

## Crawley Borough Council

### Minutes of Governance Committee

Tuesday, 24 January 2023 at 7.00 pm

#### Councillors Present:

P K Lamb (Chair)

J Bounds (Vice-Chair)

R D Burrett, K L Jaggard, G S Jhans, M G Jones, Y Khan, T Lunnon, K McCarthy, J Millar-Smith and S Pritchard

#### Officers Present:

Mez Matthews Democratic Services Officer

Andrew Oakley Electoral Services Manager

Chris Pedlow Democracy & Data Manager

#### 1. Disclosures of Interest

No disclosures of interests were made.

#### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 10 October 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3. Public Question Time

No questions were asked by the public.

#### 4. Polling Arrangements: May 2023

The Committee considered report [LDS/195](#) of the Head of Governance, People & Performance which requested that some temporary changes to the Scheme of Polling Places relating to the May 2023 Borough Council elections be made in advance of the introduction of voter ID.

The current Scheme was adopted in January 2019 following ward boundary changes arising from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England electoral review of the Borough. The Polling Scheme worked well at the three sets of elections held in 2019.

Several temporary changes had been made to the Polling Scheme for the elections held in 2021 and 2022 and, at its meeting held on [10 October 2022](#), the Committee considered the use of schools as polling places for May 2023. Further temporary changes to the Polling Scheme were now recommended for polling districts LLB (Broadfield Ward), LMC (Three Bridges Ward) and LMD (Three Bridges Ward) due to the unavailability of venues and the requirements for the checking of voter ID.

#### Polling District LBB – Broadfield Ward (Broadfield Community Centre)

Committee members discussed the proposal to change the polling place for polling district LBB (Broadfield Ward) for the May 2023 election to Broadfield Community Centre as the building at the current polling place (the former adventure playground at Creasys Drive (“Creasys Drive”)) would be unavailable in May and for future elections. The Electoral Services Manager advised that future polling provision for this part of Broadfield would be considered at the statutory polling district review.

Following queries from the Committee regarding the reasons for the unavailability of Creasys Drive, the Electoral Services Manager advised that the site had been earmarked for use as a potential Patch Team Depot by the Council. In addition, information had been received that day which called into question the structural integrity of the building, although detailed information as to the nature of that structural damage had not yet been provided in detail.

The Committee acknowledged that the health and safety of voters and polling staff was paramount and, should it be deemed unsafe, due to any damage to the building or use/storage of large machinery within the vicinity, the building should not be used for polling. However, both the extent of damage to the building and potential disruption to the operation of any future use as a Depot was unknown at the current stage, and therefore the Committee felt it was important to obtain a greater understanding of those issues before a decision could be made on the matter.

Several Committee members held the view that Broadfield Community Centre had become very crowded when it had been used as the polling place for the whole of Broadfield Ward during the poll for the General Election. Those Councillors therefore suggested that Creasys Drive should be retained to reduce both queuing and overcrowding at the Community Centre. Additionally, it was asserted that frequently moving the location of a polling place within a Ward was confusing for electors and it was stressed that consistency of polling place locations should be retained.

It was however noted that voter turnout had improved when all polling for Broadfield Ward had taken place at Broadfield Community Centre and some members of the Committee highlighted that the Community Centre was more conveniently located than Creasys Drive for the voters who lived on the eastern, Tollgate Hill, side of Broadfield.

The Committee was reminded that the proposed change to polling place for polling district LBB would only be in place for the May 2023 elections, and that future polling provision for the district would be considered at the statutory polling district review.

Following a detailed discussion, the Committee agreed in principle that, should Creasys Drive be deemed unsafe to use as a polling location, it would accept that Broadfield Community Centre be used as a polling place instead for polling district LBB. The Committee emphasised however that it required more detail as to the health and safety concerns, the structural integrity of the building and the anticipated disruption to any potential future operations at the site before a definitive decision could be taken by the Full Council on the matter.

Polling District LMC – Three Bridges Ward (The Hawth Theatre)

The Committee was reminded that, due to the usual meeting room at the Holiday Inn Xpress being unavailable, polling had been held at The Hawth Theatre for the May 2022 election. The Committee was advised that the meeting room at Holiday Inn Xpress would not easily accommodate the new requirement to have facilities to check voter ID in private, where requested by the voter. It was therefore recommended that the polling place for the district be changed to The Hawth Theatre as that offered more suitable facilities.

The Committee expressed support for the continued use of The Hawth Theatre as a polling place, with several members of the Committee stating that its use as a polling place had worked well. It was also highlighted by Committee members that positive feedback on use of The Hawth Theatre had been received from constituents, particularly given that it was not necessary to cross a busy main road to gain access to the site, as had been the case with the Holiday Inn Xpress. Additionally, it was acknowledged that previous use of The Hawth Theatre had not negatively affected voter turnout, as the minor reduction in turnout between the 2021 and 2022 for the elections in polling district LMC had been reflected across polling districts within the Borough.

Polling District LMD – Three Bridges Ward (The New Town Hall)

The current polling place was the Town Hall, however that building was due to be decommissioned by May 2023 and it was therefore recommended that the designated polling place be amended to the new Town Hall as the reception area would offer excellent facilities for polling.

**RESOLVED**

That the Full Council be recommended that, for the 2023 elections, the Polling Scheme be amended to allocate polling places as follows:

1. LBB - Broadfield Community Centre (subject to a report being submitted to the next meeting of the Full Council which provided satisfactory evidence demonstrating that it would not be possible to use the former Adventure Playground site at Creasys Drive as a polling place due to health and safety concerns, structural damage to the building and/or anticipated significant disruption to any potential future operations at the site).
2. LMC – The Hawth Theatre.
3. LMD – The new Town Hall.

**5. Update on the Implementation of the Elections Act 2022**

The Electoral Services Manager gave an update on the Implementations of the Elections Act 2022. The presentation is attached to these minutes as Appendix A.

In giving the presentation, the Electoral Services Manager highlighted that:

- The changes mainly related to voter ID and disability provisions.
- It was estimated that 2%-5% of the population did not have ID which would be accepted at a polling station. It was therefore expected that approximately 1,500-2,000 voter ID cards would potentially need to be issued, and consequentially the Elections Team wanted to issue those as early as possible as the deadline for applying for voter ID was 25 April 2023.

- It would only be possible to issue an emergency proxy in circumstances which had been stipulated by the Electoral Commission once the deadline for voter ID had passed if the voter did not have alternative suitable ID.
- A significant amount of training on voter ID would need to be undertaken by polling station staff.
- Extra staffing would be provided at polling stations to assist with the additional work generated by the new requirements for checking ID.
- Further provisions relating to elections were expected over the next few years and, when necessary, updates on those provisions would be brought before the Governance Committee.

The Committee discussed the information provided and, in response to queries or comments made by the Committee, the Electoral Services Manager:

- Confirmed that publicity would be undertaken across the town to promote the need for voter ID, means of such publication would include community noticeboards and digital boards in the Town Centre.
- Advised that although the types of ID used for polling would not be recorded at the next election, records would be kept as to how many people were refused a ballot paper due to insufficient/unacceptable ID.
- Informed the Committee that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had provided funding to pay for an additional Poll Clerk for each Polling Station to assist with the additional work generated by checking ID. That funding had been guaranteed for the next two years, but no pledge had been given by DLUHC that funding would continue beyond that period. Several members of the Committee felt uneasy that ongoing funding was not guaranteed.
- Advised that currently, when an elector came to vote in person and the Register of Electors suggested they had already received a vote, that elector would be offered a tendered ballot paper. The Electoral Services Manager advised that the number of tendered ballot papers issued was recorded and those statistics were passed to the Electoral Commission for analysis on a national basis. The Electoral Services Manager assured the Committee that the number of tendered ballot papers issued at elections run by Crawley Borough Council was low, and they would be disappointed if more than two/three tendered ballots were issued at any election.
- Confirmed that no petition had ever been submitted to challenge a Crawley Borough Council election result.
- Clarified that Presiding Officers would have the final say as to whether an elector's ID was acceptable.
- Informed the Committee that privacy screens would be provided whereby a female Presiding Officer could check the identity of an elector wearing a face covering. In a situation whereby such a check was required, but a female Presiding Officer was not stationed at such a polling station, it was likely that a female member of staff (deputising on behalf of the Returning Officer) would travel to the polling station to check the ID. Following a concern that the proposal could cause a delay to those electors, the Electoral Services Manager assured the Committee that various options were being worked through at present.

Several Committee members believed there was insufficient evidence which demonstrated that election fraud was a current issue and questioned the need for voter ID. However, other Committee members countered that electoral fraud could be unknowingly taking place and additionally, voter ID could reduce the number of tendered ballot papers being issued.

Concern was expressed that the requirement for voter ID could result in electors being refused a vote should they not have appropriate documentation. It was therefore suggested, and agreed by the Democracy & Data Manager, that a report be brought before the Governance Committee in Autumn 2023 which detailed the number of electors who had been refused a ballot paper at the May 2023 election due to insufficient/unacceptable ID.

## **6. Electoral Services Manager**

Following the Chair's announcement that this was likely to be the last Governance Committee attended by the Electoral Services Manager before they retired, both the Chair and the Committee expressed an appreciation for the Electoral Services Manager's work and dedication over the past 18 years. The Electoral Services Manager had maintained their good humour, patience, and calm nature throughout their time at the Council, especially given the challenging circumstances in recent years. The Committee wished them a long and well deserved retirement. The Electoral Services Manager responded by thanking the Committee for its kind words and shared that they had found it a pleasure working for the Council.

### **Closure of Meeting**


With the business of the Governance Committee concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.05 pm

**P K Lamb (Chair)**

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## Appendix A

### Implementation of the Elections Act 2022




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### Elections Act 2022

In force for May 2023

- Voter Authority Certificate
- Voter ID
- Disability Provisions



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### Voter Identification

- From 4 May, applies to:
  - UK Parliamentary by-elections
  - UK Parliamentary recall petitions
  - Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales
  - Local government elect and referendums in England
- From 5 October, also applies to:
  - UK Parliamentary general elections

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### Voter Identification


- Raising awareness
  - National publicity "Note to Self"
  - Poll card information
  - Spring Crawley Live
  - Community/Disability groups
  - Social media
  - Council website



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### Voter Identification


- Voter Authority Certificate
  - Applications via national website.
  - Paper/ in person applications
  - deadline 5pm 25 April
  - emergency proxy



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### Voter Identification

- Staff training




- Increased staffing in polling stations
- Polling station equipment

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## Accessibility

- A general responsibility to take all reasonable steps to support voters with disabilities
- The provisions for voters to be assisted by a companion will be extended to allow anyone over the age of 18 to assist
- Electoral Commission guidance due imminently.
- Staff Training
- Awareness raising of provisions



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## Remaining Provisions

4 May 2023.

- Change of voting system - The voting system used for PCC, election has changed from Supplementary Vote to First Past the Post for polls taking place on or after Overseas Electors .

August 2023

- scrap the 'fifteen-year rule' to allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK
- enable electors to apply online for an absent vote, with both online and paper applications requiring the applicant's identity to be verified
- require postal voters to reapply every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years (reserved polls)
- further limit the number of people someone may act as proxy



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## Remaining Provisions

November 2023


- clarification of undue influence
- new electoral sanction for intimidation
- digital imprints new regime

December 2023

- EU citizen's voting and candidacy rights (EUVCR) – final removal of ineligible EU nationals on publication of revised register

January 2024

- require postal voters to reapply every three years, replacing current rules of refreshing their signature every five years (reserved polls)



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## Remaining Provisions

May 2024

- restrict the handing of postal votes, including limiting the number of postal votes an individual can hand in
- absent vote secrecy- the secrecy of the ballot requirements in polling stations extended to absent voting
- changes to candidates addresses come into force
- changes to commonly used names come into force



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