



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 7 November 2024

Report of the Communities Scrutiny Committee – Elections Review

Working Group Report

Committee Chair:	Elise Davies – Chair, Communities Scrutiny Committee
Lead Director:	Anthea Lowe - Director: Policy & Governance
Service Area:	Policy & Governance
Report Author:	Sam Yarnall - Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	Cabinet – 7 November 2024

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:-

- 1.1 Notes the recommendations of Communities Scrutiny Committee and provides a response to the recommendations as outlined in the report at Appendix A.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 Following an in-depth review of the way in which elections are conducted across the Borough and consideration of best practice in the field of elections, the Communities Scrutiny Committee has developed some recommendations, which this report seeks to present to Cabinet for consideration.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 It is considered best practice to adopt a continuous improvement approach to the delivery of elections with Electoral Commission guidance highlighting the key benefits of holding a learning review following each election. The Returning Officer at Telford & Wrekin has, for some years, ensured that such learning reviews are undertaken. To take this learning further, following the 2023 local elections, the Returning Officer suggested that the Communities Scrutiny Committee should undertake a review so that information from a candidate perspective could be shared and incorporated into the elections work programme moving forward.
- 3.2 The Committee met on three occasions as part of the review, which consisted of one formal committee meeting and two workshops. Members heard from an expert witness, the Returning Officer and Senior Deputy Returning Officer, to better understand the legal and practical considerations of ensuring a fair and just election.
- 3.3 Members also examined recent legislative changes for conducting an election, following the implementation of the Elections Act 2022. This included the implementation of photographic voter ID, how it impacted voter turnout and also the changes to postal vote handling.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 Following the review of the elections process, Communities Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the hard work of the Returning Officer and his team. They also determined to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:
- 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;
 - 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;
 - 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;
 - 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

- 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.

4.2 Communities Scrutiny Committee also noted:

- 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;
- That the Returning Officer has adopted an approach to ensure continuous improvement and that this approach be maintained;
- The significant work carried out by the Returning Officer and his team in organising and conducting an election;
- That it is considered good practice to utilise local authority employees to staff elections;
- 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
- The work of the Returning Officer and his team was thorough, robust and provided assurance that the election process was well run.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 Whilst Cabinet are being asked to accept the recommendations from the Communities Scrutiny Committee, it could determine that some or all of the recommendations are not necessary. In accordance with guidance from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, where Cabinet decides not to adopt some or all of the recommendations, it should provide reasons for reaching this outcome.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 There are no key risks arising from this report.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

Communities Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

- 9.1 Under the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities operating under the Leader and Cabinet model of governance are required to establish at least one Oversight and Scrutiny Committee. At Telford & Wrekin Council, there are 5 such committees each with a specific focus of work, with Communities Scrutiny Committee being one. The Terms of Reference for the Communities Scrutiny Committee are attached at **Appendix B**.
- 9.2 The Scrutiny Committee has broad powers to consider matters that are relevant to the Council's business or to matters that have an effect of the residents of the Borough. Whilst the work of the Returning Officer is independent of the Council, it is recognised that the effective delivery of elections is something which impacts upon residents given its key role in democracy.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 There are no ward implications arising from this report.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 There are no health, social and economic implications arising from this report.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

14.0 Background Papers

- 1 Communities Scrutiny Committee Minutes – 11 October 2023
- 2 Communities Scrutiny Committee Minutes – 11 April 2024

15.0 Appendices

- A Elections Review Working Group Report
- B Elections Review Terms of Reference

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal Services	30/01/2024	30/10/2024	ACL