

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

26TH NOVEMBER, 2013

A meeting of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on TUESDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Moira Hood
Vice-Chair - Councillor Kevin Rodgers

Councillors Patricia Bartlett, Phil Cole, Deborah Hutchinson, Hilary McNamee, Bill Mordue, Jane Nightingale and Sue Wilkinson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Yvonne Woodcock.

APOLOGIES:

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Nuala Fennelly.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

11. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE HELD ON 9TH AND 23RD JULY, 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee held on 9th and 23rd July, 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. ELECTORAL SERVICES REPORT

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services team in relation to future elections and changes brought about by the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services summarised the main points in the report in respect of current activity in Electoral Services, preparing for IER and future elections.

In outlining the timeframe for the implementation of IER, the Assistant Director confirmed that electors who failed to register under IER in 2014 would automatically be carried forward from the register published in 2014 to the following year to enable the maximum number of electors to vote in the General and Local Elections in May 2015. However, it was noted that the

postal or proxy vote would be deleted for anyone who had been carried forward and they would need to go to the polling station to vote in 2015 unless they registered individually and completed a new postal vote application. Furthermore, Electors who did not match automatically would be reminded in 2014 and 2015 to provide the relevant information and would have until December 2015 to register under the new system when anyone who had not registered to vote individually before December 2015 would be removed from the register. The Assistant Director explained that publicity would be arranged to ensure that as many electors as possible were made aware of these changes.

With regard to paragraph 24 of the report, the Assistant Director advised Members of a correction to the figure given in the first sentence in relation to the number of canvass forms returned, which now read '67,480'.

Concerning future elections, the Assistant Director confirmed that the Returning Officer had decided to use the Racecourse as a count venue until after the Mayoral and all out Council Elections in 2017, given that there were many advantages in using this venue, such as the provision of additional space.

General discussion followed, during which Members asked a range of questions on the contents of the report. With regard to a query concerning the Register of Electors and whether some form of warning could be sent to residents about the importance of registering, the Assistant Director confirmed that registration was still a legal requirement, although this was not rigidly enforced. He added that 3 reminders in total were sent to electors about returning their registration forms but that there might be some merit in highlighting the fact that residents would be at risk of prosecution if they failed to return the form, perhaps in the final reminder sent out.

With regard to targeting people who were not on the Register, Councillor Kevin Rodgers commented that there was scope for the Council to collaborate with other outside organisations and agencies in contacting hard to reach residents in the Borough. He cited, as an example, Credit Unions who did not give out loans unless applicants were on the Register of Electors.

In response to questions from Councillor Phil Cole, the Assistant Director undertook to circulate information to all members of the Committee on the following issues:

- The proportion of people currently registering online;
- The sources of information the Council was permitted to use in data matching to confirm electors;
- Regarding the postal vote refresh conducted in August, the proportion of people who did not renew their postal vote registrations, but who were known to still be on the Register; and
- With reference to evidence of lower registration levels in areas where there was greater prevalence of private rented sector accommodation, details of the proportions of private rented sector accommodation across the Borough.

It was then

RESOLVED that, subject to the above information being circulated to members of the Committee, the contents of the report be noted, including the decision of the Returning Officer to use the Racecourse as a count venue until after the Mayoral and all out Council Elections in 2017.

13. ELECTORAL REVIEW UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the current Electoral Review being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the LGBCE had announced earlier that day that it would support a figure of 54 as the intended total number of Councillors that the Council would have with effect from the all-out Borough Council elections in 2015.

It was noted that the next stage of the process would begin with the LGBCE inviting all interested parties to propose a new pattern of warding arrangements for Doncaster, based on a Council size of 54 Councillors. This stage of the Review would run from 26th November 2013 to 3rd February 2014. Once the LGBCE had considered all the proposals received, it would take a provisional decision on warding arrangements and publish its draft recommendations in May 2014 when it would consult local people again. Final recommendations were due to be published in October 2014 and the new electoral arrangements would come into effect for the Council elections in 2015.

In outlining the factors to be taken into account by the LGBCE when it considered proposals for future warding arrangements in the Borough, the Senior Policy and Performance Officer explained that the Commission would aim to recommend a pattern of wards that achieved good electoral equality and reflected community identities and interests. It would also seek to use strong, easily-identifiable boundaries. She added that the Council size of 54 could be adjusted up or down by 1, depending on whether the Commission could fit 54 Councillors comfortably into the new ward pattern.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services stated that the cross-party member working group would now reconvene with a view to drawing up recommendations on a suitable pattern of wards in Doncaster. He also suggested that the LGBCE could be invited to give another presentation to all Members on the next stage of the review process.

During subsequent discussion on potential numbers of Members in each ward, Councillor Phil Cole expressed the view that single Member wards were more appropriate for rural parts of the Borough, while other wards based on areas covering natural communities, such as Mexborough and Rossington, would require 3 Members. Arising from a request made by Councillor Cole, the Officers agreed to circulate to Members a breakdown of electors by Polling Districts using the electoral register that the LGBCE would rely on in

considering the new warding arrangements.

RESOLVED that, subject to the request for further information outlined above, the contents of the report be noted.

14. FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH APPLICATION - SARAH STEVENSON MBE

Members considered a report which asked the Committee to consider supporting a request to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on Sarah Stevenson MBE, to recognise her sporting achievements, her influence on the sport of Taekwondo nationally, her endorsement and promotion of local charities and continued support of sport in schools and martial arts clubs across the Borough.

After the Committee had unanimously supported the application to bestow this honour on Sarah Stevenson MBE, it was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND THE FULL COUNCIL to confer the Freedom of the Borough on Sarah Stevenson MBE.