

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 21ST MARCH, 2017

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the 008 - CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 21ST MARCH, 2017, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Phil Cole
Vice-Chair - Councillor James Hart

Councillors Nick Allen, Pat Haith, Charlie Hogarth, John McHale, Jane Nightingale and Sue Wilkinson

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sean Gibbons, Majid Khan and Kevin Rodgers

11 Declarations of Interest, if any.

No declarations were reported at the meeting.

12 Minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee Meeting held on 22nd November, 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd November, 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair reported that following discussion in schools with regard to the use of Smartphone Technology for voting, it had been agreed that the concept be put on hold. He stated that if a future proposal to try this type of technology arose, schools would be open to further discussions.

13 Electoral Services Update on Key Issues.

The Committee received an update report on the preparations for the combined Local Government and Mayoral Elections taking place on Thursday 4th May, 2017. Details of these preparations were outlined within paragraphs 5 to 9 of the report.

Additionally, there were currently vacancies on the Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council and it had been confirmed that voting would also take place for these vacancies on the 4th May. Members were also advised that there would also be a By-Election taking place in Hatfield on Thursday 23rd March and the cost of that election would be charged to the Town Council.

Following the update Members were afforded the opportunity to make comments and asked questions as follows:-

- Clarity was sought in relation to count procedures, particularly the use of counting sheets. It was reported that a briefing session for candidates would be taking place on the 5th April, 2017 where all processes would be explained.
- It was asked whether Polling Station staff were able to inform voters that they were eligible to have 3 votes. It was confirmed that this would be the case when handing voters their ballot papers.
- In relation to spoilt ballot papers, members were advised that if a voter had spoilt a ballot paper then staff would issue a new paper and the spoilt vote would be placed in an envelope and retained by the presiding officer, it would also be marked on the register that a new ballot paper had been issued.
- Following clarification regarding the Polling Station Finder app, it was noted that this information would be on polling cards.
- With regard to the Hatfield By-Election, it was asked whether it was possible for Members to view the Count. It was advised that only those appointed by Candidates as Counting agents would be eligible.
- Clarification was sought as to how many people would be allowed to attend the verification and count for the Local/Mayoral Elections. It was noted that this information would be advised once the number of candidates was known following the close of nominations.

Discussion took place with regard to the change of polling place in the Thorne and Moorends Ward where Members raised their views and concerns with regard to the change in venue. It was reported that this was a relatively unique situation. It was noted that complaints about the use of the venue as a polling place had been made in 2015 and that the Returning Officer had agreed at the time to enquire if alternative venues could be identified. Members felt that the existing venue was the most suitable building as it was well established and known to the community. Members felt that there could be many similar venues that were managed by either sitting Councillors/ Parish Councillors throughout the borough and that the decision to replace the venue could potentially set a precedent resulting in fewer premises available to use as polling places.

It was proposed by Councillor John McHale and seconded by Councillor Nick Allen, that the Returning Officer be invited to reconsider the decision to replace the polling place.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared as follows:-

For: 8 Against: 0 Abstain: 0

RESOLVED that the Returning Officer be asked to reconsider the decision to replace the existing polling place in Thorne and Moorends (Miners Welfare & Community Centre) with a new Polling place (The Community Centre, Northgate) on the grounds that the Miners Welfare and Community Centre was already established and well known to the local community and that there could be many similar venues that were managed by either sitting Councillors/Parish Councillors throughout the borough and the decision to replace this venue could set a precedent resulting in fewer premises available to use as polling places.

14 Individual Electoral Registration - Progress Report.

The Committee considered an update report on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services Team in relation to the Register of Electors and Annual Canvass. Details of the work carried out were provided within the body of the report. Additionally the team carry out proactive approach throughout the year in order to maintain an accurate and complete register. It was reported that to ensure that this was met the team were currently carrying out the following initiatives, details of each initiative was outlined within paragraph 8 of the report:-

- Electoral Commission Thunderclap
- Home movers; and
- Contact Centre and one to shop reception

Following the update, members were invited to make comments and ask questions. The Chair and Members thanked officers for the well-presented report and appreciated the proactive work being undertaken to increase the electorate. In response to a question regarding the use of the 0800 freephone number, it was reported that all correspondence and forms used by the service have the Freephone number in operation.

In response to a question regarding the remaining 23,230 forms highlighted within the table at paragraph 6 of the report, it was reported that they would remain on the register but further data matching work would be carried out with Council Tax and Benefits service.

In relation to properties which are difficult to gain entry to such as Care Homes, it was asked what impact this had on obtaining information for the register. It was advised that when officers attend Care Homes, the forms would be completed prior to officers leaving. It was noted that relationships with Care Home staff had been built up overtime which has benefited the canvass process.

In conclusion, members were advised that the Cabinet office continued to supply funding towards electoral registration activity and recently an application for extra funding had been submitted to Cabinet office towards the cost of Individual Electoral Registration activities during 2016/17. It was noted that if the application was to be successful some of the funding could go into work on the non-responding properties.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____