

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER 2018

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held in Room 007A - CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER 2018, at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Susan Durant, Pat Haith, Charlie Hogarth, Mark Houlbrook and Sue Wilkinson

Also in attendance:

Councillor David Nevett (Observer)

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sean Gibbons, David Hughes and Ken Keegan.

6 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

There were no declarations reported at the meeting.

7 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10TH JULY 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th July 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With regard to minute number 4 (Election Results), the Chair confirmed that a request had been made for a Member Seminar to be arranged in due course on the subject of Neighbourhood Development Plans.

The Electoral Services Manager advised, with regard to minute number 5 (Individual Electoral Registration – Progress Report), that a breakdown detailing the proportion of postal voters in each Ward in the Borough would be provided at the Committee's next meeting.

8 BY-ELECTIONS AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING REFERENDUMS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided a detailed update on the results of the Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council – East Ward By-Election, Askern Town Council By-Election and the Armthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum all held on Thursday 20th September 2018.

## Armthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum

The Electoral Services Manager summarised the results of the Armthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum held on 20th September 2018, including the level of turnout. A full breakdown of the results was set out in Appendix A of the report. The Chair stated that it appeared from the figures in the report that this had been the highest turnout of voters to date for a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum.

In answer to a question, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the costs of holding Neighbourhood Planning Referendums were charged back to the Regeneration and Environment Directorate who, in turn, were able to claim back the costs from Central Government.

## Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council – East Ward

The Electoral Services Manager summarised the results of the By-Election held on 20th September 2018 to fill a vacancy for a Parish Councillor in the Sprotbrough and Cusworth East Ward. A full breakdown of the results was set out in Appendix B of the report. It was noted that the costs of this election would be charged to the Parish Council.

In response to a query, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that, in the case of rejected postal votes, the postal voters were contacted and provided with an explanation as to why their postal vote had been rejected. Voters were also offered the opportunity, if they wished, to come to the Civic Office and inspect their rejected postal vote statement, so that they could see why the rejection had been made.

## Askern Town Council

The Committee noted that a vacancy advertised and called by ten electors for Askern Town Council had received only one nomination, therefore the election was uncontested and consequently, the candidate had been automatically elected.

## Upcoming By-Elections

It was noted that two further by-elections to fill vacancies on Askern Town Council and Sprotbrough and Cusworth Parish Council (Cusworth Ward) were due to be held on Thursday 6th December 2018. In addition, Members noted that one further potential by-election might be required to fill a vacancy that had recently arisen on Bawtry Town Council, if contested. The date of this by-election, if required, would be Thursday 10th January 2019.

In answer to a question as regards what would happen if a Parish Council ran out of money to cover the costs of holding a by-election, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that, in that particular scenario, he would expect the Parish Council to meet the costs from its reserves, and then consider recouping the money when it next reviewed its precept level.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

The Committee received a report from the Electoral Services Manager providing Members with an update on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services Team in relation to the Register of Electors and Annual Canvass. The report included, at Appendix A, a full breakdown of the responses received to the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) by return method in this year's annual canvass in comparison to 2015 – 2017 inclusive. An updated version of this Appendix containing the very latest return statistics for this year's canvass was tabled at the meeting for Members' information.

In presenting the report, the Electoral Services Manager updated Members on the progress of the annual canvass, and outlined how the Electoral Services Team was being proactive to help increase the response rate by way of:-

- telephone canvassing;
- canvassing every care home and housing with multiple occupancies (HMO);
- targeting hard to reach areas by telephone;
- providing extra support to foreign nationals to complete the relevant forms;
- working with schools and colleges to raise awareness and increase the number of attainments on the Register ready for when they reached voting age;
- publicising the canvass and registration process via social media updates.

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

- With regard to information sharing between the Electoral Services Team and other Council departments, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the team was able to access Benefits and Council Tax information, and that she was currently liaising with a colleague at St Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) to determine if there was scope for accessing some of the information they held on their database, subject to any data protection requirements.
- Members noted that other local authorities had adopted, as best practice, some of the methods introduced by the Electoral Services Manager to increase the response rate to the annual canvass.
- The Electoral Services Manager explained that the law regarding anonymous entries on the Register of Electors had recently changed, and that information on this was being distributed. She explained that canvassers were taking any requests for anonymity and a form was then sent out to the person in question to complete.
- It was noted that there was a separate team of canvassers which dealt specifically with HMOs. The process involved the team making initial contact with the landlord and then visits to each tenant. Each individual room/tenancy in HMOs was added to the Register in order to ensure that records were as accurate as possible, and it was noted that officers liaised with Council Tax colleagues and, if required, the housing enforcement teams, where there were any apparent anomalies.

- Members were pleased to note the large increase in the number of attainers on the Register achieved during this year's canvass, and noted that this was largely due to closer working with schools and colleges to raise awareness, particularly through their social media links.
- With regard to the procedures for contacting new tenants in SLHD properties for registration purposes, and whether they could be asked to sign a declaration when they first moved in to save having to canvass them, Members noted that information on how to register was given to new tenants by SLHD when they moved in. The Electoral Services Manager stressed, however, that there was still the need to canvass properties each year, as this was a legal requirement, and it was the only means of ascertaining whether residents had moved from their properties or not, since the last Register was compiled.

After the Chair had thanked the Electoral Services Manager and her team for their continued good work, it was

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CHAIR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_