

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ELECTORAL AND BOUNDARY REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Electoral and Boundary Review Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 29 March 2022.

PRESENT: Mr N Baker, Mr M Baldock, Mrs P T Cole, Mr A J Hook, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr A Kennedy, Mr R C Love, OBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr R J Thomas and Mr B J Sweetland

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Ms L Adam (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

2. Election of Vice-Chair (Item 2)

- 1) Mr Sweetland proposed and Mr Jeffrey seconded that Mr Andrew Kennedy be elected as Vice-Chair. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED that Mr Kennedy be elected Vice-Chair.

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 18 March 2021 and 27 May 2021 (Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes were a correct record.

4. Review of the 2021 Election (Item 5)

- 1) Mr Watts, provided an outline of the initial planning and preparations for the election which were undertaken during lockdown. He highlighted some of the key challenges, such as building closures and the use of various election venues as vaccination and testing centres limiting the options. He thanked District colleagues for working with KCC and for their flexibility during the delivery of the election. Mr Watts also thanked the KCC Corporate Management Team and their Directorate staff for their assistance through the election process, the joint working was a good example of the organisation pulling together to support key priorities.
- 2) Mr Watts highlighted the following key learning points:
 - It was important to recognise some of the challenges facing District and Borough teams at particular points in the process and this would be updated in the risk assessment for future elections.
 - Election template notices
 - Focused communication with local Returning Officers.

- 3) Responding to Member comments and questions, Mr Watts and Ms Adam (Deputy Returning Officer), providing the following information:
- In clarifying progress with managing outstanding spending returns, Ms Adam explained that KCC had made appropriate contact with the relevant individuals but liaised as necessary with the Electoral Commission. No further action was required on the part of KCC but Member concerns were noted and the Returning Officer would highlight the concerns about criminal offences to Kent Police via the Head of Paid Service's office and he would write to the Electoral Commission again to flag up the issue.
 - It was confirmed that Dartford Borough Council was the one late returning area in terms of submission of accounts but it was highlighted that this was expected due to additional election pressures as it was acting as the Policing Area Returning Officer District. Members commented that Dartford performed well in the circumstances, responding well to the particular challenges of managing County and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.
 - Social media impact was a mixed element, with some very positive engagement with the voting public in terms of promotion of the election and increased awareness, along with reports of misuse or problematic weaponization of social media during and after campaigns.
 - The role of current Members, including Dr Sullivan, was highlighted in supporting the 'become a councillor events' which provided an important insight into the role of elected Member for prospective candidates.
 - All Members expressed support and thanks for the hard work of Officers at both District and County authorities.
- 4) Members discussed the merits and disadvantages of a long term shift to increased online processing for election activity, with some Members supportive of enhanced online facilities and streamlining and others positive about the administrative aspects only being developed further for online use and the other activity continuing to require in person or written activity (e.g. voting, nominations for candidates). It was also noted that a reduction in the number of subscriber signatures to secure nomination for election should be maintained. Members also determined that a letter should be sent to the Electoral Commission outlining mixed views regarding the development of online election processes – with some support for expense recording and exploration of other options involving better use of online functionality but without commitment to change current processes.

RESOLVED that;

- The report be noted.
- The actions of the County Returning Officer in the 2021 KCC election be endorsed; and
- The praise for the election teams throughout Kent on their effective work in delivering the election be noted and endorsed.

5. Adjustments made to Scale of Fees 2021/22

(Item 6)

- 1) Ms Adam introduced the report, explaining the actions taken under delegated authority.

RESOLVED that the two minor adjustments made to the 2021/22 County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses, relating to standby fees and DRO payment for the management and conduct of the KCC election, made by the County Returning Office on 19 May 2021 under delegated authority, be noted.

6. Revised 2022/23 Kent Scale of Fees and Election Expenses

(Item 7)

Scale of fees 22/23

- 1) Ms Adam introduced the report and confirmed the specific proposal for a 3% uplift in line with Kent Scheme staff receiving a 'successful rating. She advised that this was proposed in the absence of the NJC award, which was usually used as the benchmark.
- 2) Ms Adam and Mr Watts responded to comments and questions from Members. Key points included; Clarifying postal spend costs and fair reimbursement for Districts in terms of the vital administrative activity they undertake. Mr Watts confirmed that postal vote arrangements for the 2025 election required careful consideration and this would be brought back to the Committee in due course.
- 3) Members suggested the merging of fee scales and further clarification on the scope for a better long term fee level link arrangements be explored, noting the potential future conflict or gaps around using the NJC pay award or KCC pay scheme. It was highlighted that Trade Union engagement and consultation was important in future arrangements. Mr Watts confirmed that this would be reviewed again in future in advance of the 2025 election.

RESOLVED that the County Scale of Election Fees and Expenses for 2022/23 including an additional uplift to Item 17 (For each Poll Clerk at the Polling Station) to ensure KCC meets its commitment to pay a minimum of £10.00 per hour, be approved.