Doncaster
Metropolitan Borough Council

To all Members of the

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

AGENDA

Notice is given that a Meeting of the above Panel
is to be held as follows:

VENUE: 007a - Civic Office Waterdale, Doncaster, DN1 3BU
DATE: Tuesday, 7th July, 2015
TIME: 10.00 am

Members of the public are welcome to attend

Items for Discussion:

1. Apologies for absence.

2. To consider the extent, if any, to which the public and press are to be excluded from the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest, if any.

4. Minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee Meeting held on 17th March, 2015

A. Reports where the public and press may not be excluded.

5. Evaluation of the Parliamentary General, Borough Council and Parish Council Elections held on 7th May 2015 and Progress on the Ongoing Implementation of Individual Electoral Registration.

Jo Miller
Chief Executive

Issued on: 29th June, 2015

Senior Governance Officer
For this meeting:
for this meeting:

Jonathan Goodrum, Senior Governance
Officer. Tel. 013602 736709

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

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

Councillors Sean Gibbons, Pat Haith, Charlie Hogarth, Majid Khan, John McHale, Jane Nightingale, Kevin Rodgers, Clive Stone and Sue Wilkinson

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

17TH MARCH, 2015

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on TUESDAY, 17TH MARCH, 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Jane Nightingale
Vice-Chair - Councillor Alan Smith

Councillors Phil Cole, Nuala Fennelly, Charlie Hogarth, Dave Shaw and Sue Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Cooke, Deborah Hutchinson and Kevin Rodgers.

11.   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

12.   MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE HELD ON 25TH NOVEMBER 2014 AND 20TH JANUARY 2015

With regard to the resolution in Minute Number 7 from the meeting held on 25th November 2014, where Members had requested clarification as to the numbers of agents/visitors permitted to attend Counts with Candidates, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that this information would be provided in the Candidates' packs.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee meetings held on 25th November 2014 and 20th January 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13.   ELECTORAL SERVICES UPDATE ON KEY ISSUES REPORT

The Committee received a report which provided an update on preparations for the Parliamentary, Local and Parish Elections in May 2015.

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services began by introducing Keith Porter, who had been appointed as Electoral Services Manager on a consultancy basis via the Association of Electoral Administrators. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that Mr Porter was vastly experienced in the Electoral Services field and came with very good references. The Assistant Director also introduced Trina Barber to the Committee, who had been seconded into the Elections Team to provide additional support during the Elections period and had already played a central role in the recent review of polling districts and polling places.

In summarising the salient points in the report, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that three separate Election Counts would take place at Doncaster Racecourse as follows:-

- Thursday 7th May 2015 following the close of poll – verification of all ballot papers for the Parliamentary, Local and Parish Elections followed by the counting of the Parliamentary ballot papers;

- Friday 8th May 2015 at 2.00 p.m. – counting of Local ballot papers;

- Saturday 9th May 2015 at 11.00 a.m. – counting of Parish ballot papers.

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services explained that these arrangements were designed to provide staff with a chance to rest before the Local count. He advised that the law as it currently stood required the verification of all ballot papers before proceeding to any counts. However, Regulations were currently going through Parliament which would relax this rule where a Parliamentary Election was combined with Local/Parish Elections. He added that he was currently seeking further advice on this potential change and would also be discussing the issue at a forthcoming meeting with fellow South Yorkshire Senior Heads of Legal to ascertain the approach they were planning to take.

Councillor Phil Cole stated that he understood that only the Parliamentary ballot papers had to be verified before proceeding to the Parliamentary count and that there was nothing contained in the Regulations which required all ballot papers to be verified first. He also pointed out that the Regulations were silent with regard to the number of staff assigned to the verification of the different ballot papers, therefore it should be possible to prioritise the Parliamentary verification by allocating a larger proportion of staff to this task.

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that the Local and Parish Election counts would be more complex than normal as counting sheets would need to be used by staff due to the large number of candidates involved.

It was noted that the recruitment of staff for the Elections was now virtually complete and that preparations were generally all on track. The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services stated that he was very pleased with the level of support being received from colleagues across the Council towards the Elections process and with the progress made to date.

At this point, with the Chair's consent, Mr Ivan Stark addressed the Committee on a number of concerns he had with regard to alleged corruption in the Electoral system and the difficulties experienced by certain sections of the community in being able to register in order to vote. In response, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services explained that the Council liaised closely with all relevant agencies, including a dedicated Police Officer, throughout the Elections process and that it was satisfied that measures were in place to deal with any inappropriate activities or behaviour. Councillor Phil Cole pointed out that political parties issued guidance to candidates on good behaviour and that Doncaster enjoyed a good record in this respect in its

Elections. With regard to registration, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services explained that unfortunately it was difficult to include certain individuals on the Electoral Register, such as those who were living in hostels or otherwise living a transient lifestyle, who did not have a fixed abode.

General discussion followed, during which Members raised various questions and/or discussed a range of issues in relation to the preparations for the Elections, as summarised below:-

- It was noted that ballot boxes would be colour coded with labels to match the respective colours of each ballot paper to assist voters in identifying the correct box;

- With regard to the role of Returning Officer in respect of the Parliamentary Election, it was noted that the Council's Civic Mayor held this position by law in relation to the Borough constituency, while the High Sheriff of South Yorkshire carried out this role for the two County constituencies. Consequently, the Chief Executive, Jo Miller, would be referred to as Acting Returning Officer for the purposes of the Parliamentary Election.

- Members noted that there would be two Postal Vote envelopes sent out to voters – one for the Parliamentary and Local Elections and one for the Parish Elections, both of which should arrive on the same day.

- In answer to a question, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that it was the Acting Returning Officer's intention to allow those people in attendance at the verification stage of the Parliamentary count to remain in the hall to observe the Count itself. The Agents of Parliamentary candidates would occupy the front rows at tables, with others behind.

- The Chair pointed out that a national 2 minute silence for VE Day was to be held on 8 May at 3.00 p.m. In reply, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services undertook to feed this back to the Chief Executive so that appropriate arrangements could be put in place to accommodate this.

- Arising from discussion on the possibility of using the Youth Centre in Windmill Avenue as a Polling Station instead of a portable unit for Polling Districts GB (Conisbrough and Denaby Ward) and HD/HF (Edlington and Warmsworth), Councillor Phil Cole advised that the Youth Centre premises were disused at the present time and therefore were unavailable for use in the Elections.

- Councillor Charlie Hogarth queried whether the street 'Lawn Garth' could be moved from NH Polling District into the Polling District NA with Kirkby Avenue, to vote at the Polling Station on Queens Drive. He added that if it was too late to make such an alteration now, perhaps this change could be made after the Elections in May for the future. In reply, Trina Barber stated that the Elections Team would look into this matter and keep Councillor Hogarth informed as to the actions being

taken.

- With regard to the recent review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Chair expressed the view that consultation with Members in this exercise had been very good and that it had proved very useful to have an input from Councillors to take full advantage of their extensive local knowledge of their respective Wards.

- The Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the Electoral Registers would definitely be completed in time for the Candidates and Agents meetings to be held on 27th March. The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services added that, in the meantime, Officers would endeavour to send an update to Members on the latest position with the Registers.

- Concerning the receipt and checking of Nomination Papers, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that nomination papers for candidates standing in the Parliamentary Elections would be checked upon their delivery while the Agents waited. However, the nomination papers for the Local and Parish Elections would need to be left at the office for checking. Agents for candidates in these elections would be informed of any errors in their paperwork by telephone as soon as possible, and validation letters would be despatched at the end of each day to ensure that these would be received by Agents the following day confirming that the paperwork had been completed correctly.

- It was reported that a briefing was scheduled to be held on 10th April for all successfully nominated Candidates and their Agents.

- The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services informed the Committee that an Induction Programme for Members would take place at the Civic Office on 12 – 14 May inclusive. In response to questions, he explained that those Members who were re-elected would be free to dip in and out of the Programme across the 3 days, as clearly some elements such as the tour of the Civic Office would only be beneficial to newly elected Members. The Assistant Director then summarised the content of each day of the Induction Programme, identifying those elements that would be suitable both for new Members and for re-elected Members as a refresher. Arising from a Member's suggestion, the Assistant Director undertook to look at designing the structure of the Induction Programme so that the content aimed at newly elected Members was arranged in one block, e.g. on Day One, and those elements suitable for all Members to attend as refresher training were arranged in another block.

- In response to a Member's request, the Officers agreed to look into the possibility of displaying posters showing the Election results as they were announced at the Local and Parish counts, instead of the results only being displayed as rolling banners on television screens in the count venue.

  It was then

RESOLVED that, subject to the above comments and actions agreed, the update on preparations for the Parliamentary, Local and Parish Elections in May 2015 be noted.

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

EVALUATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL, BOROUGH COUNCIL AND PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS HELD ON 7TH MAY 2015 AND PROGRESS ON THE ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   The Parliamentary General, Borough Council and Parish Council elections took place on 7th May 2015. The purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the election and to highlight the key processes for improvements to be incorporated into the Elections Project Plan. Any additional issues identified at this meeting will be incorporated into the service development plans for future elections.

2.   This report also updates Members on the ongoing implementation of Individual Electoral Registration.

EXEMPT REPORT

3.   Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.   The Committee is asked to approve the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

5.   National and Local Elections are the cornerstone of our democratic process and give the electorate the opportunity to hold politicians to account and shape the future direction of national and local government.

6.   When Electoral Registration and Elections are well-managed and run the electorate are enfranchised, suitably informed, receive a high quality service and have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended. Similarly, candidates need to have the information they require in order to take part and both candidates and the electorate need to have confidence in the process and the outcome.

7.   The committee will be aware that it is no longer the case that a single member of the household registers every individual to vote that happens to live in the household. Each individual now has the right and the responsibility to register themselves to vote.

BACKGROUND

Election Review

8.   For reasons that Members will be familiar with and also set out in the report to Council on 22nd May 2015, the elections in Doncaster this year was the largest combination of polls since 1979. Key features included all-out elections for the first time, new ward boundaries, a Parliamentary General Election involving the leader of a national party and 23 contested all-out parish elections.

9.   A report of the results of the combined poll was presented to Council on 22nd May 2015 and all Members were invited to contribute to the post-election review by contacting the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services with any comments by the end of June 2015.

10.   Following the Electoral Review undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and associated decisions of the Secretary of State, the Borough Elections were for a two year term of office and the Parish Council Elections for a six year term of office. The purpose of that is to allow the Borough Elections to be run alongside the Mayoral Election in May 2017 and the Mayoral, Borough and Parish Elections to be combined from May 2021. Whilst it is unlikely that we will have a Parliamentary General Election combined with our Mayoral, Borough or Parish Elections for the foreseeable future, the experience from running an election of this scale and the lessons learned from having an all-out Borough Election for the first time, will all be very valuable in informing our preparation for future elections. Further comments on the combining of polls are given below.

11.   Overall, the elections were successfully delivered, with a very significant contribution made by individuals and teams throughout the Council. A number of positive comments were made by candidates and agents in relation to the election process and, specifically, the verification and counts. Whilst the 3 elections were successfully delivered, the combination of polls did stretch the Council's resources, particularly in relation to meeting the demand for additional staff at polling stations and the Thursday evening count. All posts were filled but we did not have, for example, the traditional safety net of a bank of staff on standby to cover for illness or other emergencies.

12.   There is also some indication that the combination of polls led to some confusion on the part of the electorate and that is probably reflected in the number of spoilt or unused ballot papers or votes. Whilst Doncaster had the largest combination of polls in terms of scale, Bedford Borough Council had to manage a Parliamentary, Borough, Mayoral, Parish and Council Tax Referendum on the same day with all of the commensurate difficulties. Senior commentators are concerned about the impact of combining polls in this way and are likely to make representations to the Cabinet Office and others, encouraging them to limit the number of polls that can be combined on a single day.

13. A review of the May 2015 elections has begun and a summary of the areas identified for improvement are shown at Appendix 1. The Committee is requested to consider Appendix 1 and comment accordingly.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

14. Members will be aware that electoral registration is now done on an individual basis rather than a single member of the household making a return for all residents.

15. The 2014/15 canvass commenced in September 2014. At that point, there were 133,116 properties in Doncaster and an electorate of 221,589. We received 114,809 responses to the initial Household Enquiry Form [HEF] without any prompting. Those responses came via the internet, post or telephone. A total of 18,307 reminders were subsequently issued. In addition, we also sent canvassers to the door, although not in every case. We do continue to have difficulty in recruiting canvassers and need to revise our strategies to deliver an improvement in this regard. Approximately 11,500 individuals were removed from the Register as a consequence of a failure to either respond at all or provide the correct information for two consecutive years. We have written to those persons that were removed and invited them to re-register. As a consequence of all of this, 7,969 persons (as at 1st June 2015) had either been re-registered or entered onto the Register for the first time. The electorate now stands at 217,869. The canvass response rate for the household enquiry forms is 87.99%, which is slightly down on last year's figure of 88.6%.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED and REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

16. Elections and Electoral Registrations are required by statute and must be delivered in accordance with the relevant legislation. Undertaking a review at the conclusion of every major election gives an opportunity to learn lessons and improve the planning and delivery of future elections. Input into the review from members will provide perspective and add value to the exercise.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. There are comprehensive statutory provisions covering both Individual Electoral Registration and the delivery of elections.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. The costs of the combined elections will be shared with the Home Office where applicable. Parish Councils are charged for the Parish Elections. Legal and Democratic Services have an annual budget which funds the cost of the Borough Elections.

19. The 2016/17 budget proposals contain a saving of £97k relating to the Boundary Review and £187k relating to the change in election cycle to all out Borough Elections coinciding with Mayoral Elections.

20. Doncaster Council has received additional funding from government to cover the implementation costs of the change to Individual Electoral

Registration. The grant for 2015/16 is £69k, which is in addition to the core budget for registration of £143k.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

21. The Council's ICT Department extended the Council's network to the count venue at the Racecourse in order to ensure that connectivity was maintained. Laptops were utilised by the Senior Counters and other staff to support the count process, particularly the compilation of votes from the "Counting Sheets" that are an essential requirement of all-out elections and the election was managed by the Council's eXpress Elections software. Many aspects of the electoral registration process are accessible by electronic means.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

22. An Impact Assessment was undertaken in advance of the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. The conclusion of that assessment was that the move away from a household electoral registration system should have an overall positive impact on equalities. Equality considerations are a key feature of the planning for elections. Practical examples include an assessment of polling stations to ensure wheelchair accessibility, large print stationery and training for the Presiding Officers on, amongst other things, facilitating voting by the visually impaired and how to assist electors to vote in the unlikely event that they were unable to access the polling station. Postal votes are also available to any resident that is on the electoral register.

CONSULTATION

23.
This report has significant implications in terms of the following:

Procurement		Crime & Disorder	
Human Resources		Human Rights & Equalities	
Buildings, Land and Occupiers		Environment & Sustainability	
ICT		Capital Programme	

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Annual Council on 22nd May 2015

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

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Jo Miller
Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer

	What worked well?	To be addressed	Key recommendations
1. Project planning			
	The election planning was based on our existing election plan with amendments to incorporate lessons learned from previous elections, build on successful initiatives (receipt of ballot boxes and the processing of postal votes for example) and, crucially, the combination of 3 polls.	The combination of all-out Borough elections for the first time with new ward boundaries, the General Election with a high profile candidate and the addition of 35 parish polls, created an unprecedented workload and, inevitably, we have learned lessons and identified where improvements can be made. The Election Manager is crucial to the success of the election and we did miss not having an Election Manager that was familiar with our processes, local issues and the eXpress Election software.	Continue to refine and develop project plan to take account of lessons learned, particularly in relation to the key issues referred to below. Recruit to the vacant post of Electoral Services Manager
2. Polling places/stations			
	A statutory Polling Places and Stations Review was undertaken earlier this year. We left this as late as possible in order to conduct the review in the knowledge of the revised ward boundaries. For a number of factors, including the combination of the three polls, it was necessary to increase the number of polling stations from 158 utilised for the recent PCC Election, to 173. We also had an	Changing polling stations led to some confusion amongst the electorate and resulted in a high level of calls from Presiding Officers to the Inspectors and/or the Elections office on polling day in an attempt to identify the correct polling station for an individual voter. The number of calls generated by this issue did cause some disruption.	Feedback from the polling station Inspectors and polling staff on the suitability of individual polling stations will be assessed and inform any changes that may be required. Continue to look at alternatives to mobile polling stations and any options that will avoid closing schools for the day. If a polling station had changed, then this was highlighted on the polling card. However, there was still some confusion

		What worked well?	To be addressed	Key recommendations
		increased number of double stations. We continued to look at ways of avoiding closing schools wherever possible. Similarly, we also looked to minimise the use of mobile polling stations, although there are currently no obvious solutions to reducing the 8 or so we have to utilise at the moment.		and further publicity may be required. We should also look to build a facility within the Council's website which will allow the electorate to identify their polling station by typing in their post code. Also need to explore what information we can give to polling station staff in order that they can quickly direct person to the correct polling station.
3.	**Equipment and stationery**			
		The new light weight ballot boxes worked well. They are considerably lighter than some of the older metal ballot boxes and are easier to secure and store.		Update all of our stock of ballot boxes in this way when funds allow.
4.	**Printers**			
		A very good service was provided by Adare. Adare liaise very closely with the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission and advise the Council in relation to any technical changes. Adare also offer significant savings on postal charges through the use of "Adare Post" which they have negotiated with Royal Mail.		Adare was appointed as the Council's election printer through the NEPO Framework Contract. That contract will expire shortly and is being re-procured by NEPO. The Council will be keen to appoint a printer that has the range of technical skills, customer care and value for money provided by the current supplier.

5. **Software performance**		
The Council purchased eXpress software last year. eXpress is widely regarded as the leading system within the sector. The system is comprehensive and provides all of the tools for the management and delivery of an accurate and efficient process. The system also has functionality and capacity that we are not currently utilising.	Ensure that we make full use of the many functions available via the eXpress software.	Commission training and development for all relevant staff (and certainly not restrict it to the Elections Team given the key roles that were populated by colleagues from elsewhere within the Council) to ensure that the software is used to maximum effect.
6. **Effectiveness of other Council departments.**		
Excellent support from throughout the Council. Elections are now properly regarded as a major corporate event with commensurate support from all directorates. ADs and other senior personnel are appointed as Deputy Returning Officers and discharge key roles. Other departments take responsibility for major aspects of the process utilising our own resources and specialisms as required. Examples include - the management and staffing of the team which received and allocated the 380 plus ballot boxes at the count venue		Continue to make full and appropriate use of all Council resources. Build on the success of this year's Council-wide working, particularly in the knowledge that 2017 will see all-out Council elections combined with the Mayoral Election.

	- handled many aspects of the preparation, management and equipping of the polling stations. - provided stand-by electricians, a locksmith and a mobile polling station for in the event of any problems with polling stations on the day - released staff throughout the organisation in the run up to the election, on election day and at the subsequent counts - provided cover for absent colleagues.		
7. Recruitment and training			
	We trained approximately 440 staff ranging from Presiding Officers and polling station Inspectors, through to Senior Count Staff and others. One successful initiative was the facility which allowed staff to book training sessions on-line.	Feedback indicated a need for greater concentration during training on practical issues, including demonstrations.	Expand the practical component of the training sessions. Incorporate practical demonstrations to cover key areas such as close of poll and the correct completion of documentation. Revisit the training material in the light of experiences from this poll, particularly around the issues which resulted in avoidable telephone calls to the Elections office.
8. Processing/hand ling of queries			
	Excellent support from the Council's Contact Centre. However, that still	The Contact Centre was able to deal with a wider range of calls	Capture now the type of queries that could not be handled by the Contact Centre.

	left a huge volume of calls that were more involved and had to be dealt with by the Elections Team. At times, all of the Elections staff were engaged on calls and that did impact on the completion of other essential tasks.	as its staff had access to "WebReg". Need to consider what further resources or training can be given to the Contact Centre for them to handle a greater proportion of calls.	Consider further specialist training for the Contact Centre staff, access to all key documentation and produce enhanced FAQs covering a wider range of queries. See also the reference above to the post code checker which would allow the electorate to identify their own polling station by simply inserting their own post code onto the Council's website which potentially avoids the need for a significant number of telephone calls.
9. Resources			
	As set out elsewhere, we enjoyed wide-spread support throughout the Council. However, 3 combined polls with 547 nominations created an unprecedented level of work and commensurate demands on the Elections Team. The Elections Team and wider colleagues worked extremely hard to deliver the election in very difficult circumstances.	Ensure maximum use of technology and other resources to reduce the peaks created by the need for manual input.	Ensure eXpress is used to its full capacity. Eliminate hard copy correspondence and replace with e-mails where possible, for example, we sent approximately 1,800 letters out to candidates, agents and others. Could access to the Count be by bar codes or similar sent to smartphones etc?
10. Security/integrity			
	Guidance and information was issued to Candidates and Agents in the nomination pack and briefing sessions.	Some complaints made about, for example, use of social media, imprints on printed material and e-mails and content of election material.	Revisit the material used for the briefing of candidates and agents together with the packs we send out. Supplement the Electoral Commission material with enhanced practical examples and emphasise common issues such as imprints. Social media is likely to play an increasing role and we need to be as clear as possible in the guidance we give.

11. Verification and count arrangements			
Project planning	The verification and count procedures were amended to reflect the combination of polls and, particularly, the introduction of all-out elections. In the run up to the election we ran a number of sessions trialling the different approaches to "counting sheets" and settled on a model which gave the greatest control and security.	The Hatfield re-count on Saturday morning and the huge disparity in the number of candidates and vacancies for individual parishes led to an uneven workload for the 3 count tables. This was only partially balanced by the redistribution of ballot boxes and the utilisation of other count teams to help with the larger counts.	There is no particular need for the parish count to keep to the constituency/ward structure that was utilised for the Parliamentary and Borough Elections. With hindsight, it may have been better to ensure that each of the 3 count tables had one of the larger parishes to deal with from the outset and then use the smaller parishes to balance out the workload as far as possible. If we utilise this approach then it is essential that candidates and agents are kept fully informed of where counts are taking place. We do not ordinarily provide individual signs for parish counts, but it would be helpful to have suitable signage for the largest 4 or 5 parishes so that everyone is clear what is taking place in the event that we move counts to facilitate the best use of staff and other resources.
Delivery of ballot boxes	The revised arrangements for the receipt of ballot boxes worked extremely well. Save for the ballot boxes from one polling station which were delayed, 370 plus ballot boxes were received at the count venue by 10:40.	Notwithstanding the numbering and other systems in place, the sheer number of boxes and staff involved led to some pinch-points.	Improved signage in the count hall clearly identifying exactly where individual ballot boxes are to be placed.
Timings of verification and count	The verification of the 3 combined polls was completed just before 2.00 am on Friday morning. The first Parliamentary result was announced	Continue to assess the scale and impact of combined and all-out elections, particularly where large parishes and multiple	Ensure maximum use of technology to aid speed and efficiency. The practice of staffing the count with persons that had not worked on polling stations worked well, but

	just before 4.30 am and the other two results announced shortly thereafter. The Borough Count commenced at 2pm on Friday and concluded at approximately 10pm. The Hatfield re-count and the Parish count commenced at 11.00 am on Saturday and concluded at approximately 6pm.	candidates are involved (for example, Armthorpe Parish Council had 24 candidates contesting 15 seats).	it did mean we did not always have access to some far more experienced staff. This will only occur on a General Election where we count through the night, but we should pay close attention to role allocation to ensure we make best use of our resources.
Venue and layout	The floor space available at the Racecourse means the count layout worked well. There is additional space to verify unused ballot papers and to sort and securely pack stationery from the polling stations. The racecourse staff were very helpful and efficient. Security is available 24 hours and ctv cameras in some areas. The ballot boxes were delivered speedily and efficiently due to the Presiding Officers being able to drive up the door of the count hall. The local and parish ballot papers were stored securely from the Thursday verification until the Friday and Saturday counts.	Improved signage? Increased utilisation of live updates from eXpress at the count.	Explore further the scope for reporting of votes, results, percentages and other statistics during the count. We were able to do this on two screens only which the Council provided. We cannot display on the Racecourse's plasma screens. This may change for future elections and we should ensure information is shared with persons present as widely as possible.
12. Postal voting			
Processing	The revised procedure to process a combined postal vote pack worked very well.	Electors who had their postal vote statement rejected will be informed within 3 months of the poll that their postal vote was	Review resources required for opening verifying and matching postal vote ballot papers taking into account the count will be taking place immediately at close of poll.

	Postal vote processing time was reduced due to the new election software and procedures. Postal vote processing time was reduced due to the new election software and procedures. A total of 79,335 postal vote packs were issued (Combined 61,536 and Parish 17,799) and 96,117 (Parliamentary 42,119, Local 42,368 and Parish 11,630) statements were returned. Of these, 1325 statements were rejected. The reasons why the 1325 statements were rejected (Parliamentary and Local 961, 7 Local only and 357 Parish) are set out below:- - 538 Blank with both signature and DOB missing - 82 Signature only failed - 353 DOB only failed - 188 Both signature and DOB mismatched - 95 Signature missing - 69 DOB missing	rejected because the signature or date of birth that they have supplied on the postal voting statement failed to match that held on record - or where they had simply been left blank. A new postal vote application will be included for the elector to update their records. The practice of having a sealed ballot box for all votes that had been processed on a single day led to some delays in the distribution of those votes to the relevant count table at the election.	Review the postal vote procedures to include consideration of a combined pack including parish ballot papers. The date we know whether or not a parish is contested may mean it must be a separate pack. Review the arrangements after the final postal vote session of packing up and collection, transportation and storage of the postal vote statements and stationery. Have a single ballot box for the processed postal ballot papers for every parish council. Security can be maintained by utilising a sealed wallet every day. At the count, it will be a matter of allocating that single ballot box to the relevant count table rather than going through many ballot boxes to retrieve and allocate the numerous wallets for every parish council.

	The arrangements for processing the postal votes at the Mary Woollett Centre are well-established and worked very well as before		
13. Candidates and agents			
	A prospective candidates and agents meeting took place on 27th March 2015. The meeting provided information and advice regarding standing for election, completing the nomination paper and general information about the postal vote process and the count. Attendees collected their nomination pack at the close of the meeting. A candidates and agents meeting was held on 10th April 2015, following close of nominations. The meeting provided more detailed information, arrangements for postal vote opening and the count were discussed in detail and it was an opportunity for questions to be asked. An information pack was sent out to all election agents or the candidate if they were their own election agents, if they did not attend. The information gave the electronic link to the expenses guidance and forms.	At this election we had a total of 547 nomination papers to process. The quality of submitted nomination papers was significantly improved over previous years with a commensurate reduction in the staff time dealing with rejected and resubmitted nominations. An appointments system was utilised for the receipt of nominations from MPs. Appointments were not practicable for the remainder. Additional staff were made available, there was a dedicated desk at the Civic Office reception and multiple nominations could be processed concurrently via the teams allocated to the task. The briefing material produced by the Electoral Commission was arguably too dry and did not have a sufficient practical component.	Make the appointment process standard practice for Parliamentary Elections. Continue to utilise additional resources to receive nominations for all-out elections, particularly where parishes are involved.

14. Communication			
	The candidacy of a political party leader led to huge media interest with approximately 120 persons given media accreditation to attend the verification and Parliamentary count. The Council's Communications Team handled all liaison with the media and supplemented its core team with additional colleagues. A dedicated media platform and area was created to facilitate tv and other coverage.		Review with the Council's Communications Team and carry forward any improvements to the project planning for the next election, particularly Parliamentary.
15. Summary			
	The Electoral Commission have confirmed that this was one of the largest combined polls ever seen. It was a huge learning curve and, over all, was delivered well. Managing an election of this scale and complexity was unchartered territory and the lessons learned will inform improved delivery in the future. The commitment and support of colleagues throughout the Council was tremendous and a genuine example of "Team Doncaster" at work.		