

Minutes of a meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee held at 7pm on Monday 25th November, 2024 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, Corby, Northants.

Present: -

Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair)
Councillor Jean Addison
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Matt Keane
Councillor Graham Lawman
Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Bill McElhinney
Councillor Simon Rielly
Councillor Kevin Watt

Officers:

Kamila Coulson-Patel, Assistant Director Legal & Governance (Dep. Monitoring Officer),
Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services,
Heather Jackson, Head of Electoral Services
Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer (Committees/Members)
Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Assistant

109 Apologies for absence

Resolved that apologies for absence be noted from Councillors Carter, Fedorowycz and Jelley.

110 Members Declarations of interest (if any)

Resolved to note that no declarations were made.

111 Notification of any requests to address the meeting

Resolved to note that no requests to address the meeting had been received.

112 Approval of the minutes of the additional meeting held on 7 October 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2024 were received.

Councillor W Brackenbury proposed that the minutes be approved and this was seconded by Councillor Marks and on being put to the vote declared carried.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2024 be approved and signed as an accurate record of the meeting.

113 Polling District & Polling Place Review 2024 - Final Recommendations

The circulated report of the Director of Law and Governance was received to update members on the consultation responses received in relation to the polling district and polling place review with a view to making a Polling Place Order.

Details of the proposed Polling Districts and Polling Places 2024 was appended to the report.

The report detailed the consultation, which had closed on 25 October, and from which the final proposals had been formulated. Heather Jackson, Head of Electoral Services presented the report to committee and explained the work that had been undertaken to make sure the polling districts and places were as convenient and suitable for the electorate as possible. She highlighted specific wards within the report which were further detailed.

Members discussed their various concerns and made suggestions, some of which had previously been explored. It was also noted that where possible Schools would not be used to avoid disruption to education provision. It was advised that if members had individual concerns that they contact the election office as soon as possible with these directly so that officers could carry out further investigations.

The chair proposed that any suggested amendments by ward councillors forwarded to the Head of Electoral Services

The chair proposed that any suggested amendments to the final recommendations be forward to the Head of Electoral Services to be considered by the Chair of Democracy & Standards Committee in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance. This was seconded by Councillor Marks.

This along with the recommendations within the report was put to the vote and declared carried. There were two abstentions.

Resolved that:

- (i) The consultation responses be noted;
- (ii) Approval be given to the recommendations for polling districts and polling places, as detailed in the Polling Districts and Polling Places 2024 – Final recommendations report;
- (iii) Approval be given to the ongoing monitoring of polling districts and polling places to enable updates to be made to the arrangements where necessary to reflect community identity, accessibility and convenience for voters;
- (iv) Approval be given to the Director of Law and Governance to make a Polling Places Order, reflecting the arrangements set out in the appendix to the report, by 31 January 2025;
- (v) Approval be given to the Head of Electoral Services in consultation with the Chair of Democracy and Standards Committee and the Director of Law & Governance to make any necessary changes to the final recommendations prior to the publication of the Polling Places Order.
- (vi) Approval be given to the Director of Law and Governance to make changes to the above-mentioned Polling Places Order, if a change is needed to a polling district or place at short notice and there is insufficient time for the change to be considered by the Democracy and Standards Committee;
- (vii) the Register of Electors detailing the new electoral arrangements, will be published on 1 February 2025, and not as previously timetabled for 1

December 2024, thus enabling the revised register to incorporate details of the new polling districts before the May 2025 elections.

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

The circulated report of the Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services (Interim) and Deputy Monitoring Officer was received.

Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services, informed the committee of the progress made in relation to the nominations and selection of the co-opted town and parish council representatives to join the democracy and standards committee.

The process had closed on 3 November 2024 with 24 town and parish councils voting for a total of eight candidates. Biographies for each candidate had been provided and circulated. The three successful candidates were Beth Ring of Weekley Parish Council, who received the highest number of votes, Paul Davis of Oundle Town Council, who received the second highest number of votes. Three councillors each received seven votes and having consulted with the chair of the committee, the three councillors were invited to draw lots for the third position. The result was that Keith Gautrey-Prue of Deane and Deanethorpe Parish Council was the third councillor.

It was proposed by the chair that the candidates be appointed to the democracy and standards committee, this was seconded by Councillor Marks and on being put to the vote the motion was declared carried.

Resolved that the democracy and standards committee:

- (i) Notes the process undertaken for the nominations and selections of co-opted town and parish representatives to the committee and candidates proposed for appointment;
- (ii) Recommends to full-council the appointment of three candidates namely Beth Ring, Weekly Parish Council, Paul Davis, Oundle Town Council and Keith Gautrey-Prue, Deane and Deanethorpe Parish Council for a term of office until May 2025 with the provision to extend to May 2029, provided eligibility criteria is met.

115 Consultation on Remote Meetings and Proxy Voting

The circulated report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services (Interim) and Deputy Monitoring Officer was received to inform the committee of the government consultation on the subject of remote meetings and proxy voting.

Kamila Coulson-Patel presented the report and explained that this was a government consultation that the council had been asked to respond to. If the legislation was made, individual councils would be able to make their own local arrangements regarding the type and number of meetings that could be held remotely. The committee was invited to formulate a consensus to enable a response to be formulated on this subject.

Members discussed the option with most of the committee feeling the option would be of benefit, they considered that remote meetings had worked well during Covid with

debate and decisions being able to be made. Many commented that travel time and distance for many councillors particularly in inclement weather and during the winter months was of concern. The cost of travel and effect on the climate were also something that needed to be considered.

Committee also commented that the local arrangements would need to make it clear which meetings would be held remotely, for example it was suggested that shared services meetings, where councillors and senior officers were present, but was a relatively short meeting, would benefit for being held remotely. Whilst a council meeting should be held in person. Some concern over broadband connections was also raised as some members experienced connection problems.

Depending on the results of the consultation, it was suggested that in the future a working group be considered to decide which meetings would be best served remotely.

In relation to proxy voting, there was concern as this was more difficult to monitor and evidence. More information would be needed in this regard on the actual process for making sure this was effective.

In summary the chair considered that the views of the committee were in favour of some meetings being held remotely, subject to local arrangements being in place, and that more information on the practicalities of the process for proxy voting would be required before a decision could be made.

Resolved that the committee:

- (i) notes the government consultation about remote meetings and proxy voting;
- (ii) gives delegated authority to the monitoring officer, in consultation with the chair of democracy and standards committee, to submit a response on behalf of the authority based on the consensus view.

116 Close of meeting

There being no further business the chair closed the meeting at 7.55pm.

Chair

Date