

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

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MAYORAL ELECTION ON 2ND MAY 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report advises Members on the arrangements being put in place for the Mayoral Election to be held on 2nd May 2013. The Count will take place the following day on Friday, 3rd May 2013.

RECOMMENDATION

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

BACKGROUND

3. On 3rd May 2012, the electorate of Doncaster voted to retain the mayoral model of executive governance for Doncaster. The mayoral term is for a period of 4 years and the next mayoral election will take place on 2nd May 2013. A timetable showing the key milestones for the Election is attached at Appendix A. The procedural and legal requirements are largely governed by the Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007. There are many similarities between the conduct of a mayoral election and the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) Election which was held on 15th November 2012. The Chief Executive and her staff successfully introduced a number of key changes in advance of the PCC Election which significantly improved the Council's election performance.
4. Save for the fact that the Mayor is elected by the people of Doncaster, whereas the Police and Crime Commissioner was elected by the people of South Yorkshire, the processes are very similar, including the use of the second preference vote and the counting arrangements. For these reasons, it is appropriate to utilise the same methodology for the Mayoral Election. Initiatives successfully implemented for the PCC included:-

- (i) The Project Group

A team was created which comprised all of the key players for the election. This included the Council's own Election staff,

colleagues from the Communications Team, the Insurance Team, and from various departments at North Bridge, including Transport and Property Maintenance, the printer (Print Image Limited), Royal Mail, the venue (Doncaster Racecourse) and South Yorkshire Police. Meetings were held on a regular basis and allowed greater co-ordination than had ever been achieved before and a significant improvement in understanding of respective roles. This group made a noticeable contribution to the smooth running of the election, both in the run-up and on Election Day itself. Colleagues from Public Building Maintenance undertook a variety of tasks from the construction and installation of ramps to improve disabled access to polling venues, to the erection of temporary fencing which allowed a part of a school building to be used without any risk of unauthorised access to other parts of the school. The Project Group will be assembled again in the run up to the Mayoral Election.

(ii) Use of the Carr House Centre for Postal Votes

The Council typically has 65,000 members of the electorate registered for a postal vote. This is a significant undertaking for the Council, particularly the checking of the votes received, which includes scanning and checking of signatures against the original application. Members may be aware that this task, which usually involves 40 members of staff on a daily basis (over a 2 week period), has previously been held at Copley House. Those facilities were cramped, inefficient and interfered with the remainder of the election preparation which was undertaken in the same room that the votes were being processed. The main hall and a number of former classrooms at Carr House were booked for 3 weeks for this purpose and the staff had plenty of room to operate and were able to complete the process without any distractions. Councillor Pat Knight visited the Carr House Centre to observe the process and was very impressed with the calm and efficient manner with which the task was completed. The Carr House Centre has been booked for the Mayoral Election and the same process will be utilised.

(iii) The Count Venue

Doncaster's election counts have taken place at The Dome for several years. The Dome was not available in November due to an existing annual booking and the Count was held at Doncaster Racecourse for the first time since the Racecourse was redeveloped by Arena Leisure Plc. The main Exhibition Hall is larger than that the main Hall at the Dome and the additional space was used to good effect. Not only was there greater circulation space, but the Count staff also had more room and it was possible to count multiple boxes within the same ward

without risk of ballot papers being counted and allocated to the wrong box with the commensurate confusion and delay.

(iv) Bad and Doubtful Papers

Members may have seen that a significant feature of the London Mayoral Election was the problems caused by the so-called "Bad and Doubtful Ballot Papers". The use of the second preference system caused huge problems in London and a total of 445,466 were invalidly completed and not counted. In anticipation of similar difficulties, ten members of staff were trained to deal with the many permutations of voting which the Electoral Commission judged to be valid or invalid as appropriate. The percentage of bad and doubtful papers actually dealt with was considerably less than the ratio evidenced in London. Nevertheless, the preparations were prudent and it will be appropriate to have the same arrangements for the Mayoral Election, albeit for a smaller number staff trained for the task.

(v) The Mini-Count Process

A unique feature of both the PCC and the Mayoral Election is that all of the electorate are voting for the same small number of candidates. It is possible to undertake the count as a single whole, however this can be confusing and does not lend itself to the ready identification of problems. By splitting the count into a series of "mini-counts" problems can be easily identified and greater accuracy achieved. If there are any inconsistencies, then it is only necessary to review a smaller proportion of the count as required. This process worked very well at the PCC and will be utilised again for the Mayoral Election.

(vi) The Elections Team

The key post of Electoral Services Manager has been vacant since Summer 2012 and the Elections Team has been under strength since 2011. These gaps were closed during the PCC by the employment of locum Election Managers and the utilisation of other staff from within Legal and Democratic Services. The post of Electoral Services Manager was nationally advertised and has been offered to a very experienced elections manager. Subject only to the receipt of satisfactory reference, the new post holder will take up her position at the end of February 2013. The staffing complement has been increased from 5 to 6 leaving 3 posts to be filled. A number of staff are currently "at risk" of redundancy within Legal and Democratic Services and those vacancies will be ring-fenced to the at risk staff.

(vii) Other Preparation

A project plan based on the Electoral Commission's template incorporating key activities and deadlines is being produced and monitored as part of the preparation. The procedural documents produced for the PCC will be amended to reflect the needs of the Mayoral Election. Detailed training for staff is being organised and will be delivered in good time for the Election.

THE MAYORAL BOOKLET

5. A unique feature of the Mayoral Election is the Election Booklet. Candidates each prepare an Address which is included in a booklet sent to every household. The printing costs are shared by the Candidates and the distribution costs are met by the Council.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6. Once a mayoral system of governance has been endorsed by a Referendum, a mayoral election is a statutory duty and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

7. The delivery of an election is a significant and complex undertaking for the Council and the statutory requirements must be adhered to. A number of significant improvements were introduced for the PCC Election and those improvements will be utilised and improved for the Mayoral Election. The template Risk Register and other documentation produced by the Electoral Commission are being populated and will form the basis for the planning for this Election. A range of contingency arrangements are also in place to deal with problems that may arise.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8. The provisions for the conduct of the Mayoral election are contained in the Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007. These regulations set detailed requirements for the conduct of the elections subject to the requirements of primary legislation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9. The cost of the Mayoral election is met by the Council and will be contained within the wider Elections Budget allocation for 2013/14 which totals £537,300.

CONSULTATION

10. Consultation is not undertaken as part of the election process. However, joint working, briefings and advice are undertaken with

candidates, agents, staff and partners as appropriate.

REPORT AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTORS

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Deadline for inclusion on the register to be used for nominations	1st March	
Poll cards despatched by Printers to Royal Mail for posting	21st March	
Publish the Notice of Election	26th March	
Nomination Period commences	26th March	
Last day for the receipt of Nominations	5th April	Noon
Publish a Statement of Persons Nominated	9th April	Noon
Deadline for appointment of election agents	10th April	Noon
Last date for withdrawals of candidature	10th April	Noon
Last date for electors to register for voting in the election	17th April	5pm
Last day for new applications or amendments to or cancellation of existing postal/proxy records	17th April	5pm
Despatch of Postal Votes from Printers (1st issue) to Royal Mail for posting	17th April	
Start of daily postal vote openings	22nd April	
Despatch of Postal Votes from Printers (2nd issue) to Royal Mail for posting	23rd April	
Last day to Publish Notice of Poll	24th April	
Last date for new Proxy vote applications	24th April	5 p.m.
Last date for the appointment of Counting Agents	25th April	
First day for requests to replace undelivered/spoil ballot papers	26th April	
Last day for requests to replace undelivered or spoiled ballot papers	2nd May	5 p.m.
Last day for new applications to vote by proxy on grounds of a medical emergency	2nd May	5 p.m.
Last day to make alterations to the register to correct a clerical error	2nd May	9 p.m.
POLLING DAY 7:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.	2nd May	
COUNTING OF VOTES	3rd May	9.30 a.m.
Last day for the receipt of election agent expenses	7th June	
Return of Candidates declaration	14th June	



Doncaster
Metropolitan Borough Council

Mayoral Election – 2 May 2013

Election Timetable