

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

12TH FEBRUARY, 2013

A meeting of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on TUESDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Kevin Rodgers  
Vice-Chair Councillor Sue Wilkinson

Councillors Patricia Bartlett, Phil Cole, Nuala Fennelly, Moira Hood, John McHale, Bill Mordue and Jane Nightingale.

APOLOGIES:

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Eric Tatton-Kelly.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

14. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE HELD ON 20TH NOVEMBER, 2012

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee held on 20th November, 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With regard to minute number 11 of the above minutes, which related to the minutes of the previous EDSC meeting held on 8th October 2012, where Members had requested various statistics in relation to the turnout levels for the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) Elections in November 2012, the Chair pointed out that he understood that the Regulations had indicated that, at the very least, figures by constituency would be available and he requested that this information be circulated to Members of the Committee. In response, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services undertook to check the Regulations to see what information could be provided and, subject to his findings, arrange for this to be circulated to Members.

15. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MAYORAL ELECTION ON 2<sup>ND</sup> MAY 2013

The Committee considered a report which outlined the arrangements being put in place for the Mayoral Election to be held on 2nd May 2013.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that a number of initiatives that were successfully

introduced for the PCC Elections in November 2012 would be repeated again for the Mayoral Election, including:-

- Re-assembling the Project Group, comprising all the key players for the Election, to enable greater co-ordination and understanding of roles in preparing for the Election;
- Use of the Carr House Centre for Postal Votes;
- The Count Venue – although not settled yet, Officers were hoping to use Doncaster Racecourse again as the venue for the Count, as the additional space that this provided compared to the Dome had been appreciated and used to good effect in the PCC Election;
- Drop-off points for the delivery of the ballot boxes by Presiding Officers at close of poll would be set up again;
- The Count would be split into a series of ‘mini-counts’ to enable problems to be easily identified and greater accuracy achieved;

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services also confirmed that Linda Lawty had recently been appointed to the key post of Electoral Services Manager and would take up her position on 20 February 2013.

With regard to the Mayoral Booklet, in which each of the Mayoral Candidates prepared an Address, Councillor Bill Mordue queried whether Officers would be meeting with the Candidates to explain what they could and could not say in their Addresses to avoid them making pledges or claims that were illegal and/or impossible to deliver. In reply, the Assistant Director confirmed that Officers did intend to meet with the Candidates to discuss various issues, including the contents of their Addresses, but he pointed out that the rules were not as restrictive as might be expected in terms of what could be said by Candidates’ in their Addresses. The Assistant Director undertook to circulate a briefing note to all Members of the Council, outlining details of the rules/restrictions in place in terms of the contents of the Mayoral Candidates’ Addresses and what control, if any, the Council had in this respect.

In response to comments by Members that it would be preferable if the Count was conducted on the Thursday night, so that the result was known sooner rather than later, the Assistant Director explained that Officers were of the view that a better outcome would be achieved if the Count was carried out on the Friday morning, when staff were refreshed. He agreed to relay the Committee’s view to the Chief Executive, with whom the final decision in this regard would rest as the Returning Officer.

In reply to a Member’s question as to whether the mini-count process would be carried out on a ward by ward basis, the Assistant Director stated that this was still to be determined but such an approach would make sense.

Councillor Phil Cole enquired whether there were any restrictions or controls

over the use of slogans on ballot papers by Independent Candidates. In reply, the Assistant Director stated that he would clarify the position regarding the use of slogans in the briefing note to be circulated to Members.

During further discussion, Councillor Phil Cole queried whether the Council had any follow-up mechanisms in place to contact voters whose postal votes had been rejected due to incorrectly completed postal vote statements to help minimise the risk of them making the same mistakes again at future elections. In reply, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the Council did not have the staff resources to be able to contact individual voters whose postal votes had been rejected. He also felt that if voters were contacted, this might cause unnecessary distress or confusion to some people who might not appreciate the reasons why the Council was carrying out the exercise. The Head of Democratic Services stated that as this was a national issue, he would contact the Electoral Commission to see if there was any best practice that the Council could adopt in minimising the number of rejected postal votes. Members then requested the Officers to circulate details of the number of rejected postal votes by Ward at the Elections held in May 2012, and asked that a breakdown of the reasons for rejected postal votes at the forthcoming Mayoral Election in May 2013 be provided following the event.

With regard to the Count venue, some Members expressed the opinion that the Council should continue to use the Dome for this purpose and not the Racecourse, on the basis that it was Council-owned and using the venue would bring income into the facility. The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services pointed out that, while this Committee could express a preference as to the venue for the Count, the final decision in this regard would rest with the Returning Officer. On being put to the vote, with 5 Members voting for, 2 against and 2 abstentions, it was agreed that the Committee's favoured venue for the Mayoral Election Count is The Dome.

In response to a query regarding the likely impact of the new legislation relating to Individual Electoral Registration on the Council, the Head of Democratic Services gave a brief update on the preparations being made for the transition to the new system, including details of the data matching exercise to be carried out in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions Database. He undertook to include an update on this matter in the briefing note to be sent to Members picking up the points raised at this meeting.

After the Chair had asked the Officers to keep Members informed and updated on the preparations for the Mayoral Election as and when necessary, and had indicated that a further meeting of this Committee could be called between now and the date of the Election if this was felt necessary, it was

RESOLVED:

- (i) to note the report and request the Officers to circulate a briefing note to all Members covering all of the points raised and discussed at this meeting, as identified above;

- (ii) that the Returning Officer be informed that this Committee's preferred choice for the Count venue is The Dome and is of the view that the Count should be conducted on the night of the Election (Thursday 2nd May 2013) instead of on the Friday morning; and
- (iii) to note that Officers will meet with each of the Mayoral Candidates to advise them on the contents of their Mayoral Addresses, prior to being published in the Mayoral Booklet.