

DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WORKING GROUP

16 December 2020

Commenced: 4.00pm

Terminated: 4.35pm

Present: Councillors Cooney (In the Chair), Billington, Fairfoull, J. Fitzpatrick, Kitchen, Reid, S Smith, Ryan, Ward and Warrington.

Apologies: Councillor Feeley.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 5 October 2020 be approved as a correct record.

21. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions which reminded Members that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had informed Tameside Council they are to undertake an electoral review. The last such review was in 2003 and agreed the size of the council to be 57 councillors across 19 wards (three councillors per ward). The first stage of the review is to consider the size of the Council, i.e. how many Councillors should there be. This will be followed by a review of the warding arrangements.

The attached report is the Tameside Council size proposal (Stage 1) to the LGBCE. In addition, Tameside Council has provided the supporting information requested by the LGBCE. The size proposal has to be submitted to the LGBCE by 16 December 2021 and will be considered by the Commission in January 2021.

The report is structured as below:

1. Executive summary
2. Tameside the place and its communities
3. Electoral forecasts
4. Governance and decision making
5. Local and sub-regional arrangements
6. Scrutiny and regulatory functions
7. Representational role of councillors in the local community
8. Other

Tameside Council proposes a **council size of 57 councillors** across 19 wards (three councillors per ward). No change from the current council size. In coming to the decision to propose a council size of 57 councillors a range of evidence and a number of factors were considered and balanced. They included:

- population and elector growth;
- increasing diversity of local communities;
- governance and decision making;
- scrutiny and regulatory functions;
- changing nature of case work in terms of volume, scope and complexity;
- representation of individuals and communities beyond the formal governance arrangements;
- major changes such as Greater Manchester devolution and health and social care integration.

RESOLVED:

That Members RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL to endorse the attached submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

22. UPDATE ON MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions which reminded Member that 6 May 2021 the Combined Borough Council and GM Mayoral Election postponed from May 2020 would be held. The Notice of Election for both Elections will be published on 29 March 2020. Meaning that the nomination period will commence on 30 March 2020. Ballot papers and paperwork for the Borough Elections will be white and for the GM Mayoral Election they will be yellow. The method of voting at the Mayoral Election is Supplementary Vote which means electors can vote for their 1st and 2nd preference.

It remained probable that there would be some form of Covid restrictions in place when the elections were held and these would need to be factored into planning considerations.

Nominations for the GM Mayoral Election would be dealt with by the Combined Authority. Delivery of nomination papers for the Local Elections would be from the day after the publication of the Notice of Election on 29 March 2020 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 8 April 2020. It will be necessary to put in place procedures to ensure that, despite the impact of the pandemic and any local restrictions that might be in place, any person expressing an interest in standing for election was able to access a nomination pack. It was suggested that wherever possible and practical access to nomination packs should be electronic, either through the Council's website or by email. Where this was not possible steps would be taken to ensure the safety of candidates, agents and election staff in line with public health guidance. Where possible informal checks of nomination papers would be done electronically. Where this was not possible measures will be put in place to ensure safety of candidates, agents and elections staff, these will include delivery by appointment only and recognised safety measures such as social distancing, face masks and hand sanitiser. With regard to the delivery of nomination papers steps would need to be taken to maintain safety. Again this would require delivery by appointment only with a specified delivery point.

Given the likelihood of Covid restrictions still being in place in May 2021 and the possibility of receiving a large number of late postal vote applications by electors wishing to avoid having to go to a polling station it was intended to undertake a publicity campaign early in the new year reminding residents of the alternative options for voting at the May elections rather than going to a polling station. This would be done in line with Electoral Commission guidance

Members were informed that the deadline for withdrawal of nominations was 4:00 pm Thursday 8 April 2020, in theory postal votes could be issued any time after this. The Combined Authority Returning Officer has indicated that they wish to see all GM Mayoral Postal Votes dispatched on Wednesday 22 April 2020. It is possible to send out the Borough Council election postal votes separately to the GM Mayoral Electoral however, this would incur costs to Council. Given that it will not be possible to dispatch any postal votes (combined or separate) until shortly before 22 April it was suggested that a combined postal vote pack should be sent out on 22 April at the same time as the rest of GM. This approach would also allow for more thorough checking of postal vote packs prior to dispatch.

Arrangements would need to be put in place to ensure that postal vote verification and opening was conducted in a covid safe way whilst ensure candidates and agents were able to carry out their roles. At present it was anticipated that verification and opening of postal votes would be undertaken at Dukinfield Town Hall though precise arrangements would be determined following health and safety and public health guidance. Further details on arrangements for postal vote verification and opening would be provided at the scheduled February meeting of the Working Group.

With regard to polling stations, it would be necessary to consider the arrangements at each polling station to ensure a safe environment for electors, candidates/agent and staff working in polling stations. An update on arrangements for polling stations will be provided at the February meeting of the Working Group.

Members considered possible arrangements for conducting the verification and count and agreed that further consideration would need to be given to this matter at the February meeting of the Working Group.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That it be noted that nominations can be submitted from 9am on Tuesday 30 March 2020 until 4pm on Thursday 8 April 2020;**
- (ii) That it be noted that it is likely that arrangements will need to be put in place to ensure safety of all those involved in the nomination process.**
- (iii) That it be agreed to dispatch combined postal votes on Wednesday 22 April and that further details on verification and opening of postal votes will be provided at the February meeting of the Working Group.**
- (iv) That further consideration be given to the arrangements for verification and counting of votes at the February meeting of the Working Group**
- (v) That we follow the Electoral Commission advice and communications strategy about the alternative ways of voting.**

23. ELECTORAL COMMISSION BULLETINS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Governance and Pensions that provided Members with recent copies of the Electoral Commission news bulletin, which set out current issues affecting the democratic framework for local government.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

CHAIR