

Electoral Matters Committee

Tuesday, 11th July, 2023

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Peter Fleming (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Luke Court and Monica Stringfellow

Also Present:

Councillor James Fardoe

Officers:

Melissa Bassett, Sue Hanley and Darren Whitney

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 9th August 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. REVIEW OF LOCAL POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES DUE TO WARD BOUNDARY CHANGES 2023

The Electoral Services Manager presented a report on the subject of the Council's review of local polling districts and polling places. Members were advised that this review was required following the changes that had been agreed to ward boundaries in the Borough.

Chair

Electoral Matters Committee

Tuesday, 11th July, 2023

As part of the review process, Officers were proposing that a working group, comprising a number of Members and Officers, should be established. This working group would review local polling districts and the appropriate locations of polling places. It was estimated that there would need to be three meetings of this working group in order to complete this work. Officers were proposing that the outcomes of the working group's review should be reported at a meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee and it was suggested that this meeting should take place on Tuesday 26th September 2023.

Members were asked to note that the working group would not have any decision-making powers. Instead, the working group would investigate the appropriate location of polling stations in the various wards and report back to the main Electoral Matters Committee, which would make a final decision based on any recommendations from the group. By convening an informal working group, meetings could be held in a more flexible manner, including through holding virtual meetings. Should a working group not be established, the Electoral Matters Committee would need to hold significantly more meetings during the year and this would have resource implications for the Council.

At the first meeting of the working group Members would need to establish the parameters for the review. The working group could also consult with a range of specialist officers on a number of important factors, including health and safety considerations. Issues such as the accessibility of buildings as well as the size of venues needed to be taken into account when considering potential locations for polling stations. There was the possibility that larger venues could accommodate more than one polling station and there would need to be space available that could be used as a private area in which residents' ID could be checked prior to voting.

The availability of venues to be used as polling stations would need to be considered. There was the potential that venues would need to be used for unscheduled elections, including by-elections and the general election which was due to occur at some point in the following 18 month period. Members were asked to note that the Government was keen for Councils to make use of schools as polling places.

Should Members agree to establish the working group, the group would focus on the polling places in three different wards at each meeting. The ward Councillors for the relevant polling districts

would be invited to attend those meetings alongside the members of the working group.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The value of establishing a working group to review local polling districts and polling places, particularly in respect of the flexibility that this provided to elected Members to attend meetings of the group.
- The issues in relation to the location of polling stations in Winyates, which had been identified at the previous meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee, and the need for these to be addressed by the working group.
- The impact that the use of schools as polling stations could have in terms of disrupting students' education.
- The potential for many schools to continue to remain open on an election day, even when the premises were being used as a polling station, where the space could be separated from the classrooms.
- The data that officers could share with the working group in respect of current polling stations. Officers explained that this data had been gathered in completed questionnaires.
- The potential for representatives of political parties that were not currently represented on the Council to be engaged in the review. Members noted that the review process was supposed to be apolitical and there would be opportunities for interested parties to comment as part of the public consultation process on the statutory review.
- The Council departments that would be consulted as part of the review process. The Committee was informed that it was likely the working group would wish to consult with Planning, Health and Safety, Equalities and Housing Officers as part of the process.
- The other stakeholder groups that could be consulted during the review. Officers explained that this was likely to include County Councillors, the local MP and Disability Engagement groups.

At the end of the discussions in respect of this item, Members agreed that the members of the Electoral Matters Committee should be appointed as members of the working group. In addition, as he had expressed an interest in taking part in the review, it was further proposed that Councillor James Fardoe should be invited to take part as a member of the group.

In considering the membership of the working group, Members concurred that there needed to be a reasonable number of Councillors present at each meeting, including representatives of both political groups at the Council. It was with this in mind that Members agreed that there should be a quorum of three Members for meetings of the working group, to include at least one representative of each political group at the Council.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the timetable for the review be agreed;**
 - 2) **a working group be set up to review and report back findings to this Committee at a meeting scheduled to take place on Tuesday 26th September 2023;**
 - 3) **Councillors Matthew Dormer (Chair), Juliet Barker Smith, Luke Court, James Fardoe, Peter Fleming and Monica Stringfellow be appointed to serve on the working group; and**
 - 4) **the working group should have a quorum of three members, with a member from each political group to be in attendance at each meeting.**
5. **STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023**

The Electoral Services Manager presented a report on the subject of the statutory review of polling districts and polling places for 2023.

The Committee was informed that the local and the statutory reviews could not be completed in tandem as the statutory review was not due to commence until 1st October 2023. Consequently, the findings in the local review would help to inform the statutory review process.

Once the statutory review had started in October, public consultation would commence. As part of this consultation process, representatives of political parties and other interested stakeholders would have an opportunity to contribute to the review. Officers would aim to complete the statutory review in time to report to a meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee, to be held in November or December 2023. The outcomes of the statutory review would subsequently be reported to Council for determination

Electoral Matters Committee

Tuesday, 11th July, 2023

in January 2024. Officers would then publish the register of electors in time for the local elections in May 2024.

During consideration of this item, Members questioned whether there were any legal limits in respect of the maximum number of electors who could be registered to vote at particular polling stations. Officers clarified that there was a maximum number of 2,250 electors per polling station. The limit on numbers applied to polling stations, rather than to polling places; there could be multiple polling stations in the same polling place, or venue. Residents were able to identify their polling station in these circumstances by viewing the list of streets on display for the different polling stations at that venue.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the timetable for the review be agreed; and**
- 2) the review formally commences on 2nd October 2023.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 7.31 pm