

# Elections Review Working Group Proposal

## **Elections Review**

### **Working Group**

### **Scrutiny Review Proposals**

#### **Background**

1. At its meeting on 11 October 2023, the Communities Scrutiny Committee received a briefing from the Director: Policy & Governance providing details on the work of the Elections team during the May 2023 elections. Following this, it was suggested that a working group review the process of conducting an election, especially in relation to the process of counting votes and the impact that Photo Voter ID had on the process to see if any improvement could be made.
2. Members were keen to examine the process of organising, conducting and reviewing an election and whether or not any improvements could be made to the election process.
3. The Committee deemed the matter to be particularly important in the Borough's efforts to undertake an effective and efficient election.
4. The scrutiny review aimed to identify areas of the election process, particularly in relation to the count process and the impact of the introduction of Photo Voter ID.
5. The working group would look to identify examples of innovation and good practice from outside the Borough in line with the aims of the review.
6. There are a number of factors that will need to be considered within the scrutiny review including, but not limited to:
  - The frequency of elections;
  - Regulatory framework;
  - Financial implications;
  - Resource implications; and
  - Timescales involved in implementing any new strategies.
7. A number of initial issues for the scrutiny review have been identified:
  - Potential budgetary differentials between the Borough and areas demonstrating best practice (Southampton) which impact upon the ability to implement some strategies
  - The potential for the review to be too wide ranging (for example. the impact of Photo Voter ID)
  - Difficulties in compiling comparable election count time data
  - Possible difficulties regarding timings of the working group due to elections, timetable, Parliamentary Boundary Review, Community Governance Review and Electoral registration work

## Elections Review Working Group Proposal

- Potential difficulties in compiling evidence from external organisations due to comparable circumstances i.e. Authorities where an election had taken place since the implementation of the Photo Voter ID legislation and similar authority make-up (executive model)
8. Possible external contacts have been identified, these include:
    - Southampton Council
    - Association of Electoral Administrators
  9. In terms of the Council Plan, this matter could be considered under the following priority:
    - [Being] a community-focussed, innovative Council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

### **Working Group Terms of Reference:**

1. The working group will comprise of seven Members, six of whom will be voluntarily drawn from Members across the authority excluding Cabinet Members and The Mayor. The remaining Member will be the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee as Chair of the Committee referring the matter.
2. The group is a sub-group of the Communities Scrutiny Committee.
3. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair will exercise a casting vote.
4. The group's work will consist of a review of the Borough's current process and procedures regarding conducting an election, the counting process and the implementing the Photo Voter ID legislation.
5. Officers and Cabinet Members relevant to the specific areas of scrutiny will be invited to attend and contribute to the meetings of the working group at the discretion of the Chair as and when required.
6. Democratic Services will administer meetings and provide administrative support for the group's work.
7. Meetings will be held regularly with a minimum of four meetings to be scheduled and held between October 2023 and January 2024.
8. The working group's meetings will, so far as is possible, be held via Microsoft Teams or face to face.

## Elections Review Working Group Proposal

9. The group may call additional meetings, in addition to the four core suggested meetings, as required to follow up matters identified in their scheduled meetings.
10. Meetings will follow the principles of scrutiny i.e. no party whip will be applied and a constructive, evidence-based, approach will be used.
11. Information obtained as a result of membership of the group is sensitive and should be treated as being confidential by members.
12. The working group will produce a report to Committee presenting its findings and recommendations.
13. The Chair of the working group will attend Cabinet if necessary to feedback views of the working group.

### Proposed Timetable

Meeting Date:	Reason:
11 October 2023	Committee Meeting – Scene Setting
2 November 2023	Initial meeting of the working group
9 November 2023	External evidence
23 November 2023	Evidence gathering/Vote counting workshop
7 December 2023	Additional evidence gathering/deliberations