

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2016

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held in Room 007 B - CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2016, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Nick Allen, Charlie Hogarth, Majid Khan, John McHale, Jane Nightingale, Kevin Rodgers and Sue Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sean Gibbons and Pat Haith.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.

There were no declarations reported at the meeting.

6 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12TH JULY 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee held on the 12th July, 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7 PROPOSAL TO TEST SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY FOR VOTING

The Committee were asked to consider a report which would examine the possibility of piloting a new voting method in elections, beginning with a non-statutory election.

The e-voting pilot would allow voting by downloading an app onto a smart-phone. The system used Block-chain technology and was extremely secure.

Members were advised that the Block-chain offered the opportunity to increase participation in the democratic process by allowing citizens to use the technology to securely vote electronically in elections. It could be used to:

- Easily verify their citizenship and right to vote.
- Receive electoral material from all candidates.
- Vote securely from any location.

It was noted that any pilot scheme would seek to establish whether a Block-chain voting option would increase voter participation (especially amongst the "smartphone

generation”), increase voter satisfaction and trust, as the transparent nature of the block-chain would allow voters to verify that their vote was counted.

It was reported that the first step proposed was for Doncaster to test the concept among the “smart phone generation”, by seeking to use the technology for the election of the Doncaster Youth Council representatives, who were currently elected area by area with voting taking place among pupils age 16+ in Doncaster’s schools. The next elections were due to take place in February 2017.

Following the introduction of the report, the Chair Councillor Phil Cole sought Members’ views. Members felt that it was a good innovation and was good for engaging with young people. However Members expressed some concern in relation to the provision of resources for the Youth Council elections during the preparation for May’s Mayoral and all-out Council election. Members enquired whether it was feasible for Smart phone technology to be used for future elections such as Local/Mayoral elections. Members were advised that the Council’s Electoral Team would be interested observers of the pilot but would otherwise have no involvement as the Youth Council elections were carried out by Children’s Services. It was also noted that the Director of Learning Opportunities and Skills, Damian Allen was interested in moving forward with the proposal. With regard to elections carried out by the Electoral Team, it was advised that there would be a lot to learn and questions to be asked to gain assurances that Smart Phone Technology could be used for statutory elections particularly when there was still some reluctance by the public to the use of postal votes.

Councillor Charlie Hogarth asked whether there was any way Members of the Committee could look at how the system worked. The Chair suggested that the Committee receive a presentation by the company supplying the Block-chain technology.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) the Committee request that the Directorate of Learning Opportunities and Skills hold the election for the Doncaster Youth Council representatives by using smartphone technology; and
- (2) a report be submitted to the next meeting asking the Committee to consider when the first election would be that this technology could be piloted.

8 EVALUATION OF THE BURGHWALLIS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING REFERENDUM HELD ON 27TH OCTOBER 2016

The Committee considered a report which outlined the details of the second Neighbourhood Planning Referendum election that took place in Burghwallis on Thursday 27th October, 2016.

Members were advised that the outcome of the referendum was in favour of using the Neighbourhood Plan for Burghwallis to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area. Out of an electorate of 245 the number of electors who voted at the Referendum was 87 (35.51% turnout) of which 76 electors were in favour of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Burghwallis area.

Councillor Kevin Rodgers asked whether elections for such small areas could be carried out by post instead of having a Polling Station. It was advised that there was a requirement to have a Polling Station and a minimum of two staff. It was also noted that the cost of the election was borne by the Planning directorate who were eligible to receive funding.

Members were also advised that there were 2 further Referendums for Armthorpe and Edlington. Although no date had been set both plans had been forwarded to independent examiners.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9 UPDATE ON THE ANNUAL CANVASS

The Committee received an update report on the Annual Canvass and the number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services Team. Since the production of the report a further breakdown of the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) was circulated at the meeting which showed a further increase in responses. It was also envisaged that this would continue throughout this week through the telephone canvassing exercise. Further details with regard to how the Electoral Team were being proactive to increase the number of electors were identified within paragraph 8 of the report.

In response to a query regarding the use of all agencies in helping to increase responses, it was reported that data matching takes place with the Council's Council Tax and Benefits Team which gives access to the system to enable double checking on electors particularly in relation to empty properties.

It was asked what the cost difference was for posting forms. Members were advised that the Council pay for the service which was part of the express system and whilst a definite figure could not be given, it was around 10p which was not a huge amount although there was still a significant amount of officer time imputing the information from the forms. Members felt that people may be more inclined to register to vote on-line if there was an incentive to do so. It was noted that although the Annual Canvass would be published on the 1st December, further canvass work would continue within January and February.

Overall members were extremely pleased with the report and conveyed their thanks to Trina and the Electoral Services Team who provided an excellent service to the residents of the Borough.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

10 URGENT ACTION TAKEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 36 - TEMPORARY APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO HIGH MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

The Committee received a report which confirmed the action taken in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 36 in March 2016 to appoint Councillors Cynthia Ransome and Jonathan Wood on a temporary basis to High Melton Parish Council for the purpose of attending a meeting to establish a quorum and enable the Parish Council to make necessary appointments to its membership.

RESOLVED that the urgent action taken in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 36 by the Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services on 17 March 2016 in consultation with the Chair of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee be noted.

Prior to the conclusion of the meeting, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services stated that since the Committee had last met Trina Barber had now been appointed to the post of Electoral Services Manager on a permanent basis. The Committee congratulated Trina on her recent appointment and for all her hard work carried out whilst in her interim role.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____