

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

**21ST SEPTEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (Chairman), J. Robinson (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, H. J. Jones and R. Lambert

Officers: Mr D. Whitney, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms M. Bassett

8/23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**

None.

9/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

10/23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON 2ND FEBRUARY 2021, 8TH JULY 2021 AND 24TH JULY 2023**

The minutes of the meetings of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meetings of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

11/23 **STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023**

The Committee considered the report which set out the proposed communications plan for the statutory review of polling districts and polling places.

In presenting the report, the Electoral Services manager highlighted that there would be a spreadsheet on the consultation webpage which members of the public could review. Background information would also be provided. Details would be published on the website in advance of the consultation period. He invited members to suggest any special interest groups who might be approached.

Given the proposed publication of details prior to the consultation period, Members asked how the webpage would be managed to be clear when comments could be submitted. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that details on the webpage would state when the consultation

period began, and there would not be any links to enable comments to be made until then.

A Member asked whether polling districts should be included in the list of issues on which people could comment. The Electoral Services Manager responded that this could be added and was routinely included in stakeholder communications. There would be an interactive map on the webpage which should help those who wished to respond.

A member referred to religious buildings and whether their use caused concern among people of other faiths. The Electoral Services Manager responded that officers asked faith leaders in the local community if they had any concerns about their use. No concerns had been expressed by them about religious institutions or social clubs.

A member queried the use of schools as polling stations due to the potential impact on education. The Electoral Services Manager responded that the law required rooms in schools to be made available if required, but the Elections Team tried to use alternative premises where possible. He gave details of one school where its use was contested, but there were no alternatives and the Team worked with the Head to prepare for elections well in advance.

The use of portacabins as an alternative to schools was discussed and it was noted that these were not ideal, for example, they were not always accessible. Voters had also complained about their use.

A member queried whether feedback was obtained from those working on the elections to inform future arrangements. The Senior Electoral Services Officer reported that Polling Station Inspection staff had been asked for feedback via a checklist at the last election in anticipation of this review. Presiding Officers had also been asked for information about the polling stations, including access for electors and location, and whether they could suggest an alternative. Equalities and Health and Safety Officers visited as many polling stations as they could and completed a separate checklist on these elements. The feedback would be incorporated in the future report to the Committee.

Members queried the timing of the review since the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) would be carrying out a review of the ward boundaries during the next year. It was noted that although the current review of polling districts and polling places was statutory, it would generally be light touch since the arrangements should be in place ready for a General Election. The current LGBCE review of county council electoral divisions was due to be completed next July. This would be followed by consultation on potential new district ward boundaries. The polling districts and places would then need to be reviewed again in detail.

In terms of specific polling stations, the following issues were raised:

- St Godwald church hall was used for the whole of Aston Fields and Slideslow. It was noted that this had been used as an alternative to the local school. There was a lack of parking and was not in the ward. However, it was noted that it was likely that the school would be used for a General Election.
- Trip hazard at AVB at Stoke Prior village hall.
- The potential for issues arising from planning applications which could impact on polling stations and how these were picked up.
- Currently there were 35 polling stations in the District which were not in the relevant polling district and a member queried how this could be addressed. It was acknowledged that it was best practice to have all polling stations in the polling district, but some polling districts were very small with around 10 electors and it was impractical to do this. A framework would be put together to set out the criteria the Committee would consider to reach a decision when it reviewed feedback about the review. However, given the two forthcoming electoral boundary reviews it would be likely that issues would be examined in more detail when details of the wards and divisions were known.

In terms of communication with councillors, officers confirmed that all members would be invited to let the Committee know of any specific concerns in their ward areas.

**RESOLVED** that the communications plan for the review in appendix 1 be agreed.

The meeting closed at 6.34 p.m.

Chairman