

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 2023

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU on TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 2023, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Julie Grace
Vice-Chair - Councillor Nick Allen

Councillors James Church, Gemma Cobby, Debbie Hutchinson, Jake Kearsley and Thomas Noon

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barry Johnson, Emma Muddiman-Rawlins, Ian Pearson and Andy Pickering

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.

No declarations were reported at the meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7TH FEBRUARY 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th February, 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 ELECTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update on current elections activity and upcoming issues, By-Elections and Neighbourhood Planning Referendums.

Information and results were also provided from the Auckley Neighbourhood Planning Referendum which took place on Thursday 20th April 2023. Further details regarding the turnout both by postal votes and polling stations was outlined within paragraph 8 to 9 of the report. The outcome of the referendum was in favour of using the Neighbourhood Plan to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

In addition, an update was also reported on the implementations from the Elections Act. It was advised that major changes had now been implemented from May 2023; voters across England were now required to bring photo ID to vote in person in a polling station. A new form of identification, the Voter Certificate (VAC), was introduced as a form of ID for those who did not have another form of eligible ID. Members were advised that whilst Doncaster had not undertaken any elections this year, there had been 406 applications received for the Voter Certificates.

Officers advised that the several members of the Elections team had supported Sheffield City Council during their May Local and Parish Elections which had enabled the team to deal with voter queries on polling day regarding Voter ID by taking telephone calls and visiting polling stations as Inspectors to see how photo ID is being provided and helping with any queries. This will help the team for when any by-elections occur before May 2024 Elections and focus on training needs.

In response to a question regarding what steps had been taken by Sheffield to promote the voter ID prior to the Election taking place, it was advised that there had been the National Campaign i.e. posters in bus stops, social media outlets. However, in terms of promotion at a local level and liaising with residents, officers would seek further information and forward to Members in due course.

In terms of resources to help deal with the amount of work generated from the introduction of Voter ID, officers assured Members that support would be available and had already been offered by neighbouring authorities. The team were in the process of collating all the information from the lessons learnt from Sheffield which in turn will assist the team in preparing for the Elections in May 2024.

Regarding Polling stations, it was asked whether the team had any idea where the polling stations would be that would meet the disability requirements. Officers advised that this information was not known at present. However, Polling Stations will be under review from October, 2023 which was a legal requirement. Information was being collated from previous elections to indicate what the Council already has and what changes may need to be looked at for future specifically in terms of the two portable units used where the Voter ID may not fit and in terms of accessibility for disabled voters. It was also advised that officers would be liaising with different groups that represent people with different disabilities to provide feedback which will be incorporated into the review.

Information was sought regarding the turnout for the elections in Sheffield. This information would be forwarded to Members outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

4 CANVASS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided an update to Members on key work streams being undertaken in relations to the Register of Electors and the preparations for the start of the Annual Canvass. It was noted that a revised version of the electoral register must be published by 1st December each year following the conclusion of the annual canvass.

Details of the three routes to be followed by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) were highlighted within paragraph 8 of the report. In terms of Route 1, 75.79% properties had now been successfully matched. Letters and emails will shortly be sent to all those who matched in Route 1 to notify them of the results and to only respond if there are changes to the information currently held on the Electoral Register.

A query was raised regarding the register and how the changes were made. It was advised that if an individual moves address it would be their responsibility to advise the team of that change. However, it was advised that there were several electors that

have advised that they have moved address but have not said what their previous address was. The team would seek that information when speaking to the elector but if the elector has followed the process on-line, they don't always provide previous address details. The Annual Canvass will assist in providing the correct address and remove previous information.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____