

# Minutes of General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

**Thursday 16 December at 6.00pm  
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Dhallu (Chair);  
Councillors Allcock and Owen.

**In attendance:** Tracey Hurst – Electoral Services Manager  
Rebecca Maher – Head of Finance  
David King – Elections Assistant  
John Smith – Interim Accountant  
Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Connor Robinson – Democratic Services Officer.

## 18/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen and Kaur.

## 19/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 20/21 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2021 be agreed as a correct record.



## 21/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

## 22/21 **Admission Agreements to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme**

The Committee considered the admission agreements to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The agreements would give delegated authority to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance to allow catering staff from Old Park Primary and Whitecrest Primary School to continue to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme following their transfer to a new employer.

The Committee also considered the future delegated authority to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance to the future pension liability and guarantee where it was both below and greater than £250,000 and the signing and execution of these agreements through the Director of Legal Services.



**Resolved** to recommend to Council that:

- (1) the Chief Executive/Director of Finance be given the delegated authority to sign the Admission Agreements relating to the transfer of catering staff from Old Park Primary School to Mellors Catering Services, and Whitecrest Primary School to Aspens Services Limited, and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required);
- (2) where the future pension liability/guarantee is below £250,000 that the Chief Executive/Director of Finance be given the delegated authority to sign all future Pension Admission Agreements below this limit, and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required) to give effect to relevant organisations becoming admitted bodies;
- (3) where the pension liability/guarantee is greater than £250,000 that a separate report is presented to seek approval for the Chief Executive/Director of Finance to be given the delegated authority to sign the Pension Admission Agreement and for the Director of Legal Services to make arrangements for the necessary documents to be signed or executed under deed of seal (as required) to give effect to relevant organisations becoming admitted bodies.

23/21

**Review of Polling Places and Polling Stations 2021/22**

The Committee considered the review of polling places and polling stations 2021/22.



Post elections 2021, the Elections Team undertook a review of polling places within the Borough. Although not statutory it was considered good practice to undertake a review after an election year as a means of identifying and resolving any issues.

The number of schools being utilised for elections was regarded as too high as the use of schools and the subsequent enforced closure was adding to the disruption faced by pupils in their education. In addition, the use of temporary cabins had also been reviewed owing to their cost and practicality of their set up.

When reviewing polling places, it had been necessary to review their appropriate efficacy. The perspective of the electorate had to be considered in any change, such as, the accessibility of the site, its suitability, parking arrangements and disabled access. If alternative sites could not be found in the vicinity, then the site would not be changed.

The review was concluded, which recommended the following changes:

- amendment to 24 polling places across 24 wards;
- the number of school polling stations used would be reduced from 47 to 27;
- the number of temporary cabins reduced from 16 to 12.

The Committee noted that all recommended changes had taken place with consideration to the current framework, access and suitability of a subsequent site.

It was understood that a number of schools utilised the election day as a teacher training day. Agreement had been sought from those schools that wished to continue being a polling station provider. Communications had been carried out in November and October 2021 to inform them of the forthcoming May election to ensure schools prepare accordingly.

It was highlighted that polling station location changes would be communicated with residents online on the Council's website and via social media. Impacted residents would also receive a letter and the changes would also be highlighted on polling cards.



In response to questions from Members of the Committee to officers it was noted:

- where there were recommendations of a change ward members had been consulted and given the opportunity to engage with the elections team and put their views forward. Where no change had been recommended, no consultation occurred;
- in new large estates with little to no public buildings finding suitable polling places was difficult. In any event the Elections Team aimed to ensure the accessibility and suitability of every polling place.

**Resolved** to recommend to Council that:

- (1) the proposed changes to specific Polling Places and Polling Stations as set out in Appendix 1 be approved;
- (2) subject to (1) above, authorise the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer to implement the approved changes detailed in Appendix 1;
- (3) subject to any required changes with a Polling Place or Polling Station within the Borough prior to elections in 2022 (and beyond), the Returning Officer (or in their absence/unavailability, the Deputy Returning Officer) be authorised to change any Polling Place(s) and/or Polling Station(s), following consultation with relevant Ward Members and Chairperson of the General Purposes and Arbitration Committee, as considered necessary to enable the efficient and effective running of elections.

Meeting ended at 6.23pm

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