

Governance Committee
27 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillors: Belinda Walters (Chair), Tony Bevis, Paul Clarke and David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: Roger Noel and Mike Croker

Absent: Councillors: James Brookes, Jon Campbell and Jay Mercer

GO/13 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings held on 27 September 2023 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

GO/14 **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Bevis declared a personal interest on the basis that he was the Vice-Chairman of Planning Committee (North), which was a position that would disappear if some of the proposals outlined in the Planning Committee Review report were adopted. As the report was only for noting he considered that he could participate in the debate. The Chair confirmed that he could do so.

GO/15 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

GO/16 **PLANNING COMMITTEE REVIEW**

The Monitoring Officer and the Head of Development and Building Control gave a presentation on the Planning Committee Review.

The presentation covered the background to the review; some observations on the current Planning Committee structure; possible options for changing the structure; a comparison with the other district and borough councils in West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey; the scope of the review; and an indicative timetable, leading to recommendations being made to Full Council for adoption in July 2024.

Following the presentation, Members made comments and asked questions. Among the points raised were:

- Concern was expressed that experience would be lost if planning training was concentrated in a fewer number of Members who subsequently lost their seats at an election. The Head of Development and Building Control confirmed that the review would consider training. She expressed the

view that all Members should have an understanding of planning whether they sat on a Planning Committee or not.

- Why it mattered if Horsham District Council had a different arrangement to other councils. The Head of Development and Building Control commented that the Council should always be reviewing what it did. She explained that the review was not being approached with a set outcome and all matters were open to consideration. She highlighted that a common problem with the existing arrangement was the preparedness of some Members for Planning Committee meetings.
- Concern was expressed in relation to how the views of local residents would continue to be represented on a Planning Committee comprised of a fewer number of Members. The Head of Development and Building Control advised that there were ways in which a ward Member could actively participate in the planning process without sitting on a Planning Committee.
- The Chair commented that she did not feel prejudiced by having opted out of sitting on a Planning Committee.
- In relation to the scope of the review, a request was made that participation by parish councils, neighbourhood councils and the neighbourhood forum be considered separately, as Members could decide to treat them differently.
- Whether substitute members for Planning Committees could be explored, to address the risk of losing local knowledge in the event that a member of a smaller Planning Committee was unable to attend a meeting.
- A request was made for a statistical comparison between the Council's Planning Committees and those of the other councils referred to in the presentation showing how many applications went to each committee, how many decisions were taken in line with the officer recommendation and how many were turned down.
- Concern was expressed about the timing of the review given the large number of new Members and a suggestion was made that it be postponed for a year. The Head of Development and Building Control advised that the timetable had been extended to allow further opportunities for consultation, including an all Member workshop in January. Further engagement could take place if required.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

REASON

To raise awareness of the Planning Committee review.

GO/17 **POLLING PLACES AND POLLING DISTRICTS REVIEW**

The Democratic Services and Elections Manager introduced the report. She explained that the Council was required to undertake a review of its polling

districts and polling places every five years. The last such review concluded at the end of 2019.

The review proposed that the polling districts in the Cowfold, Shermanbury and West Grinstead ward be renamed, as that ward would form part of the Horsham constituency as a result of the Parliamentary boundary review. There were proposed changes to four polling places, as outlined in the report.

The Democratic Services and Elections Manager highlighted comments that had been received during the consultation, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report, in relation to the Forest ward, polling district HKXC and the Nuthurst parish, and the responses to them.

The continued use of the Rising Sun as a polling station and the relocation of one of the polling stations for Roffey South to the Millennium Hall were welcomed.

A query was raised in relation to the polling places designated within the Forest ward. The Democratic Services and Elections Manager advised that options had been explored with one of the ward Members, including the Stroke Club and the Salvation Army. The alternative venues suggested were not suitable, due to access or availability. It was confirmed that it was permissible for polling places to be designated outside of a polling district where it was not possible to designate them within it. The Committee were advised that the Returning Officer had been delegated authority to make changes to polling places between review periods so it was possible for changes to be made, should suitable alternative venues be identified.

A question was asked in relation to the deadline for making changes to polling places. The Democratic Services and Elections Manager advised that changes would need to be finalised in January for the elections taking place on 2 May 2024, due to poll card data having to be finalised.

RESOLVED

That it be recommended that Council approves the revised schedule of polling districts and polling places, as set out in Appendix 1, for all elections.

REASON

- i) To ensure that polling districts, polling places and polling stations are relevant and fit for purpose.
- ii) To ensure statutory compliance.

GO/18 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 6.07 pm having commenced at 5.32 pm

CHAIR