

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2017

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held in Room 007A - CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2017, at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Phil Cole
Vice-Chair - Councillor Nick Allen

Councillors Pat Haith, David Hughes, Majid Khan, Jane Nightingale, Tina Reid, Kevin Rodgers and Sue Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sean Gibbons and Sue McGuinness.

1 PERSONAL REFERENCE

In opening the meeting, the Chair stated that he wished to place on record his thanks to all of the former Members of the Committee for the contributions they had made to the work of the Committee, namely former Councillor James Hart and Councillors John McHale and Charlie Hogarth. The Chair also welcomed Councillors David Hughes, Sue McGuinness (who had submitted apologies for this meeting) and Tina Reid as new Members of the Committee.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

There were no declarations reported at the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 21ST MARCH 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee held on 21st March, 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 RESULTS OF THE COMBINED LOCAL AND MAYORAL ELECTIONS AND THE UK PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION

The Committee considered a report which gave details of the results of the combined all-out Local Government and Mayoral Elections held on Thursday 4th May 2017 and the UK Parliamentary General Election held on Thursday 8th June 2017.

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report by confirming that this was the first time that all-out Council Elections and the Mayoral Election had been held together and this would be the pattern going forward from this point on. She then summarised the salient points in relation to the outcomes of each election, including

the number of electors who had cast their votes on polling day, the number of electors who had voted by post, the number of postal vote packs rejected due to the personal identifiers not matching, and the total turnout in percentages. Detailed summaries of the results of the Local, Mayoral and General Elections were provided in the appendices to the report. In referring to the use of counting sheets at the counts, the Electoral Services Manager advised that further information, including copies of the spreadsheets used at the counts, could be provided to Members upon request.

During subsequent discussion, the Officers answered questions and Members made comments/observations on a range of issues including the following:-

- In response to a question by Councillor David Hughes, the Officers clarified the methods used for deciding whether to accept or reject postal votes where the personal identifiers did not appear to match. With regard to rejected postal votes, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that all of the affected individuals would be written to and informed of the error/discrepancy which had led to their postal vote being rejected, and they would be able to come and inspect the papers if they so wished.
- The Officers explained that if a voter returned their postal vote papers in a plain envelope instead of the official envelope provided in the postal vote pack, this would still be picked up and processed in the same way as all the other postal votes.
- Arising from discussion on the increasing use of social media, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services advised that any complaints received in relation to the content of election campaign literature circulated by candidates or comments/posts made on social media were passed to the election single point of contact (SPOC) Police Officer and the Electoral Commission.
- Members acknowledged the significant amount of work that had been caused for the Elections Team by the increase in registration, postal vote and proxy applications in the run up to the General Election, including a substantial number of duplicate registrations received from electors re-registering when they were already registered. It was noted that the elections team had to carry out the time consuming task of manually checking the duplicate registrations, and this problem would persist until electors were able to go online themselves in order to check whether they were already registered or not. It was also noted that the Elections Team had tried to get the message out to people via the Council's website and social media that they did not need to re-register for the General Election if they were already registered and had recently voted in the Local Elections.
- Councillor David Hughes queried whether the Elections Team liaised with the staff working in the polling stations as to any issues or problems at the venues, as he was aware that the staff working at the polling station in Highfields Community Centre had complained of being cold. In response, the Electoral Services Manager explained that Presiding Officers were issued with log books enabling them to report back on any issues with the polling stations, and the Inspectors also noted down any problems. The Elections Team also carried out regular checks to ensure that premises used as polling stations were

adequate and fit for purpose. It was noted that portable heaters could be provided for use at polling stations where there was inadequate heating.

- Arising from a query by the Chair as to whether a person was eligible to vote if they were registered at a property but did not reside there, such as a landlord of a property, the Electoral Services Manager explained that situations such as this would normally be picked up when the annual canvass was carried out. The Elections Team also liaised with other relevant teams within the Council, such as colleagues in Council Tax.
- Members acknowledged that there had been some confusion evident amongst voters in the General Election, with some people asking why the names of the Party Leaders, i.e. Jeremy Corben and Prime Minister Theresa May, were not shown on the ballot papers.
- With regard to forthcoming by-elections, it was reported that due to a recent vacancy arising at Thorne Moorends Town Council, a by-election was to be held on Thursday 13 July 2017. It was noted that 3 candidates were standing and the count would take place on Friday 14 July at the Civic Office. A further vacancy at Hatfield Town Council had arisen, but with only one nomination being received, the election was uncontested and the candidate was, therefore, automatically elected.

After the Chair had, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Trina Barber and the Elections Team, together with all the staff who had worked on the various elections recently, for their hard work and efforts in ensuring that the elections and subsequent counts had all run smoothly and efficiently, it was

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____