

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Governance Committee

Tuesday, 17 November 2020 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

R D Burrett (Chair)

T Lunnon (Vice-Chair)

D Crow, C R Eade, M G Jones, P K Lamb, R A Lanzer, S Malik, K McCarthy and
C J Mullins

Officers Present:

Natalie Brahma-Pearl Chief Executive

Mez Matthews Democratic Services Officer

Andrew Oakley Electoral Services Manager

Chris Pedlow Democratic Services Manager

1. Disclosures of Interest

No disclosures of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 6 July 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No written questions had been submitted by members of the public.

4. Polling Arrangements May 2021

The Committee considered report [CEX/52](#) of the Chief Executive which proposed a new polling district LAC in Bewbush and North Broadfield Ward to cater for the boundary of the Bewbush and Ifield West Division with the Gossops Green and Southgate Division of West Sussex County Council. The reason for this proposal was to take account of a minor discrepancy between the Borough Ward boundary and County Division boundary at Burbeach Close, Bewbush.

The Committee considered the report and, in response to a query raised by a Committee member, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that no additional staff would be required at the polling station to accommodate the new polling district.

Councillor Malik had to leave the meeting at this point due to technical difficulties with his online connection, and so was not present for the vote on the item.

A recorded vote was then taken on the recommendation (as set out in the report) in accordance with the Council's Virtual Committee Procedure Rules. The names of the Councillors voting for and against the recommendation, along with any abstentions, were recorded as follows:

For the recommendation:

Councillors Burrett, Crow, Eade, Jones, Lamb, Lanzer, Lunnon, McCarthy and Mullins (9).

Against the recommendation:

None (0).

Abstentions:

None (0).

RESOLVED

That the Full Council be recommended to amend the Polling Scheme to create polling district LAC as shown in the table at [Appendix A](#) to report [CEX/52](#).

5. May 2021 Elections

The Electoral Services Manager provided the Committee with a verbal update on the May 2021 elections:

General:

- The Borough election (which had been postponed in 2020), the West Sussex County Council election and the Police & Crime Commissioner election would be held in May 2021.
- The Returning Officer for the Police & Crime Commissioner election (in Brighton) would want to maintain some stabilised arrangements across Sussex.
- The Electoral Commission had provided guidance in relation to COVID-19 and was expected to provide further guidance in the lead up to the elections.
- The Government had advised that the May 2021 elections would definitely be taking place.
- Ensuring the polls were "COVID-secure" would be a challenge.

Polling Station Arrangements and Staffing:

- Initial planning to ensure polling places were COVID-secure would involve investigating whether polling places could operate a one-way system with a separate entrance and exit, provide social distance markings on the floor with a queueing system which could be managed by the elections staff. The use of PPE (masks) by both staff and electors would be necessary and polling equipment would need to be sanitised regularly. The operation of polling stations would be in line with national guidance.
- It was important to be able to reassure electors that voting in person at their polling place was safe. An audit for COVID-security was therefore being undertaken on all current polling places on a building-by-building basis and it could be that some of those buildings would be found not to be COVID-compliant for use as a polling place. It was intended that a report would be brought before the January 2021 Governance Committee meeting which would include any proposals for changes to polling places.
- The current Polling Scheme included three schools and the Committee might want to give an indication, at its meeting in January, whether it wished to

continue using those schools as polling places for the May 2021 election, given the disruption already experienced to children's education as a result of the COVID lockdown earlier in the year.

- Recruitment for election staff was likely to be necessary as the age profiles of individuals regularly involved in election work indicated that some of the most experienced election staff might not be available to work in the May 2021 election.
- To ensure social distancing and manage the number of people present in a polling place at any one time it might be necessary to combine polling stations (where a polling place had multiple polling stations) or reduce the staffing levels in polling places (where space was limited).

Arrangements for the Counts:

- Detailed planning for the counts would take place in early 2021.
- The Borough Council and County Council counts would be held in the sports hall of K2 Leisure Centre. Both counts would take place the day after the election, with the Borough count in the morning and the County count in the afternoon.
- The Police & Crime Commissioner count would take place on the Monday following the elections.
- K2 Leisure Centre's sports hall was a large room which would provide space for social distancing. More detailed planning with regard to achieving social distancing and managing the count generally was yet to be undertaken.

Absent Voter Arrangements:

- Communication messaging for electors would be issued in the New Year, both on a national and Sussex-wide basis. That information would reassure electors that polling places would be COVID-secure, but advise that absent voter arrangements could be put in place should electors wish to do so. Electors would be requested to arrange an absentee vote early so that arrangements were in place before the election.

The Committee then considered the issues raised by the Electoral Services Manager and the Committee:

- Noted that, should national guidance continue to require that face coverings be worn in public spaces where social distancing was not always possible, masks would be provided for electors who were not medically exempt and attended the polling place without a face covering.
- Noted that it would have the opportunity to consider the use of schools as polling places at its meeting in January 2021. The Committee was reminded that only three schools were currently used as polling places and two of those schools were able to remain open on the day of the election.
- Acknowledged that the decision to hold the Police & Crime Commissioner count on the Monday following the election had been taken by the Returning Officer for that election. The Electoral Services Manager believed the rationale for selecting that date had been based on the availability of suitable count venues.
- Was informed that the County Council count would not take place at the same time across the county as not all Councils would be holding Borough or District elections in May 2021 and so some would be able to commence the County Council count before Crawley.
- Proposed various way to ensure social distancing at the count venue. The Electoral Services Manager informed the Committee that options would be fully investigated but he expected that space would be available at the count

for Election Candidates and Election Agents to assure themselves that the count was being conducted properly.

- Was advised that the Electoral Commission was expected to provide guidance regarding the attendance of tellers at polling places. The Committee noted that once the audit of all polling places had taken place the Electoral Services Manager intended to hold conversations with Election Agents nearer to the time of the elections.

The Chair thanked the Electoral Services Manager for the update and the work currently being undertaken. It was agreed that a verbal update on the May 2021 elections be a standing item on all Governance Committee agendas for the remainder of the Council year.

RESOLVED

1. That the verbal update on the May 2021 elections be noted.
2. That a verbal update on the May 2021 elections be a standing item on all Governance Committee agendas for the remainder of the Council year.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Governance Committee concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.39 pm

R D Burrett (Chair)