

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2023

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2023, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Julie Grace
Vice-Chair - Councillor Nick Allen

Councillors Duncan Anderson, James Church, Gemma Cobby, Debbie Hutchinson, Emma Muddiman-Rawlins, Thomas Noon and Andy Pickering.

APOLOGIES:

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jake Kearsley.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

12 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22ND NOVEMBER 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13 ELECTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update on current Elections activity and any upcoming changes, by-elections and Neighbourhood Planning Referendums. Specifically, this report contained updates on:-

- The new requirement for voters to have Photo ID to be able to vote in person in polling stations;
- The annual absent voter refresh exercise and proposed changes under the Elections Act 2022; and
- The Auckley Neighbourhood Planning Referendum, that was likely to take place in March/April 2023.

The Electoral Services Manager gave an overview of the new requirement for electors to show an official form of photographic identification (ID) when voting in a polling station, which was coming into force for elections held from 4 May 2023 onwards. While there were no scheduled elections in Doncaster in 2023, the new measures would apply to any by-elections held from 4 May onwards. Upon receipt of an application, Electoral Registration Officers were required to provide those electors without a valid form of Photo ID with a free voter identification document called a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) from January 2023, whether they had polls or not.

It was reported that since the online application portal for applying for Voter Authority Certificates went live on 16th January, the Council had received a total of 78 applications, which had been processed as follows:-

- 61 applications had been sent a Voter Authority Certificate
- 13 applications were on hold (not a suitable photo or register to vote application not yet cleared by DWP etc)
- 4 applications had been rejected (3 duplicate applications and one not registered and when contacted did not want to register or vote).

The Electoral Services Manager outlined the procedure for processing the applications and explained that staff in the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop in the Civic Office had been briefed on the new requirements so that they could assist with any queries or calls regarding the new Photo ID.

Discussion followed, during which the Electoral Services Manager explained, in answer to a question regarding communications, that a national advertising campaign by the Electoral Commission was currently underway on various platforms. She stated that there was a need to strike the right balance in terms of raising awareness of the new ID requirement, whilst also not causing confusion amongst electors in light of the fact that there were no scheduled elections being held in Doncaster this year. She also pointed out that there had already been some confusion with electors thinking that the new photo ID requirement applied also to postal voters, which was not the case.

With regard to funding, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the Council had so far received £13,000 from the Government's New Burdens Funding to cover the cost of implementing the new measures, and that more would be made available in the next financial year when elections were due to be held, which would help cover the cost of training polling station staff on the new requirements and the provision of privacy booths in stations for people who wore face coverings on religious grounds for example. Members also noted that the funding was expected to cover the cost of a temporary additional member of staff in the electoral services team to assist with processing of voter ID applications at the time of elections, when it was likely that a higher number of applications would be coming through.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that whilst the Voter Authority Certificates had a 10-year validity in all likelihood they would require an early replacement as they were simply an A4 piece of paper, not a laminated card. As there were no scheduled May elections, the Council had the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other authorities as regards the impact of the new measures and examples of good practice.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

14 CANVASS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update to Members on the final outcome of the Annual Canvass and a detailed breakdown of the statistics for each Route and final electorate by ward.

The Electoral Services Manager updated the Committee on the final figures in relation to the responses received from properties in this year's canvass, broken down

according to the three routes followed for each property, i.e. Route 1 (matched properties), Route 2 (unmatched properties) and Route 3 (Care Homes and Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO)). The Committee was reminded that as a result of the canvass reforms in 2020, only properties where all the electors could not be matched against national and/or local data were required to respond. The aim of the canvass reform was to deliver a more efficient system by which Electoral Registration Officers could maintain their electoral registers with no negative effect on citizens, or on the accuracy and completeness of the registers.

It was reported that the overall response rate for all three Routes including those who did not need to respond was 90.27%, which was slightly down on last year's return.

The 2022 Annual Canvass had been completed and the revised Electoral Register was published on 1st December 2022 ensuring that the Electoral Registration Officer had met their statutory duty. The new Electorate as of 1st December 2022 stood at 224,636 electors and 58,331 postal voters. A detailed breakdown of the 1st December 2022 electorate by ward including postal vote breakdown was provided at Appendix A of the report.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

15 URGENT ITEM - REQUEST TO CHANGE THE NAME OF THE PARISH OF BARNBURGH WITH HARLINGTON

The Chair informed the Committee that she had agreed to accept this report as an urgent item of business at today's meeting, the reasons for which were detailed in paragraph 3 of the report.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that a request had been received from the Barnburgh with Harlington Parish Council to change the name of the parish area to Barnburgh and Harlington. The change had been requested on the basis that Barnburgh and Harlington was the name that the parish was more generally known by and that had been used locally for a significant length of time.

In accordance with Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, such requests were considered by this Committee, which then made a recommendation to Full Council for ratification.

RESOLVED:-

- a) To RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL at its meeting on 27th February 2023 that the Barnburgh with Harlington parish be renamed Barnburgh and Harlington; and
- b) That, if approved, a notice be published in accordance with the statutory requirements set out in paragraph 15 of the report.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____