

**To the Chair and Members of the
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

**COMBINED LOCAL (DISTRICT AND PARISH COUNCIL) ELECTIONS AND
REFERENDUM ON VOTING SYSTEM AT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS –
5TH MAY 2011 – PROGRESS REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Local Election, both District and Parish Council, and subject to the passage of the legislation through Parliament the Referendum on the Voting System to be used at Parliamentary General Elections are to take place on the 5th May 2011. The purpose of this report is to provide information on progress that has been made in the initial preparation for the elections.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Committee is asked to consider and approve the report subject to any comments it wishes to make.

BACKGROUND

3. Following the Parliamentary Election on the 6th May 2010 the Government announced its intention to hold a Referendum allowing people to make a choice on the voting system to be used at Parliamentary Elections. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill enacts the provisions for the referendum allowing voters to express a preference between current first past the post and the alternative vote system. The bill has not completed its passage through Parliament but it is anticipated that this will happen by the 16th February 2011 the latest date for the Referendum to take place on the 5th May. Confirmation on the progress of the bill will be reported at the meeting.
4. The legislation provides that the lead officer – Chief Counting Officer – is the Chair of the Electoral Commission who has appointed Regional and Local Counting Officers who will be the Returning Officers of Local Councils in their Respective areas. The Regional Counting Officer for Yorkshire and the Humber is the Chief Executive and Returning Officer of Wakefield Joanne Roney.
5. The organisation of a combined election creates additional complexities over

the organisation of a single election and it will be essential to take these issues into account as part of the planning process. This situation will be exacerbated with the addition of the Parish Council Elections which will be taking place in addition to the District Council Elections and the Referendum. In the event that the Parliamentary Election is held on a different date and is not combined with the Local elections contingency arrangements will operate to meet this eventuality.

6. The legislation provides detailed provision for both the elections and the referendum and the commission is issuing detailed requirements for the conduct of the referendum to ensure consistency nationally particularly in response to some of the issues experienced in some areas last year. There are however commonalities in the requirements for each project which will assist in ensuring a consistent approach in line with good practice.
7. The cost of combined elections is shared where facilities are used for both elections e.g. polling stations. This is on an actual cost basis usually where there are two elections taking place this will be 50%, however in some areas there will also be Parish Council Elections taking place resulting in costs being shared on 33.3% basis.
8. Planning is underway to put in place all the usual arrangements for polling stations; issue and opening of postal votes; nominations; the verification and count along with the numerous other arrangements that are necessary for the conduct of a successful election.
9. A key consideration will be the verification and count which will be more complicated because of the requirements of the two Elections and Referendum. The additional requirements imposed by legislation to ensure the security of the poll, particularly in relation to postal voting, impacts on the operation of the count and taking account of this it is intended that the verification of the 3 ballot papers and the counting of votes for the District Election will take place on Thursday night following the close of polls. The count for the Parish Elections will be undertaken on the morning of Friday the 6th May 2011 commencing at 10.00am, although this may be adjusted dependent on the number of contested Parish Councils. The count for the Referendum must start at 4.00pm on the 6th May 2011.
10. Taking these issues into account on Thursday night the ballot boxes would be received at the count venue the verification of both the Parliamentary and Local ballot papers would be undertaken followed by the counting of the ballot papers for the Parliamentary election. The ballot papers for the local election would be sealed and secured ready for counting on Friday morning.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11. The elections and referendum are a statutory duty and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OBJECTIVES

12.

Doncaster Priorities	Implications of this initiative
A Prosperous Place	The democratic process contributes directly to the well being and prosperity of the area
Skills & Lifelong Learning	See note in Prosperous Place
Healthy & Caring	See note in Prosperous Place
Safer, Cleaner & Greener	See note in Prosperous Place
Equality of Opportunity (Cross-Cutting)	See note in Prosperous Place
Improving Neighbourhoods Together (Cross-cutting)	See note in Prosperous Place
Protecting The Environment (Cross-cutting)	See note in Prosperous Place
Achieving Excellence	See note in Prosperous Place

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

13. The delivery of an election is a significant and complex undertaking with strict statutory deadlines. Planning is a key component in reducing or eliminating risks.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. The provisions for the conduct of the Local election are contained in the Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006, the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 and the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill. These regulations set detailed requirements for the conduct of the elections and referendum subject to the requirements of primary legislation. In addition the authority has a statutory duties relating to the provision of resources to the Returning Officer for the resources conduct of the Local Elections under section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15. The cost of the District election is met by the Council, Parish Council elections are charged to the respective parishes whilst funding for the Referendum is met by the Government. The combination of the elections and the sharing of costs will reduce the overall cost burden of the elections to all parties. Provision has been made within the 2011 budget for the cost of the Local election.

CONSULTATION

16. Consultation is not undertaken in connection with elections however activities will be undertaken at a national and local level to raise awareness and promote participation.

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTORS

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

File –Local and Parliamentary Election – 5th May 2011

**ROB VINCENT
RETURNING OFFICER AND
LOCAL COUNTING OFFICER**