of the proposed fees may change. If so, an update report reflecting these changes would be brought back to committee in January.

Councillor Rita Potter moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor Milkinder Jaspal seconded the recommendations.

The report was considered by Committee and the Chief Operating Officer responded to questions asked.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed schedule of fees for May 2023 as shown in Appendix 1 be approved.

7 **Local Authority Companies - Linked Bodies**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, presented an update on Local Authority Companies - Linked Bodies. The Councils' current position in relation to Linked Bodies was outlined, and the Chief Monitoring Officer detailed how each of these bodies was monitored.

It was noted that the City of Wolverhampton Council was in a good position regarding Linked Bodies and that positive feedback had been received from external auditors in the audit for 2021/2022.

Councillor Milkinder Jaspal welcomed the update and thanked Finance and Legal Officers for their excellent monitoring work over the years.

Resolved:

1. That the update on Link Bodies be noted.

8 **Protocol for Full Council Public Questions**

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, outlined the report: Protocol for Full Council Public Questions, and highlighted key points. The report proposed minor revisions to the Protocol for Questions by Members of the Public and recommended that Committee approved the proposals. It was noted that public questions would be introduced at Full Council on 24 January 2024, and publicised on the Council's website before Christmas.

Councillor Rita Potter moved the recommendations within the report. Councillor Milkinder Jaspal seconded the recommendations.

The report was considered by Committee and the Chief Operating Officer responded to questions asked.

With regards to questions that had been submitted in time but not answered at the meeting, it was agreed that the written response would be provided within one week of the meeting and published on the Council's website for transparency.

It was further agreed that a satisfaction survey would be carried out to determine how participating members of the public rated the process. The findings would then be brought to Committee for review.

Resolved:

That Governance and Ethics Committee:

1. Noted the implementation of Questions by Members of the Public from January 2024.
2. Authorised the Chief Operating Officer to publicise the Protocol for Questions by Members of the Public on the Council's website.
3. Agreed that there was delegated authority to the Chief Operating Officer to make minor amendments to the Protocol for Questions by Members of the Public as required in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Chair of the Committee.