

REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

Of a virtual meeting on Wednesday 10 February 2021 from 7.30pm to 8.03pm

Members of the Licensing Committee:-

Councillors:-	Martin Trevett (Chair)	Steve Drury (Vice Chair)
	Donna Duncan	Roger Seabourne
	Stephen Cox	Alex Turner
	Joy Mann	
	Shanti Maru	
	Debbie Morris	

Officers in attendance:

Michael Summerville – Elections Services Manager
Matthew Robert – Team Leader Projects and Compliance
Lorna Fryer – Lead Licensing Officer
Sherrie Ralton - Committee Manager

RG01/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received. Councillor Steve Drury joined the meeting at 19.37.

RG02/20 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Regulatory Services Committee Meeting held on 12 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman when it was possible to do so.

RG03/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

None received.

RG04/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None received.

RG05/20 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES – RETURNING OFFICER TEMPORARY DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Approval was being sought to grant temporary delegated authority to allow the Returning Officer for Three Rivers to make any urgently required temporary

changes to polling places in the District for the forthcoming local government elections, currently scheduled for Thursday 6 May 2021, in the event of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, meaning that changes to voting arrangements for voters would be urgently required.

The following points were raised by Members:

How would electors be advised that the polling station had changed at short notice? The Elections Services Manager advised that on previous occasions notes had been delivered to electors' homes, messages put on Social Media and the Council's Website and notices put up at the polling station with details of where to go.

Previously, delegated authority had always been granted in consultation with Group Leaders, Lead Members and Spokespersons for the Committee. Closing a polling station could be politically sensitive and should have the backing of all party representatives. It may be more difficult if the change was to occur at the very last minute, but if there was time to let voters know there should be sufficient time to inform Members. Members had an immense amount of local knowledge which could be useful in the situation. It was proposed that delegated authority should be granted in consultation with Group Leaders, Lead Members and Spokespersons. If it were very late in the day the Leader of the Group or a senior Member should be consulted before an announcement was made public to ensure they were seen to be being fair and everyone was on board for any changes.

Members had faith in the integrity of the Election. It would be better for the Returning Officer to have the maximum amount of help and guidance. If a Polling Station needed to be changed at short notice Members' local knowledge would be invaluable. The Member agreed with the proposal for the consultee being either the Group Leader or Agent for the relevant Ward.

If there were sufficient time all Members of the Regulatory Services Committee and Ward Members should be consulted or informed.

The Chair supported the proposal for Ward Members, Election Agents and Group Spokespersons to be consulted.

Would it be too cumbersome for the Returning Officer to consult the three Ward Members, the Agent and/or all the Spokespersons? It may not be practical for the Returning Officer to get an opinion from every member of the Committee.

The Elections Services Manager advised that the Returning Officer had no issues with consulting with whoever the Committee decided upon. The report stated that they would look to consult with agents and candidates once the election was called. It was appreciated that Members were in a good position to advise. It was suggested that any issue occurring before the Notice of Election publication on 19 March then Regulatory Committee could be called to make a decision, however once the election timetable was running a different approach may be required.

The Chair supported calling a Regulatory Committee Meeting if needed before the Notice of Election publication on 19 March, after that consultation should be with the Agent, Candidate, Ward Members and Group Spokespersons.

A Member did not think the candidates should be consulted as they would not have been elected.

The Election team would be informing as many people as possible so agents and group leaders would be consulted.

A Member agreed with the suggestions and pointed out that agents would inform the candidates.

A Member asked for Ward Members to be added to the list of consultees.

The Elections Services Manager advised that there would be a combination of polls including County, Police and Crime Commissioner, Neighbourhood Planning Referendum and Parish. They would try to consult as widely as possible.

Councillor Roger Seabourne proposed, duly seconded the recommendation in the report with an amendment to include consultation with Group Leaders and Agents as a minimum.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chairman, agreed by general assent.

RECOMMEND:

The Committee recommend temporary delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer, in consultation with Group Leaders and Agents as a minimum, in order to make any necessary changes to polling places that may occur during the coronavirus pandemic to enable voters to carry out their democratic right to vote at local government elections scheduled this May.

RG06/20 REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

To consider and make necessary changes to the Committee's work programme.

Members agreed that the Annual Canvas updates would continue through the Members Information Bulletin so the item could be removed from the Work Programme

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the items included in the work programme

CHAIRMAN