

## **BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCILS**

Minutes of the meeting of the **JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 25 September 2023

Chair: John Matthissen (Joint-Chair)

Councillors: Simon Dowling  
Mary McLaren  
Isabelle Reece  
John Whitehead  
Adrienne Marriott  
James Patchett  
Tim Regester  
John Whyman

### **In attendance:**

Councillor(s): Rachel Eburne  
John Ward

Guest(s): David Green – Arlingclose Strategic Director

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)  
Director - Corporate Resources (ME)  
Corporate Manager – Finance, Commissioning & Procurement (BP)  
Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)  
Corporate Manager – Internal Audit (JS)  
Elections Consultant (GF)  
Governance Support Officer (BW)

### **Apologies:**

Austin Davies  
Bryn Hurren (Joint-Chair)

## **12 SUBSTITUTES AND APOLOGIES**

12.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Austin Davies and Councillor Bryn Hurren.

12.2 Councillor John Whyman substituted for Councillor Hurren.

## **13 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

13.1 None received.

## **14 JAC/23/07 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 JULY 2023**

It was **RESOLVED**: -

**That the minutes of the meeting held on the 31 July 2023 be confirmed and**

signed as a true record.

**15 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME**

15.1 None received.

**16 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC**

16.1 None received.

**17 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS**

17.1 None received.

**18 JAC/23/08 REVIEW OF THE DELIVERY OF THE 2023 DISTRICT, TOWN & PARISH ELECTIONS**

18.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce report JAC/23/08 to the committee.

18.2 Councillor Dowling queried the number of items on the action plan that were listed as amber and red, and asked how up to date it was. The Chief Executive responded that many of the items that were shown in red were for elections that did not need running for a few years and were scenario specific, currently the Police Crime Commissioner election was prioritised as it was scheduled for May 2024.

18.3 Councillor Dowling raised concern surrounding the upcoming general election and whether the councils would be ready for this. The Chief Executive responded that there was no choice but for the councils to be ready. Whilst there would be an impact on resources and the scale of the election was bigger, there were less factors at play due to the lessened number of constituencies. The Elections Consultant added that the County's elections managers were holding meetings to discuss the upcoming general election. In addition, members of the elections team had undergone training to deal with snap elections and cross boundary constituencies.

18.4 Councillor Patchett questioned whether any discounts had been offered to or requested by parish councils. The Chief Executive responded that none were offered or requested.

18.5 Councillor Mariott queried whether the actions had been prioritised. The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office responded that the action plan was ongoing and a project plan was being developed where tasks were

being prioritised.

- 18.6 Councillor McLaren questioned whether any lessons were learnt by the Senior Leadership Team during this exercise. The Chief Executive responded that a direct link to himself as Returning Officer and the Elections Manager would be beneficial for the elections team.
- 18.7 Councillor Register expressed concern that uncontested parishes were declared and then shown to be as contested. The Chief Executive responded that the statements of people nominated had originally been incorrectly but had been republished correctly.
- 18.8 Councillor Register questioned how costs were calculated for uncontested elections. The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office responded that costs for elections were based on the size of the electorate and that there would be variations between parishes.
- 18.9 Councillor Reece questioned why there was a need for a robust team plan, and why there was not an existing plan in place. The Chief Executive responded that for much of the team it had been their first election that they had run and that a project plan for the election was in place however there was not one in place within the elections team.
- 18.10 Councillor Reece further questioned what proportion of the training was undertaken online. The Chief Executive responded that online training was carried out for all Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks regarding the introduction of voter ID.
- 18.11 Councillor Patchett questioned the voter registration process and how it was possible for family groups that had registered at the same time to not all be properly registered. The Elections Consultant responded that all registered names go to the DWP for verification and where these cannot be verified by the DWP further documentation may be needed which causes delays.
- 18.12 Councillor Ward questioned the elections management system and whether the bug in the system had been fixed and if there were further changes to the system that could be implemented. The Chief Executive responded that the bug in the system applied to all users and had been fixed, and training for staff had been provided on the software. The Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office added that fortnightly meetings were being held with the Councils' IT team and Democracy Counts and that the councils had a wish list of updates to the system that they were negotiating with Democracy Counts.
- 18.13 Councillor McLaren questioned how big a problem voter ID had been. The Chief Executive responded that there had been few issues with the voter ID

and most of the incidents related to allowable forms of ID which was currently being reviewed by the electoral commission.

- 18.14 Councillor Whitehead observed that the loss of elections officers with decades of experience of wards in the Council areas did have an effect on how the election was run, and that the elections team needed to grow to make up for this loss.
- 18.15 In response to Councillor Whitehead's observation the Chief Executive added that the previous elections teams were nearly double the size of the current one and that this would need to grow, and whilst this had cost implications it had been raised with the Section 151 Officer.
- 18.16 Councillor Whyman praised the thoroughness of the review and stated that it was a worthwhile exercise.
- 18.17 Councillor Patchett suggested that deadlines be added to the action plan to clarify time frames.
- 18.18 Councillor Matthissen stated that it was reassuring to hear that the election was run in a satisfactory way and that there was assurance that a plan had been put in place for improvements.
- 18.19 Councillor Dowling proposed the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Patchett seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote.

**It was RESOLVED: -**

- 1.1 That the committee noted the content of the draft action plan and considered any actions that may need to be taken following review of the plan.**

## **19 JAC/23/09 ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) UPDATE**

- 19.1 A short comfort break was taken between 11:52am-12:05pm.
- 19.2 Councillor Whyman proposed the recommendation as detailed in the report, with the additional recommendation that a future report be brought back to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee within two months. Councillor Dowling seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote.

**It was RESOLVED: -**

**1.1 That the committee note the contents of the report and confidential appendix a.**

**1.2 That a future report be brought back to the Joint Audit and Standards Committee within two months.**

**20 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (TERM WHICH INCLUDES THE PRESS)**

20.1 Councillor Regester proposed that the public and press be excluded. Councillor McLaren seconded the motion.

By a unanimous vote

**It was RESOLVED: -**

**That pursuant to Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public should be excluded from the meeting for the business specified below on the grounds that if the public were present during this item, it was likely that there would be the disclosure to them of exempt information as indicated against the item. The author of the report proposed to be considered in Part 2 of the Agenda is satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information**

**21 JAC/23/09 ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) UPDATE - CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES**

**22 RE-ADMITTANCE OF THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE PRESS)**

22.1 Councillor Matthissen proposed the re-admittance of the public. Councillor Whitehead seconded the motion.

By a unanimous vote.

**It was RESOLVED: -**

**That the public and press be re-admitted.**

**23 JAC/23/10 FORWARD PLAN**

23.1 Members agreed that an update on ESG be brought to the November meeting.

23.2 The forward plan was noted.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 13:06pm.

.....Chair