

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 2019

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the 007A, CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 2019, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

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

Councillors Pat Haith, Charlie Hogarth, Mark Houlbrook, David Hughes and Sue Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Susan Durant and Sean Gibbons.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.

No declarations were reported at the meeting.

11 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27TH NOVEMBER, 2018.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November, 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 ELECTIONS/BY-ELECTIONS/REFERENDUMS UPDATE.

The Committee received a detailed update and results of the Sprotbrough & Cusworth Parish Council, Cusworth Ward By-Election and the Askern Town Council By-Election which were both held on Thursday 6th December, 2018.

It was reported that in relation to Sprotbrough & Cusworth, there was an eligible electorate of 1,740 electors of which 579 had postal votes issued and 258 (44.56%) were returned and personal identifiers correctly verified. A further 2 postal votes were rejected and those electors had been notified accordingly. There was one polling station on polling day which 68 (5.86) electors visited to vote.

Members were advised that there were two candidates and Tony Nicholson was elected as a Parish Councillor for Sprotbrough & Cusworth Parish Council – Cusworth Ward. Appendix A to the report contained a full breakdown of the results.

With regard to Askern Town Council, there was an eligible electorate of 3,881 electors of which 931 had postal votes issued and 365 (39.21%) were returned and personal identifiers correctly verified. A further 6 postal votes were rejected and those electors

had been notified accordingly. There were three polling stations on polling day which a very low number of 29 (0.98%) electors visited to vote.

Members were advised that there were two candidates and Sarah Elizabeth Blanchard was elected as a Town Councillor for Askern Town Council. Appendix B to the report contained a full breakdown of the results.

Information was also provided in relation to the two by-elections that had taken place in Bawtry. It was noted that only 1 nomination was received for both, therefore the election were uncontested and candidates Diana Lyn Kirby and Ivor Calvin Greer were both automatically elected to the Town Council.

Members were also advised that it had been suggested that the reason for the low turnout for the Askern Town Council election may have been because the Town Council decided not to issue poll cards.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### 13 INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION - PROGRESS REPORT.

The Committee received an update report 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, an updated 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.

In presenting the report, the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services 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 the following new initiatives:-

- Contact centre and one stop shop reception
- The Councils 'My Doncaster Account'
- Schools/Colleges
- Marketing and Engagement
- Home Movers

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

- With regard to the signatures of voters for postal votes, it was asked how often these would be renewed. In response, it was advised that this would be carried on yearly basis. It was noted that 15,500 letters had been posted out and the usual response rate was 90%. There would be a slight dip in postal votes throughout the renewal process however, poll cards would be issued and the opportunity to re-apply for a postal vote would be given. The Electoral Services Team would also write to the person outlining the reasons why the vote had been rejected which also gave the elector the opportunity to re-apply.
- In response to a comment made regarding how many people were not registered and the need to be registered by law, Officers stated that there was a requirement by law for people to register on the Electoral Roll however, there

was no covenant to support this. It was noted that for those people applying for credit, it can prove difficult to obtain without being on the Electoral Roll.

- With regard to information sharing between the Electoral Services Team and other Council departments, Officers confirmed that the team was able to access Benefits and Council Tax information and the team were currently looking at liaising with colleagues at St. Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) to identify any scope for accessing some information they held on the database. It was also suggested by a member that the team liaise with the Landlord Registration Scheme in Hexthorpe.
- A question was raised in relation to the possibility of apply a penalty for non-registration. Officers reported that a penalty can be applied however, the Council would not receive the money generated this would go to Central Government, which is the reason why Councils throughout the country had not applied penalties for not registering. It was pointed out to Members that whilst this was not an option, the team were doing all they can to ensure people register through the numerous work streams identified.
- The Chair stated that it was pleasing to see that the electorate had grown by 2000. He made reference to the new registrations highlighted at paragraph 7 of the report and asked whether these were registered via the Household. Officers commented that this would be in the case however, the team would write to them asking them to register themselves.
- It was noted that there were certain parts of the borough where there were caravan parks which were registered. However, it had been brought to Members attention that there was a holiday village within the borough and assurance was sought as to the criteria for registration and whether any applications had been received from there. Officers stated that to their knowledge no forms had been received but if details could be forwarded to them, this would be investigated following the meeting. Officers wished to advise members that registration to be placed on the Electoral Roll needs to identify your primary residence. It was noted that some residents primary place of residence within the Borough would be on a boat or barge. Officer also advised that if a homeless person had been living within a hostel for a number of months then they can be registered on the Electoral Roll using that as their primary residence.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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

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