

Minutes of an additional meeting of the **Democracy and Standards Committee**
Held at 7.00 pmon Monday 7th October, 2024 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube,
Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

Present: -

Members

Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair)

Councillor Jean Addison

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury

Councillor Robin Carter

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz

Councillor Matt Keane

Councillor Ian Jelley (Vice Chair)

Councillor Graham Lawman

Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Dorothy Maxwell

Councillor Kevin Watt

Officers

Kamila Coulson-Patel AD of Legal and Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Heather Jackson Head of Electoral Services

Louise Tyers Senior Democratic Services Officer

103 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bill McElhinney. Councillor Lyn Buckingham was attending as a substitute for the Labour Group vacancy.

104 Members' declarations of interest (if any)

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury – Member of Twywell Parish Council

Councillor Matt Keane – Member of Corby Town Council

Councillor Graham Lawman – Member of Wellingborough Town Council

Councillor Andy Mercer – Member of Rushden Town Council

105 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2024 were received.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2024 be approved and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

106 Community Governance Reviews

The Head of Electoral Services presented the report which sought to seek approval on the principle of undertaking Community Governance Reviews of local Town and Parish Council electoral arrangements from September 2025.

Following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) review of electoral arrangements for North Northamptonshire Council, the final recommendations had been taken forward into the North Northamptonshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2024. Article 4 and Schedule 2 of that Order set out the changes that were relevant to local town and parish electoral arrangements. These included abolishing some of the existing parish wards and replacing them with new parish wards, as well as making changes to the number of councillors representing those wards.

The report set out an outline timetable that would enable Community Governance Reviews to be undertaken and completed within the recommended 12 month period and prior to the May 2029 local government elections. As part of the process, it was essential to ensure adequate time was allocated to consultation to promote meaningful engagement in the review and for the submission of representations from local communities.

The proposed timetable facilitated two 10 week periods of consultation to enable Members and local communities sufficient opportunity to consider proposals and prepare representations and other feedback and to consider recommendations prior to creation of the final Reorganisation Orders. The timings would also provide an opportunity to prepare and implement interim governance arrangements during the period making the Community Governance Reorganisation Order and the scheduled May 2029 elections.

It was raised that the current Corby Town Council wards mirrored those of North Northamptonshire Council and this could lead to confusion for the public about whether they were voting in the right district. In response to a question as to whether existing town and parish councillors terms of office could be extended, the Head of Electoral Services advised that the issue of polling districts would be picked up during the Polling District and Place Review and would be brought into alignment as part of that review. Extending terms of office could be looked at but as town and parish councils were charged for holding elections this would lead to greater costs for them if they were held separate to unitary elections.

In response to a question as to whether the LGBCE could reject any proposed Order, the Assistant Director of Legal and Governance advised that she had not seen any examples of other Orders being rejected, but if they were to do so it would likely be due to a deficient process.

It was raised that consultation would be a key part of this process and it was suggested that the Communications Team be used to ensure key communications were released effectively. The Head of Electoral Services confirmed that a communications plan would be developed.

It was proposed by Councillor Wendy Brackenbury and seconded by Councillor Graham Lawman that the recommendations in the report be put to the vote. The Chair put the motion to the vote and it was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To approve the principle of undertaking Community Governance Reviews in respect of the electoral arrangements for Town and Parish Councils.

- (ii) To approve the outline timetable for the review as set out in paragraph 5.5 of the report.

107 Appointment of co-opted Town and Parish representatives to the Democracy and Standards Committee

The Assistant Director of Legal and Governance presented the report which provided an update on the progress for the nomination and selection of the appointment of co-opted town and parish council representatives to the Democracy and Standards Committee.

On 4 June 2024, the Democracy and Standards Committee agreed a process for nominations relating to the appointment of co-opted Town and Parish council representatives to the Committee.

On 23 August 2024, nominations were sought for three town and parish council representatives for the purpose of assisting with the Authority's obligations to deal with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. This was offered on the basis that the term of office for the initial appointment would end in May 2025 to coincide with the elections to North Northamptonshire Council and town and parish councils. If a town and parish councillor was re-elected they could be invited to have their appointments extended to May 2029.

A total of eight nominations had been received and an election was opened from 20 September 2024 to 6 October 2024. As of 4 October 2024, 12 town and parish councils had voted and this had increased to 17 votes by the deadline. Due to the very low levels of engagement, the Monitoring Officer had now made a recommendation that this item be deferred to allow for further engagement with town and parish councils.

It was now proposed that the vote would be extended until 3 November and the outcome would be reported to this Committee on 18 November with a recommendation made to Full Council in early December.

The Chair advised that he supported the proposed deferment as the vote clearly lacked a democratic mandate, especially as one of the candidates had been missed off the original list.

Due to the town and parish council elections being held in May 2025, it was suggested that this may be what had put councils off voting and perhaps it should be deferred until 2025/26. In response, the Assistant Director of Legal and Governance confirmed that the posts did need to be filled but it was acknowledged that there was a risk that the successful candidates may not be re-elected

It was moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Wendy Brackenbury that this item be deferred until the Committee's next meeting in November 2024. The Chair put the motion to the vote and it was declared carried.

RESOLVED:

To defer consideration of this item until the next meeting in November 2024.

108 Close of meeting

There being no future business the Chair closed the meeting at 8.00pm,

Chair

Date