

## MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

17 January 2024 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor C. Davidson (Chair)

Councillors H. Clark, D. Eley, J. Potter, S. Rajesh and M. Steel

Also in attendance –

Parish Councillors K. Bentley and P. Jackson

Independent Persons –

Mr P Jeremiah

Mr D Lamb

Mrs P Mills

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Sosin and Mrs C Gosling.

### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

### 4. Public Question Time

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

### 5. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements made.

### 6. Monitoring Officer Report

The Committee received an update on standards complaints since the May 2023 elections. It was noted that two complaints had been received and all previous outstanding complaints had been actioned.

Members also heard the current position in relation to parish-tier register of interest forms. It was advised that all outstanding forms had been received and that the Monitoring Officer is now working with members to ensure that they have been completed accurately and to the best of their knowledge.

Two training sessions for parish-tier councillors were also facilitated in December 2023 with the second session being recorded for those who were not able to attend.

In response to questions and statements from members, it was advised that;

- A trial of online submissions for register of interests, as implemented at City Council level, will be undertaken with some parish-tier councils shortly. Any council that wishes to participate in this must have adopted the model code of conduct in its entirety.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee;

- Noted the current statistical information as to complaints made and agreed for the report to be published on the Council's website.
- Noted the position in relation to parish tier register of interests.

(19:09pm to 19:15pm)

## 7. Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024

The Committee received a report containing recommendations from the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) following the polling district and polling places review. The aim of this review is to ensure that voting is accessible and inclusive for all residents in Chelmsford.

Members were informed that the last compulsory review was undertaken in 2019 and an interim review was undertaken following the Community Governance Review in 2022.

The Committee heard that the recommendations, which were developed alongside the Constitutional Working Group, focused on the 10 of the 90 polling districts where concerns or alternative options were raised. Of these polling districts it was determined that only one change should be implemented at this stage, the relocation of the West Hanningfield Village polling station to St Peters Primary School, following the closure of the village hall.

The initial recommendation of merging the two polling districts in West Hanningfield to assign voters to one polling place was withdrawn, to be considered in more detail at the next review, once local residents have been directly consulted.

The report outlined the schools that are currently used for polling, and whether they were able to remain open to students at the recent elections. The committee were reassured that schools are used as a last resort for elections and that all options are thoroughly reviewed before the decision to require an educational venue is taken.

The ARO is continuing discussions with Chelmer Housing Partnership to consider any venues under their ownership that may be suitable for future polls.

Members of the committee agreed that the use of school sites in these cases is necessary and supported officers in continuing to work with them to deliver elections and minimal disruption to pupils.

In response to questions and statements from members, it was advised that;

- Due to the way polling district boundaries are drawn, polling stations do not have different ballot papers being issued to electors within them, minimising elector confusion. This is with the exception of Chignal and Mashbury Village Hall, as Mashbury has an electorate of less than 100 and no alternative venues.

**RESOLVED** that the proposals were approved and implemented for future elections, effective from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024.

(19:15pm to 19:27pm)

## 8. Proposed Amendments to the Constitution

Members heard a proposal for Treasury Management and Investment Sub-Committee to increase its membership from five councillors to seven.

The Committee was also advised of the two minor changes to constitutional documents. This included the application of the Information Security Code of Conduct to contractors and councillors and a change of wording in the Employee Code of Conduct.

In response to questions and statements from the Committee, it was advised that;

- Officers are continuing to review the Information Security Code of Conduct, including discussions with the Governance Committee Chair in relation to how this will operate for members and further amendments are expected to be made. The final code will be sent to councillors once this has been concluded.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to any comments that Cabinet might have, the Council be recommended to approve the following changes to the Constitution:

- For the current terms of reference for Treasury Management and Investment Sub-Committee to increase its membership from five councillors to seven councillors
- The Employee Code of Conduct and Information Security Code of Conduct amendments outlined in the report be noted.

(19:27pm to 19:39pm)

### 9. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on the work programme for 2023-24.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme of the Committee be noted.

(19:39pm to 19:42pm)

### 10. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 19:42pm

Chair