



COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 11 April 2024 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors E Davies (Chair), E Aston (Vice-Chair), S Handley, A D McClements, R Sahota, P J Scott and G Thomas

In Attendance: A Lowe (Director: Policy & Governance), R Phillips (Service Delivery Manager: Legal & Democracy), S Yarnall (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), Dean Sargeant (Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services), D Sidaway (Chief Executive) and P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny))

COMSC14 Declarations of Interest

None.

COMSC15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the previous meeting 11 October 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

COMSC16 Election Review Working Group Report

The Director: Policy & Governance presented the Elections Review Working Group report to the Committee. The report outlined the work conducted by the working group including the initial scene setting meeting on 11 October 2023 and the workshop on 9 November 2023, where expert witness Mark Heath, Solace, attended to provide expert evidence. The report had been circulated to the Committee in advance of the meeting and outlined the meetings and workshops that helped to inform the report and the recommendations and conclusions of the working group.

The Director: Policy & Governance highlighted that paragraph 2.5 of the report detailed the recent legislative changes with voter photo ID which required electorates to show a form of photographic ID to confirm their identity. The Committee were informed that there were 20 different forms of ID an electorate could show. Paragraphs 2.18 and 2.19 of the report illustrated that only 0.3% of electorates in Telford and Wrekin did not have the correct ID compared to the national average of 1.4% of electorates with the incorrect ID. However, Members were advised that the national average was stated to have some



discrepancies. It was highlighted within the report the work that the Council's Communications Team had done in terms of promoting the election and the use of photo ID, which had been repeated for the Police Crime Commission elections later in the year.

Section 5 of the report addressed the 11 recommendations made by Members which included 5 for action and 6 for noting by the Committee. The Director: Policy & Governance stated that following formal agreement by the Committee to accept the report and agree the recommendations that the next steps would be to present it to a meeting of Cabinet later in the year.

Following the presentation, Members posed a number of comments and questions.

The Chair and Members commented on the report and noted that they were pleased that their reviews and comments were reflected accurately within the report. Members highlighted that the Elections Team were working to continuously improve the process for all involved and that recommendations 5.1 to 5.5 had illustrated this.

The work regarding the comms around voter ID was noted to be positive especially within diverse wards and the data presented had shown a clear understanding of what was classed as accepted forms of voter ID.

For clarity, were the 0.3% of voters that did not present the correct form of voter ID, part of the full total including those that did not have the correct ID but returned later with the correct ID or the number of voters that did not vote because they did not have the correct ID?

The 0.3% was stated to be the reported percentage of electorates that did not vote because they had the incorrect ID.

Recommendation 5.2 refers to 'political groups'. Could this be updated to include non-party affiliated Members?

The Director: Policy & Governance explained that recommendation 5.1 highlighted the inclusion of non-party affiliated Members and highlighted that those elected Members which were independent had been recognised throughout the report.

Members voted on the recommendations outlined in the report which were unanimously agreed

RESOLVED – that: the recommendations within the Election Review report be approved as follows:-



1. Future prospective candidates (both those that are members of a political group and those that are independent) and their agents ensure that they attend the briefings provided prior to an election in order to better understand the process of an election count;
2. All political groups should take steps to ensure that any prospective candidates and agents attend the pre-election briefings offered by the Returning Officer and his team;
3. That, at the next election, the elections team pilot the staggering of staff breaks to assess what impact, if any, this has on the efficiency of proceedings;
4. Where possible, at future elections where several wards require counting, an indicative count plan is provided to candidates so that they have some expectation as to when results for their prospective ward may be announced. This needs to be shared along with advice that it is an indicative plan only and could be subject to change; and
5. The elections team review the training requirements for count staff who will be counting multi-member wards, including the implementation of the training video(s) that are being prepared by the Returning Officer's team.

Members also noted:-

6. That, whilst the role of the Returning Officer is independent of the Council, there is a requirement for the local authority to provide the Returning Officer with appropriate resources to enable him to discharge his legal responsibilities;
7. That the Returning Officer has adopted an approach to ensure continuous improvement and that this approach be maintained;
8. The significant work carried out by the Returning Officer and his team in organising and conducting an election;
9. That it is considered good practice to utilise local authority employees to staff elections;
10. That the 'lessons learned' exercise carried out by the Returning Officer after each election was good practice and that some small improvements had already been identified and incorporated into



future plans – these improvements were endorsed by Members;
and

11. The work of the Returning Officer and his team was thorough, robust and provided assurance that the election process was well run.

COMSC17 Fly Tipping Update

The Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services presented an update on fly tipping in the Borough. The Committee previously received a presentation at its meeting on 28 June 2023 on the Council's efforts on tackling fly tipping in the Borough. Since that meeting the work of the team was said to have been focused on data led intelligence for identifying instances of fly tipping across the Borough.

One of the methods for collecting the data was from the use of Telford and Wrekin Watch, a communications campaign that utilised the variety of communication methods such as social media for members of the public to inform the Council on instances of fly tipping. This along with evidence obtained from CCTV cameras were said to have supported the efforts of the Council's Enforcement Team to tackle fly tipping across the Borough.

Members were informed that further work was to be undertaken as previously addressed in formal meetings and workshops attended by members of the Committee. Further work was underway on the draft information leaflet and the draft action plan following comments received by Members. A further update would be presented to the Committee at a later date following further development of the action plan and the information leaflet.

Following the update, Members asked the following questions.

With Shropshire Council announcing the closure of some recycling centres, how would Telford & Wrekin Council cope with the increase of use at local recycling centres and the potential that it may have on further fly tipping in the Borough?

The proposals by Shropshire Council were still in consultation and the Council's Enforcement Team would use data led intelligence to tackle any further instances of fly tipping.

Why were some reported cases of fly tipping taking longer to address?

There were many factors that could impact the times of which an instance of fly tipping was dealt with.



Members commented on the work that they were doing with the Council's Enforcement Team and looked forward to seeing the final leaflet design.

COMSC18 Work Programme Review

The Service Delivery Manager: Legal & Democracy presented the updated work programme to the Committee. Over the last municipal year the Committee had covered a number of different areas such as equality and diversity and the elections review. It was highlighted that the work programme would operate as a two year work programme to allow for more in-depth work to be undertaken and items would follow onto the next municipal year, these included an update on fly tipping and domestic violence funding and support. The work programme was currently being reviewed and Members had been invited to provide suggestions to support with work programming.

COMSC19 Chair's Update

The Chair advised Members that following the meeting on 11 October 2023, Officers had presented the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy to the Governance Committee at its meeting on 10 April 2024 where it was noted that the recommendation made by the Communities Scrutiny Committee for EDI to form part of the essential training programme for Members would be adopted. Officers were looking for Members to trial the training and if Members were interested in being involved to contact the Officers to be involved.

The meeting ended at 6.26 pm

Chairman:

Date: Date Not Specified