



# City of Doncaster Council

## Agenda

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To all Members of the

## **ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

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

**Venue:** Council Chamber, Civic Office, Waterdale, Doncaster DN1 3BU

**Date:** Wednesday, 28th February, 2024

**Time:** 10.00 am.

### **BROADCASTING NOTICE**

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### **Items for Discussion:**

**Page No.**

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.

**Damian Allen**  
**Chief Executive**

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Issued on: Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Governance Services Officer for this meeting: Amber Torrington  
[Amber.torrington@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:Amber.torrington@doncaster.gov.uk)

4.	Minutes of the Elections and Democratic Structures Committee Meeting held on 21st November 2023.	1 - 6
<b>A. Reports where the public and press may not be excluded.</b>		
5.	Annual Canvass Update.	7 - 16
6.	Elections Activity.	17 - 26
7.	Elections Act 2022 Update.	27 - 36

**MEMBERS OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE (11)**

**Chair** – Councillor Julie Grace

**Vice-Chair** – Councillor Nick Allen

Councillor James Church	Councillor Gemma Cobby
Councillor Ken Guest	Councillor Debbie Hutchinson
Councillor Jake Kearsley	Councillor Emma Muddiman-Rawlins
Councillor Thomas Noon	Councillor Ian Pearson
Councillor Rob Reid	

# Agenda Item 4.

## CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

### ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2023

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER, 2023, at 10.00 a.m.

#### PRESENT:

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

Councillors James Church and Ian Pearson.

#### APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gemma Cobby, Jake Kearsley, Debbie Hutchinson, Thomas Noon and Andy Pickering.

#### 5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

#### 6 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18TH JULY 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 7 CANVASS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update to Members on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services Team in relation to the Register of Electors and the preparations for the start of the Annual Canvass.

The Electoral Services Manager updated the Committee on the latest 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)). It was reported that a 100% response rate from Care Homes had now been achieved. Members were informed that an accurate breakdown of the figures per Ward together with other statistics would be provided at the Committee's next meeting.

During subsequent discussion, Councillor Ian Pearson referred to the issuing of new guidance last year with regard to accessibility and taking steps to ensure that disabled people were not excluded from going on the electoral register by error or by ignorance. In light of this, he asked if any special work was being undertaken in conjunction with disabled organisations to ensure that people who were not accessible

by mainstream systems were not excluded from the canvass process. In response, The Electoral Services Manager explained that, at the start of the Canvass, the Electoral Services Team sent emails out to various community groups they held on file asking them to let them know of any individuals who may need additional assistance with registering to vote. In particular, she said that the Team was currently working with one such group to discuss ways of providing additional assistance to people in relation to the Canvass and with voting on election days. The Electoral Services Manager stated that she was due to attend a meeting of the group and would therefore be able to provide an update following this at the Committee's next meeting. She added that the Team provided communications in a range of different formats for people, including braille, with supporting guidance and material also being provided by the Electoral Commission.

In response, Councillor Pearson pointed out that less than 20% of blind people read braille, and most of these were women. He suggested that the talking newspaper, both local and regional, should be used as a means of communication, and that when access to polling stations was reviewed, this took on board not only wheelchair access but also access by people using white canes and guide dogs.

In reply to a question by the Chair, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that the figures provided in the report in relation to properties in the Annual Canvass included a small number of properties in approximately 8-10 streets that could not be visited due to incidents of anti-social behaviour being reported.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

## 8 ELECTIONS ACT 2022 UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the Elections Act 2022, with a particular focus on the new measures which had recently been implemented since the last meeting and new measures to be introduced early next year. It was noted that the most recent changes related to postal and proxy voting revisions and the implementation of online absent vote applications via the ERO portal which was currently already used to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (free photo ID).

The Electoral Services Manager gave an overview of the new measures in relation to:-

- Online absent vote applications;
- New identity checking requirements for absent vote applications;
- A new maximum time period of up to 3 years for a voter to hold a postal vote;
- Changes to proxy voting limits – a person was not entitled to vote as proxy in any electoral area on behalf of more than four electors;
- Overseas electors regulations – removal of the 15 year limit on voting rights for British citizens abroad and extension of the overseas franchise to all British citizens who have previously registered or resided in the UK;
- The handling and handing in of postal votes and the secrecy of absent voting;
- EU Citizens' candidacy and voting rights;

- Ballot Secrecy Act 2023 – this legislation would make it an offence at UK parliamentary elections and local elections in England for a person to be with or near another person at a polling booth, with the intention of influencing them; and
- A new requirement to include a digital imprint on any campaign material issued on social media by certain persons, such as a registered party or a candidate.

With regard to processing postal vote applications, the Electoral Services Manager explained that with the new system, staff were no longer able to batch scan 25 postal votes at a time as they now had to be processed one by one. This had resulted in an increase in processing time from being able to scan 25 applications in under 1 minute, to taking up to 9 mins to process one form using the new portal. It was noted, however, that the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) were aware of the administrative issues with the new system and had undertaken to make improvements and changes to update the system in January 2024 to make it more user friendly and efficient for electoral services staff going forward.

Councillor Pearson referred to the change from 5 years down to 3 years in respect of the maximum period that postal votes could be held by electors before having to reapply and asked whether the issue of how this impacted upon local authorities which operated on fixed 4 year period all out elections had been raised with DLUHC. In reply, the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that this issue had been raised with DLUHC and the feedback received had been that they recognised that people moved and changed addresses and had to update their postal votes, resulting in postal vote application cycles changing. It was also acknowledged that other elections were held in between the local elections.

In response to a comment by Councillor James Church as regards the potential difficulties in recruiting and retaining an additional 173 Poll Clerks to work on elections as recommended by DLUHC, the Electoral Services Manager explained that an additional Poll Clerk had been employed at Polling Stations during the Covid Pandemic, so it had been done before. However, she stated that it was possible that some staff might be deterred by the additional tasks they would have to perform on election duties in light of the new measures, such as checking voter identities, so the full picture would not be known until recruitment commenced in the new year.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

9 ELECTIONS ACTIVITY - ROSSINGTON & BAWTRY BY-ELECTION, STAINFORTH TOWN COUNCIL BY-ELECTION NOVEMBER 16TH 2023

The Committee received a report which provided Members with detailed information and results from the following By-Elections:

- Rossington and Bawtry Ward by-election held on 16 November 2023
- Stainforth Town Council by-election held on 16 November 2023

It was noted that these by-elections were the first in Doncaster to be carried out under the new voter ID requirements and improvements to support accessibility in polling

stations that came into force on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023. It was also reported that, during the by-election timetable, the new Elections Act measures had come into force for postal and proxy voting revisions.

All Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks had undertaken a lengthy training session dedicated to voter ID and accessibility in advance of working on polling stations. All Polling Stations had been supplied with a privacy ID booth, mirror, tactile voting devices, large print elections stationery, pencils with grips and magnifiers to assist the visually impaired.

The Electoral Services Manager summarised the results of both by-elections, including numbers of postal votes issued and returned and total turnout figures. It was reported that for the Rossington and Bawtry ward by-election, 3 postal vote applications and one proxy vote application had been received and successfully processed via the new ERO absent vote portal.

The Committee was informed that there had been no particular issues or problems arising from the new voter ID requirements at either of the by-elections and the process had run smoothly at polling stations. Staff had been briefed on ensuring that there were no accessibility issues for voters at the stations and to make any necessary adjustments if it became apparent on the day that any individuals needed special assistance. On this subject, it was noted that temporary lighting had been put in place at one particular polling station where the ground outside the building was uneven.

Councillor Church stated that he had spoken to a number of residents when out campaigning, three of which had said that they did not intend to vote in the by-election because of the new voter ID requirement. In reply, the officers explained that there would be extensive publicity and information provided for voters for the next elections in May 2024, including national campaign material. This would include the Council disseminating its own publicity information across its social media platforms next year to help spread the word. It was also pointed out that the new requirements did not appear to be having an adverse impact on voter turnout, as the figure for the Rossington and Bawtry by-election of 19% was slightly higher than the turnouts of the last two by-elections held in Doncaster, which had been 18% and 17% respectively.

In response to a question by Councillor Pearson in relation to the costs of providing the Voter Authority Certificates and also the provision of support for those people who might struggle to obtain digital photos/IDs, the Electoral Services Manager explained that the Certificates were sent across to a central printer which then printed and posted out the Certificates, the costs of which were borne by Central Government. Regarding support for people, it was explained that people were able to bring a hard copy printed photo or other photo ID into the Civic Office where staff would digitise it on their behalf and assist them with their online applications. From next year, the Team was also planning to go out to visit people in their communities to explain the new process and provide assistance where needed with photo IDs and online applications for the Voter Authority Certificates.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chair announced that she had agreed to move the date of this Committee's meeting in February next year to avoid any potential conflict with the half term school holiday. So, the meeting originally scheduled to be held on Tuesday 13 February 2024 would now be held at **10.00 a.m. on Wednesday 28 February 2024** instead, and the Chair requested that Members note this change in their diaries.

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

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

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## City of Doncaster Council

### Report

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Date: 28 February 2024

To: The Chair and Members of the

#### **ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

Report Title: **Canvass Update**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report provides members with an update on the final outcome of the Annual Canvass and a detailed breakdown of the statistics for each Route and final electorate by ward.

#### **EXEMPT REPORT**

2. This report is not exempt.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

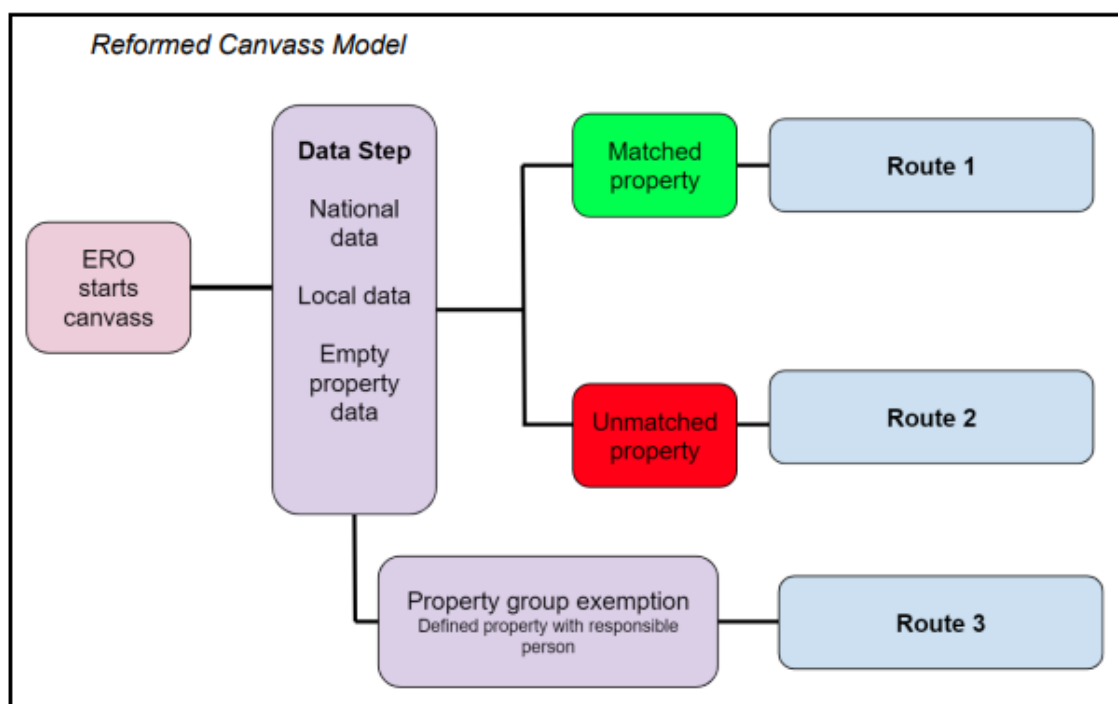
#### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

4. Ensuring the Electoral Register is as up to date as possible and carrying out proactive electoral activity is key to public engagement to ensure residents are registered to enable them to vote when an election occurs.

#### **BACKGROUND**

5. Each year the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty to carry out a full annual review of the Electoral Register by contacting all residential addresses to establish if the information currently held on the Electoral Register is complete and accurate, this is called the Annual Canvass. The purpose of the canvass is to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register. This means identifying citizens who should be registered but are currently not, as well as identifying electors who are no longer at a property and should therefore be removed from the register. A revised version of the electoral register must be published by December 1<sup>st</sup> each year, following the conclusion of the annual canvass.

6. With the introduction of the canvass reforms in 2020, only properties where all the electors cannot be matched against national and/or local data are required to respond. The overall aim of canvass reform is to deliver a more efficient system by which Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) can maintain their electoral registers with no negative effect on citizens, or on the accuracy and completeness of the registers.
7. The canvass incorporates a 'data step' at the outset of the process. This informs the ERO, based on the data available, which properties are likely to have an unchanged household composition, based on matching data on the electoral register against national Government data and, where relevant, locally held data sources. Local datasets are available to the ERO under their existing powers, provided by Regulations 23, 35 and 35A of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001.



8. The ERO will follow one of three routes for each property:
  - Route 1** - the matched properties route, this will be used for properties where the data indicates no change in household composition.
  - Route 2** - the unmatched properties route, this will be used for properties where data matching has highlighted that there may be a change to the information the ERO currently holds for the property.
  - Route 3** - These properties are defined as Care Homes and Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) all of which are required to provide an update on their current occupants.

### **Route 1**

9. The National data matching process had to take place between 1 June to 31 August 2023 and Electoral Services carried out the National data match download on 26 June 2023. At that time there was 225,282 registered electors and 146,455 properties in Doncaster and 85.67% of electors and 111,010 (75.79%) properties successfully matched from the initial national data matching download for Route 1.
10. Electoral Services carried out data mining in order to match a further 11,828 electors from Council Tax records and a further 400 properties for Route 1. A further 1,857 properties were matched from other internal local data sources.

### **Route 2**

- These properties were the un-matched properties that did require a response. Under Route 2 - Stage 1, we sent letters and e-mails to 33,357 properties and 7,032 (21.08%) properties responded. A further 26,325 reminder letters were sent out for Route 2 - Stage 2, w/c 9<sup>th</sup> October and we received a further 4,404 (16.73%) responses. Leaving the remaining 21,921 outstanding properties for Route 2 - stage 3 requiring a personal visit. Foot canvassers visited those outstanding properties to try to obtain a response and Electoral Services continued to data mine to match properties using all available internal data. A further 7,334 (33.46%) responses were obtained for Route 3, stage 3. Overall for all three stages, the return rate was 18,770 (56.27%) for Route 2.

### **Route 3**

11. These properties are defined as Care Homes, all of which are required to provide an update on their current occupants. The Electoral Services Team contacted all Care Homes directly due to the high turn around in these types of properties to establish that everything could be as up to date as possible. We were able to obtain a response from all care homes achieving a 100% response rate for route 3

### **Breakdown**

12. The overall response rate for all three Routes including those who did not need to respond was 90.19% although we received more responses back than last year the overall % is slightly down on last year's return of 90.27%. A breakdown per year can be found below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Responses received at the end of Canvass</b>	<b>% of Responded properties at end of Canvass</b>	<b>Number of properties outstanding</b>
2024	132,085	90.19%	14,370
2022	128,652	90.27%	13,802
2021	129,483	91.85%	11,483
2020*	132,801	94.67%	7,479
2019*	117,000	84.20%	21,948
2018	119,859	86.42%	18,836
2017	118,017	85.70%	19,698

2016	112,364	82.87%	23,230
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\*2019 Canvass was ended early due to snap Parliamentary election on 12 December 2019

\*2020 Canvass no foot canvass carried out due to Covid

13. Despite a later than normal start to the Annual Canvas due to the Tender award of a new Electoral Printer the 2023 annual canvass was completed in time and the revised Electoral Register was published on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 ensuring the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) met their statutory duty. The new Electorate as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 was 219,250 electors and 56,228 Postal Voters.

14. Although the annual canvass has concluded, we continue to send Invitation to Register (ITR) forms and e-mails to individuals where we only have a name and address but no personal information (DOB & NINO) which were identified during the annual canvass. Since we completed the annual canvass we have sent 14,511 ITR's and received 8,595 on-line registrations, 1,137 by paper form and 84 via telephone. These include a mixture of new registrations and also those that have moved property and are required to re-register at their new address.

15. Since the register was published the electorate has increased and currently stands at 223,120 electors and 55,967 Postal Voters. A detailed breakdown of the current electorate by ward including postal vote breakdown is provided at **Appendix A** of this report.

### OPTIONS CONSIDERED


16. Electoral Registration is a statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.








### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. This report is primarily for information only.

### IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

18.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change				✓

Comments:				
 <b>Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</b>				✓
Comments:				

<b>Fair &amp; Inclusive</b>	✓			
<p>The Council has a duty to ensure all eligible electors can register to vote and respond to canvass forms easily and are provided with several ways in order to do so. Registration information is also available in alternative languages, Braille and by video (YouTube) link on the Council Web page.</p>				

**Legal Implications [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 16/02/2024]**

19. There are comprehensive statutory provisions covering the delivery of electoral registration activity:
- Representation of the People Act
  - The Representation of the People (England & Wales) Regulations
  - The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass Amendment) Regulations
  - Local Government Act
  - Electoral Registration and Administration Act

**Financial Implications [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 20/02/2024]**

20. This work is funded solely from the Registration of Electors budget (NC003). Central Government no longer provide Councils with funding towards the annual canvass due to the reduction in the cost of delivering the Canvass under the Canvass Reforms.

**Human Resources Implications**

21. There are no Human Resources Implications arising from this report.

**Technology Implications**

22. Technology implications have not been requested.

**RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

23. Every effort is made to drive Individual Electoral Registration to ensure the Council and the ERO meets the Electoral Commission’s Performance Standards and complies with their legal duties.

**CONSULTATION**

24. Not applicable

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

25. Previous EDSC reports.

## **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**26.**

ERO	Electoral Registration Officer
HMO	Homes of Multiple Occupancy
ITR	Invitation to Register
NINO	National Insurance Number
DOB	Date of Birth

## **REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

Trina Barber, Electoral Services Manager  
Legal & Democratic Services

Tel: 01302 734398

E-mail: [trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk)

**Damian Allen**

**Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer**

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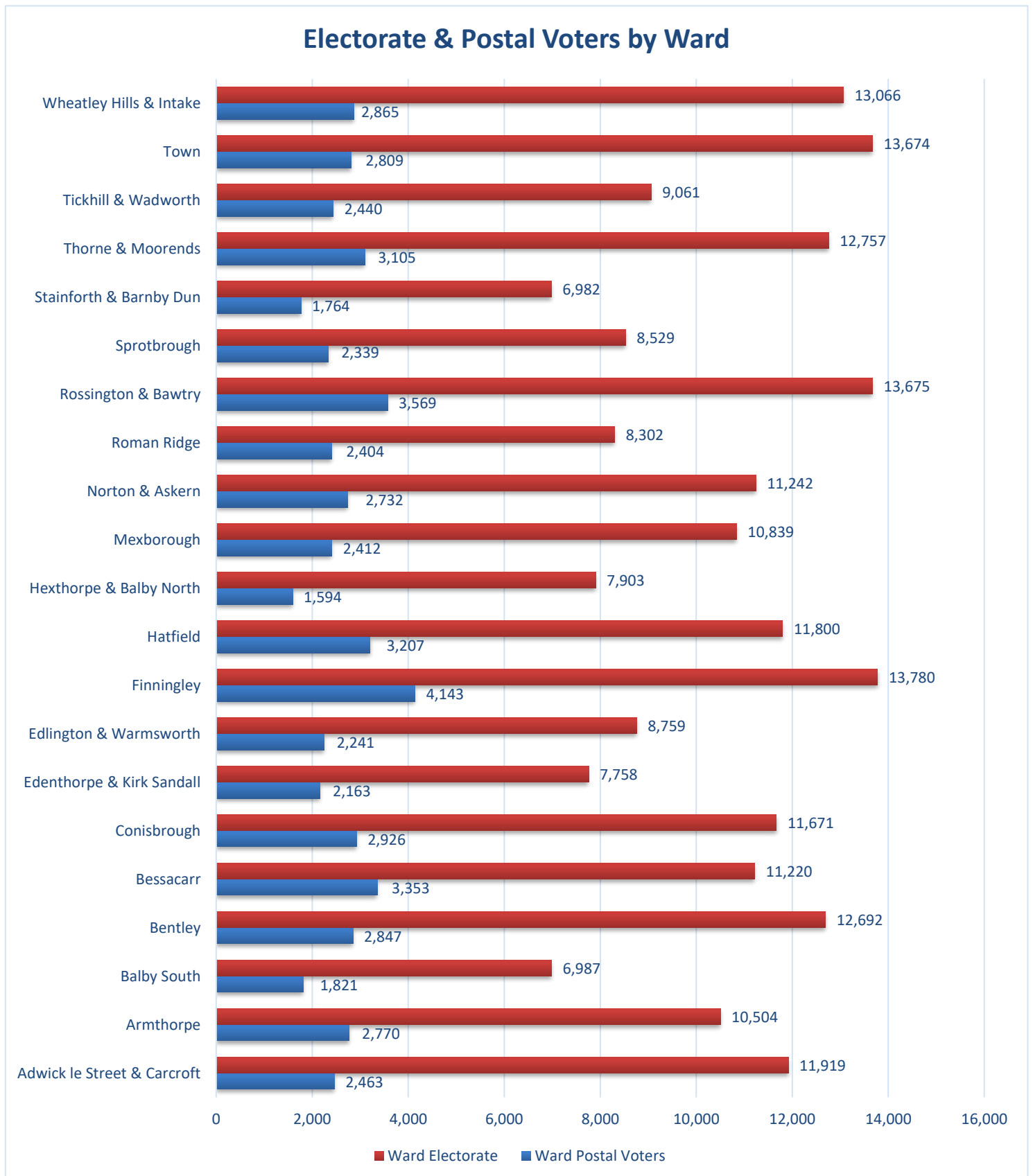


**City of Doncaster Council Electorate – 14 February 2024**

Total Electorate: 223,120

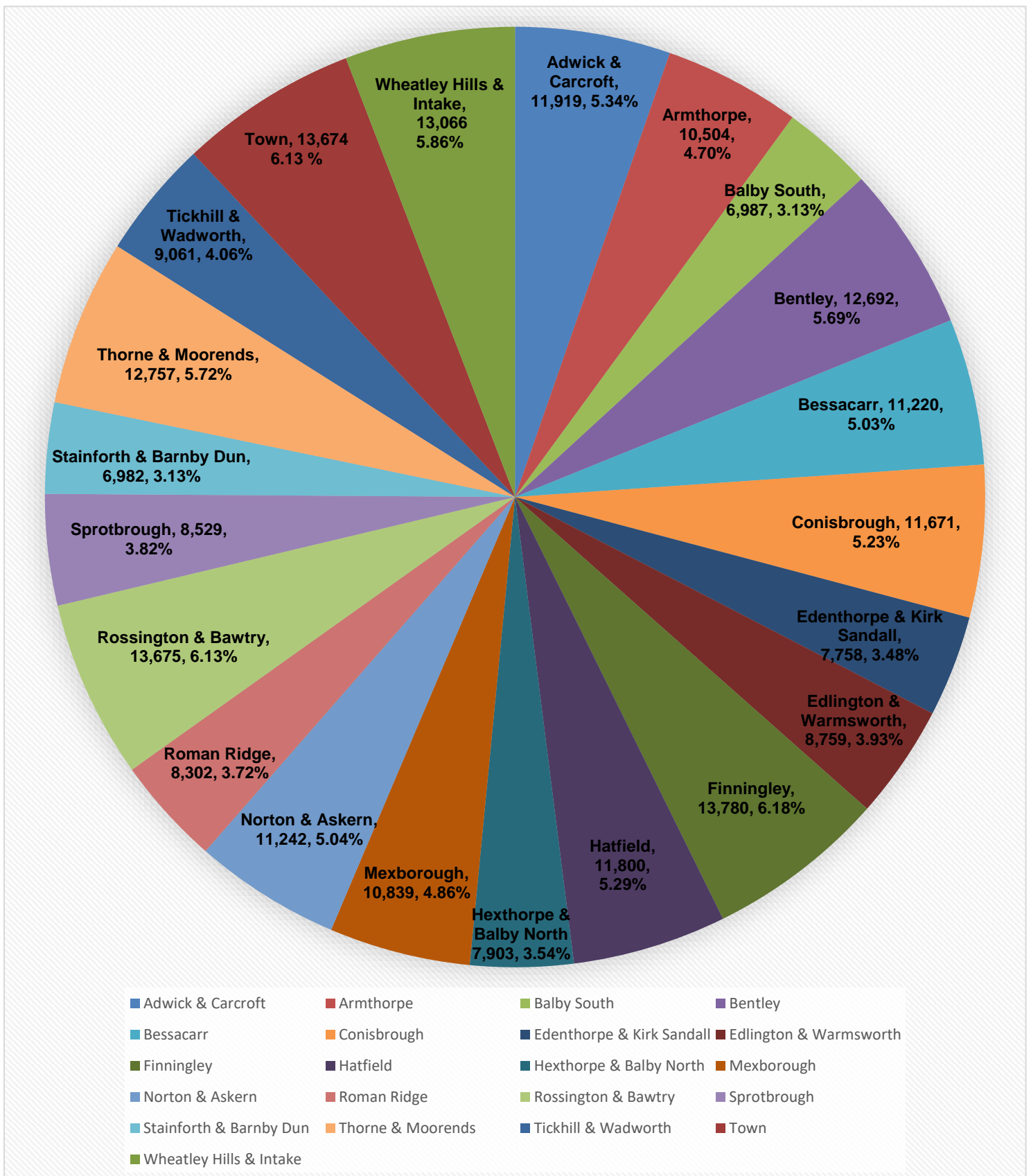
Total Postal Voters: 55,967 (25% of the electorate are postal voters)

The electorate and postal voters for each ward are broken down below



**City of Doncaster Council Electorate - 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021**

Total Electorate 223,120 broken down per ward and by % of the full Electorate





## City of Doncaster Council

### Report

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**Date: 28 February 2024**

**To: The Chair and Members of the**

**ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

**Report Title: Elections Activity**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On 2 May 2024 South Yorkshire Councils were scheduled to hold Police and Crime Commissioner Elections. The Home Secretary has confirmed that he has laid an Order on 7 February 2024 which if enacted will transfer Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) functions to be exercised by the Mayor of South Yorkshire from the point of the May 2024 elections.

The Order is subject to approval by Parliament. If approved, the intention is that it will be enacted before the statutory date for Notice of Election on 26 March 2024. Discussions began with government regarding the transfer in early 2023.

The Transfer Order sets out that all PCC functions would transfer to the Mayor of South Yorkshire and the separate role of Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire would be abolished in May 2024, when the current term comes to an end. This would also mean that a Mayoral election would take place 2 May 2024 and the successful elected candidate will become Mayor of South Yorkshire with Police and Crime Commissioner functions.

This report provides a detailed update to Members on the preparations for the upcoming election on 2 May 2024.

#### **2. EXEMPT REPORT**

This is not an exempt report.

#### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report is for information, the Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

#### **4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

Having accessible and well-organised elections and referendums are key to public engagement in the democratic process. Elections are the cornerstone of our democratic process and are important to all of our residents. Elections give the electorate the opportunity to hold politicians to account and shape the future direction of national and local government.

#### **5. BACKGROUND**

Due to the order being laid in Parliament on 7 February 2024 we are currently planning for a South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) Election. However, until confirmed we are also ensuring that we have strategic contingency plans in place in case approval is not granted. This includes draft template poll cards and postal votes for a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Election already drafted and proofed with our printers, Count plans agreed for both a SYMCA and a PCC election. All Polling Station bookings, recruitment and staff training will not be affected either way.

Last year the Elections Act changed the supplementary voting system of Mayoral and PCC elections, therefore there will no longer be a first and second choice on the ballot paper and the Count will be first past the post, reducing the length of time to count the votes.

The Elections Act also introduced the requirement from May 2023 for voters to show photographic identification when voting in a polling station. On 2 May this year, voters in Doncaster will be required to show acceptable photo ID in a polling station for the first time. Forms of ID which are accepted include Passports, Photo Driving Licences, Blue Badges and Older Persons Bus Passes.

As well as the Electoral Commissions national Voter ID campaign, Electoral Services have taken extra measures to get the message out to voters by sending flyers with canvass, registration forms and annual Council Tax bills. Running radio advertising campaigns in all DCLT leisure centres across Doncaster and all Doncaster Council social media pages. All polling station 'poll cards' will be in the form of a 'poll letter' to include the full list of acceptable forms of ID along with the link of how/where to obtain free voter ID (VAC). More information on how we are raising awareness of voter ID can be found in the Elections Act update report.

#### **6. Preparations for the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Election**

Preparations are underway for the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) Election to take place on Thursday 2 May 2024. Regular planning meetings are taking place with the Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO) team and South Yorkshire Councils.

Martin Swales, the Chief Executive of SYMCA is the Combined Area Returning Officer (CARO) for the election, with Damian Allen the Council's Chief Executive as Local Returning Officer for Doncaster. The CARO is responsible for the co-ordination of delivery of the election across South Yorkshire. Local Returning Officers are responsible for the conduct of the election in their local authority area.

The Verification and Count of all ballot papers will take place on Saturday 4 May 2024 at Doncaster Racecourse. Arrangements for recruiting staff has commenced for all positions on polling stations, postal vote opening and count.

All our usual Polling Stations have been contacted and we have received around 90% of completed booking confirmation letters. We do have several polling stations no longer available due to closing or changes to premises. **Appendix A** provides a draft list of polling stations currently under review and the proposed change to our usual polling station or different from the one used last time. However, all polling stations have not been confirmed at this point and this list may change. Once suitable arrangements have been sourced members will be notified of the final proposals.

Any changes to a polling station will be highlighted on polling cards notifying those effected electors of a change to their previous polling station. The usual polling station finder on the Councils website will be updated with these changes. The 'find my polling station' app allows electors to search for their polling station by typing in their post code or address and not only will details of their polling station pop up they will be given a map and directions on how to get there from their home address. 'find my polling station' app address is also provided to all electors on their polling cards.

A timetable of key dates for a 2 May Election is provided at **Appendix B**.

## **7. BY-ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUMS**

### **Thorne-Moorends Town Council – Thorne Town Ward**

Due to non-attendance at Town Council meetings a vacancy occurred and was advertised for a Town Councillor in the Thorne Town Ward. City of Doncaster Council received the necessary request from at least ten electors within the Thorne Town ward area to fill the vacancy by holding an election. Therefore, nominations open on Friday 16 February and close at 4:00pm on Friday 23 February 2024, if contested the election will take place on Thursday 21 March 2024.

At present there are 9,158 registered electors in Thorne Town Ward, of which 2,344 are postal voters. Should the election be contested, there will be six polling stations. The cost of this election will be charged to Thorne-Moorends Town Council.

Further information can be found on the Councils web page by visiting:

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/the-council-democracy/thorne-moorends-town-council-by-election>



## **8. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**



Elections and Referendums are a statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements. To support the Elections Act changes all polling station staff will undertake a lengthy training session dedicated to Voter ID, Postal Vote handling and accessibility in the polling station. Extra polling staff will be appointed to busier polling stations as recommended by the Electoral Commission and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

## 9. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

This report is primarily for information only.

## 10. IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 <b>Tackling Climate Change</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</b>				✓

Comments:				
 <b>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</b>				✓
Comments:				
<b>Fair &amp; Inclusive</b>	✓			
<p>The Council has a duty to ensure Elections and Referendums are well managed to allow all eligible electors to freely vote by secret ballot ensuring freedom of expression and political debate by exercising their vote. The Council has worked hard to ensure that voting is accessible to all. A full Polling Places review was carried out in 2019 and full risk assessment reviews in 2021 to ensure all Polling Stations are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and will continue to be reviewed to ensure they meet any new legislative requirements and recommendations from the Elections Act 2022. The next full Polling Places Review will be completed by January 2025.</p>				

## 11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 16/02/2024]

The arrangements detailed in this report are designed to ensure compliance with a range of statutory duties including:

- Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006, 2014, 2018
- The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2014, 2015 and 2018
- Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985 and 2000
- Elections Act 2022

## 12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 20/02/2024]

The government have committed to providing New Burdens Funding to local authorities via Section 31 Grants to cover the increased costs resulting from implementing measures in the Elections Act 2022. Some funding has been used to pay for privacy ID booths and mirrors and will also be used to fund extra poll clerks and towards extra training of staff.

The grant funding should only be spent on work / equipment relating to the Elections Act and any unspent funding should be rolled forward at year end.

Any costs associated with a Thorne-Moorends Town Council by-election are claimed back in full from the Town Council.

### **13. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

Human Resources Implications have not been requested for this report.

### **14. TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

Technology Implications have not been requested for this report.

### **15. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

Ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the Council, RO and ERO meets the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards and complies with their legal statutory duties. Delivering well-run elections improve our reputation and meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

### **16. CONSULTATION**

Not applicable

### **17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Previous EDSC reports

### **18. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ERO	Electoral Registration Officer
CARO	Combined Area Returning Officer
RO	Returning Officer
DLUHC	The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
VAC	Voter Authority Certificate

### **19. REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

Trina Barber, Electoral Services Manager  
Legal & Democratic Services

Tel: 01302 734398 E-mail: [trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk)

**Damian Allen**

**Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer**



Polling District	Usual Polling Station	Polling station used in May 2022	Proposed Polling Station 2024
<b><u>Hexthorpe &amp; Balby North Ward</u></b>			
AB	Waverley Community Centre, Church Lane, Balby, Doncaster DN4 0UQ	Waverley Community Centre, Church Lane, Balby, Doncaster DN4 0UQ	Balby Family Hub, 1 Sandycroft Cres, Doncaster DN4 0TY
<b><u>Wheatley Hills &amp; Intake Ward</u></b>			
DI	Copper Pipe Cafe, Barnby Dun Road, Doncaster DN2 4RG	Copper Pipe Cafe, Barnby Dun Road, Doncaster DN2 4RG	Portable Unit, Junction of Jefferson Avenue & Chalmers Drive
<b><u>Bessacarr Ward</u></b>			
EG	National College, For Advanced Transport & Infrastructure, Carolina Way, DN4 5PN	National College, For Advanced Transport & Infrastructure, Carolina Way, DN4 5PN	Portable Unit, Junction of Langsett Court & Lakeside Boulevard
<b><u>Conisbrough Ward</u></b>			
GB	Sea Fish Restaurant, 18 Doncaster Road Conisbrough DN12 3AG	Sea Fish Restaurant, 18 Doncaster Road Conisbrough DN12 3AG	Portable Unit, Windmill Avenue
GK, GL	Sea Fish Restaurant, 18 Doncaster Road Conisbrough DN12 3AG	Sea Fish Restaurant, 18 Doncaster Road Conisbrough DN12 3AG	Portable Unit, Windmill Avenue
<b><u>Edlington &amp; Warmsworth Ward</u></b>			
HE	Warmsworth Community Centre, Low Road West, DN4 9LE	Warmsworth Community Centre, Low Road West, DN4 9LE	The Resource Centre, 77 Stapleton Rd, Warmsworth, Doncaster DN4 9LJ
<b><u>Adwick- Le-Street &amp; Carcroft Ward</u></b>			
OB	The Hobcroft Centre, Repton Road, DN6 8JF	The Hobcroft Centre, Repton Road, DN6 8JF	Draycott Walk Communal Hall, Repton Rd, DN6 8JG
<b><u>Norton &amp; Askern Ward</u></b>			
PI	All Saints Church, Stockbridge Lane DN6 9JF	Owston Hall Hotel Owston Lane, Doncaster DN6 9JF	Owston Hall Hotel Owston Lane, Doncaster DN6 9JF
<b><u>Mexborough Ward</u></b>			
SA	The Hall Gate Centre, Hall Gate S64 0DQ	The Hall Gate Centre, Hall Gate S64 0DQ	Derwent Road Communal Hall, Derwent Rd, Mexborough S64 0QF
<b><u>Sprotbrough Ward</u></b>			
TG	St James' Church, Church Lane, High Melton DN5 7SZ	St James' Church, Church Lane, High Melton DN5 7SZ	The Barn, The Cadeby Inn Pub, Main Street, DN5 7SW

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## Timetable of Proceedings for Thursday 2 May 2024

Publication of Notice of Election	Tuesday 26 March 2024
Receipt of Nominations	Tuesday 26 March 2024 to 4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Withdrawal of Candidate	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Appointment of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Publication of Notice of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Publication of Statements of Persons Nominated	4:00 pm Monday 8 April 2024
Last Date for Registration	Tuesday 16 April 2024
Receipt of Postal Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 17 April 2024
Last day for Voter Authority Certificates	5:00 pm Wednesday 24 April 2024
Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 24 April 2024
Publication of Notice of Poll	Wednesday 24 April 2024
Appointment of Poll and Count Agents	Thursday 25 April 2024
First Day to Issue Replacement Lost Postal Ballot Papers	Friday 26 April 2024
Last Day to Issue Replacement Spoilt or Lost Postal Ballot Papers	5:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024
Receipt of Emergency Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024
Day of Poll	7:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024

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## City of Doncaster Council

### Report

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**Date: 28 February 2024**

**To: The Chair and Members of the**

**ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

**Report Title: Elections Act 2022 Update**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report is designed to provide an update on the Elections Act 2022, with a particular focus on the new measures which have recently been implemented since the last meeting and new measures due to be implemented next.

Due to the City of Doncaster Council not having national Elections in May 2023 some of the changes made last year will not have affected voters until the elections taking place in May this year.

#### **2. EXEMPT REPORT**

This is not an exempt report.

#### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report is for information, the Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

#### **4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

Helping voters to understand the democratic system is an important part of the City of Doncaster Council's role. Many changes to the Elections Act will have not affected most voters in Doncaster until May's Elections this year.

#### **5. BACKGROUND**

The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022, with many changes spanning over two years. We have already seen the introduction of Photo ID at a polling station, free photo ID in the form of a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC), extended election accessibility measures, first past the post for Mayor and PCC elections and online absent vote applications to name a few.

## 6. VOTER IDENTIFICATION

The majority of the country took to the polls using photo ID for the first time in the May 2023 elections. However, the City of Doncaster Council didn't have any national elections in May 2023, therefore, on 2 May this year, voters in Doncaster will be required to show acceptable photo ID in a polling station for the first time. Forms of ID which are accepted include Passports, Photo Driving Licences, Blue Badges and Older Persons Bus Passes.

Two By-Elections took place under the new rules in November 2023 for the Rossington & Bawtry ward and Stainforth Town Council areas. Therefore, some residents in those areas are already aware of the requirement to take acceptable ID in order to vote in a polling station at any upcoming future Elections.

### How is the City of Doncaster Council raising awareness

We know from UK Government and the Electoral Commissions research that the vast majority of voting age adults (around 96%) hold an acceptable form of photo ID. But the same research also identified demographics less likely to have eligible ID. A number of these – “white people, the unemployed, and those with low education and qualifications” – can be reached effectively by mass advertising. Others face significant or compounding barriers, such as the over 85s, disabled people, trans and non-binary people, homeless people, and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. We intend to do more Partnership working – more than we have ever done before to help reach some of these audiences to a greater extent and sharing with them resources available to help promote the message.

In September 2023 we created an A5 coloured flyer to inform people about the new voter ID requirement including acceptable forms of ID with QR codes and links to more information and free photo ID. On the other side is more information on voter ID and how 17 year olds (attainers) could register now to ensure they are ready to be able to vote as soon as they turn 18. This flyer was sent to over 50,000 properties in September with our annual canvassing letters to those properties that required a canvass response. Since November a further 14,500 flyers were sent out with all 'Invitation to Register' forms and will continue to be sent with future forms.

In February the flyer will be sent out with approx. 140,000 annual Council Tax bills and be included in any new bills raised thereafter.

We will be running a 12-month radio advertising campaign from mid-February in all DCLT leisure centres across Doncaster (Doncaster Dome, Dearne Valley Leisure Centre, Askern Leisure Centre, Adwick Leisure Centre, Armthorpe Leisure Centre, Balby Fitness Village and Rossington Community Pool). Our message will initially focus on registering to vote and voter ID and will be played every hour between the hours of 6:30am – 9:30pm 7 days a week. The message is changeable throughout the campaign to cover May's Election, the UK Parliamentary General Election and the Annual Canvass.

Poll cards will be sent out to residents in March informing them of May's upcoming Election, they will be in the form of a 'poll letter' to include the full list of acceptable forms of ID along with the link of how/where to obtain free voter ID (VAC). We will repeat this in relation to any other elections held in Doncaster this year.

As well as the above City of Doncaster Council web pages include detailed information regarding Voter ID and how to obtain free voter ID (VAC). All Social Media platforms will increase activity over the coming months regarding the upcoming elections including the requirement for Voter ID as well as other Elections Act changes.

### **What else is being done to help raise awareness**

The Electoral Commission have launched their awareness campaign across England and Wales. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at the polling station on 2 May. The campaign also aims to ensure that people who do not have an accepted form of photo ID are aware that they can apply for free Voter ID (Voter Authority Certificate).

There will be two main phases:

1. **8 January to 24 April** – alongside their key message, this phase will focus on raising awareness of the option of applying for free voter ID.
2. **24 April to 2 May** – after the deadline for applying for free voter ID has passed, the campaign will move on to a final push to remind voters to bring photo ID to the polling station.

They'll be advertising on all the traditional channels, such as press, radio, TV, search and display, social media, and out of home billboards. As well as continuing to use some exciting channels that they've started exploring over the past couple of years, such as cinema, in-game, and digital out of home.

## **7. CHANGES TO POSTAL AND PROXY VOTING**

### **Online absent vote applications**

From 31 October 2023 electors (except for anonymous electors) are able to apply for an absent vote (postal vote) online via <https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote>. Since the portal went live on 31 October, to date we have received 112 online applications and 127 paper applications so far, all of which include the new identity checks to include national insurance and date of birth which also came into force from 31 October 2023.

### **Changes to proxy voting limits**

The number of people a person can act as proxy for has been restricted. From 31 October 2023, a person is not entitled to vote as proxy in any electoral area on behalf of more than four electors. Within the four electors, no more than two electors can be domestic electors. Domestic electors are those electors who are neither service voters nor overseas electors. All existing proxy voters were contacted last year who had an arrangement in place before 31 October 2023 informing them of the new rules and that they must reapply and make a fresh application by 31 January 2024. The updated proxy limit is now included on polling cards and when any fresh proxy application is made.

## **8. OVERSEAS ELECTOR'S REGULATIONS**

The draft statutory instrument implementing Elections Act changes for overseas electors has been laid in Parliament and came into effect on 16 January 2024. [The Representation of the People \(Overseas Electors etc.\) Amendment Regulations 2023](#) the 15-year limit on expatriates' right to vote in UK Parliamentary elections has been removed and all British citizens overseas who were previously registered or resident in the UK will now be enfranchised.

Those enfranchised are entitled to register in respect of the last UK address at which they were registered, or, if they were never registered, the last UK address at which they were resident. The registration period for overseas electors has been extended from one year to up to three years. Electors will be able to reapply or refresh their absent vote arrangements at the same time as renewing their overseas declaration. Renewals will be linked to a fixed point of 1 November. They will be able to use the online portal to register and apply for a postal vote.

Since the changes to the 15-year limit on expatriates' right to vote in UK Parliamentary elections was removed on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024, to date we have received 54 applications.

## **9. HANDLING AND HANDING IN OF POSTAL VOTES AND THE SECRECY OF ABSENT VOTING**

The handling and handing in of postal votes and the secrecy of absent voting will change for polls taking place from 2 May 2024. It requires people handing in postal vote packs at a polling station or to the Returning Officer via hand delivery to the Council Civic Office to complete a 'return of postal voting documents form' which include provisions on rejecting postal votes where the form has not been completed, where the maximum number of postal votes handed in is exceeded, or where postal votes have been handled by a campaigner. There will be a limit on the number of postal votes a person can hand in at a polling station – they will not be allowed to hand in more than five postal ballot packs for other electors plus their own. If a person hands in more than five postal ballot packs for other electors, all the postal votes (other than their own) will be rejected.

Political campaigners will be banned from handling postal votes, except where the postal vote is their own, that of a close family member, or someone they provide regular care for.

A political campaigner is defined in legislation as:

- a candidate at the election
- an election agent of a candidate at the election
- a sub-agent of an election agent at the election
- employed or engaged for the purposes of that person's activities as a candidate
- a member of a registered political party and carries on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election
- employed or engaged by a registered political party in connection with the party's political activities
- employed or engaged by a person within paragraphs (a) to (f) to carry on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election



- employed or engaged by a person within paragraph (g) to carry on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election

If found guilty of handling postal votes as a campaigner, a person could face a fine and/or imprisonment up to two years.

## **10. EU CITIZENS' CANDIDACY AND VOTING RIGHTS**

In England, automatic entitlement will cease for EU citizens to register to vote, vote, stand for election and hold public office. The rules are expected to take effect in May 2024, after the 2 May elections.

Two groups of EU citizens will retain their rights:

- **'Qualifying EU citizens'** that is citizens of a country included in Schedule 6A to the Act at the relevant time, and who hold any form of leave to remain or do not require such leave (largely analogous to 'qualifying Commonwealth citizens'). Note that Schedule 6A is a list of countries with which the UK has bilateral voting and candidacy rights treaties. Currently, the UK has such treaties with four countries: Poland, Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg. These countries will be listed on the Schedule at the point the provisions come into force. It is feasible that, in future, other countries will be added to this list.
- **'EU citizens with retained rights'** those persons who were already resident in the UK or Islands at the end of the Implementation Period following our exit from the EU (31/12/20). Such persons are also required to have maintained lawful immigration status.

All EU citizens on the electoral register will therefore need to have their eligibility to be registered reviewed, at a point after the legislation comes into force, with those determined to have become ineligible - under the new provisions - being removed from the relevant electoral register. EU citizens elected to office before the measures in the Act come into force can remain in office for their full term, irrespective of immigration status, and irrespective of whether they qualify under the new eligibility criteria.

## **11. BALLOT SECRECY ACT 2023: 'FAMILY VOTING'**

A Commencement order has been made to bring Ballot Secrecy Act provisions into force on 2 May 2024. The Act makes it an offence at UK parliamentary elections and local elections in England for a person to be with or near another person at a polling booth, with the intention of influencing them.

## **12. IMPRINTS REQUIRED ON SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN MATERIAL**

From 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023, a digital imprint must be included on any campaign material issued on social media by any of the following persons

- a registered party
- a registered non-party campaigner
- a candidate or future candidate
- an elected office-holder

Councillors are included in the definition of "elected office holder" so in future any campaign posts issued by either elected Councillors or those who have announced

their intention to stand for election must by law include an imprint. Further information can be found at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/statutory-guidance-digital-imprints>




### 13. OPTIONS CONSIDERED






Elections and Electoral Registration is a statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements. The core Electoral Services team are attending key meetings and training to keep up to date with the new implementations on an ongoing basis and ensure the Contact Centre is continually briefed on changes. A review of polling station staff training will also be required to cover the changes and the Electoral Commission and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) recommends extra Poll Clerks on high turnout polling stations to help with voter identification and completing Postal Vote handling in forms.

### 14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

This report is primarily for information only.

### 15. IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 <b>Tackling Climate Change</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs</b>				✓
Comments:				

 <b>Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</b>				✓
Comments:				
 <b>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</b>				✓
Comments:				
<b>Fair &amp; Inclusive</b>	✓			
<p>The Council has a duty to ensure Elections and Referendums are well managed to allow all eligible electors to freely vote by secret ballot ensuring freedom of expression and political debate by exercising their vote. The Council has worked hard to ensure that voting is accessible to all. A full Polling Places review was carried out in 2019 and full risk assessment reviews in 2021 to ensure all Polling Stations are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and will continue to be reviewed to ensure they meet any new legislative requirements. The next full Polling Places Review will be completed by January 2025. Electoral Services team are attending key meetings and training to keep up to date with the new Elections Act implementations on an ongoing basis.</p>				

## **16. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 16/02/2024]**

The Elections Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022, it introduces a number of changes to how elections are conducted in the UK. This will have an impact on local authorities and the core Electoral Services Team, who will be responsible for implementing much of the change. The Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP) in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is supporting the electoral sector to implement the changes.

## **17. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 20/02/2024]**

The government have committed to providing New Burdens Funding to local authorities to cover the increased costs resulting from implementing measures in the Elections Act.

Section 31 Grants (2022 – 2024) received so far:

- £12,954 (November 2022)
- £6,901 (April 2023)
- £37,189 (August 2023)

Confirmation of a further grant of £62,545 to be received in April 2024 towards extra polling station staff, additional polling staff training of Elections Act changes, processing online VACs, Absent Votes and Overseas applications as well as Election Act awareness campaigns.

The grant funding should only be spent on work / equipment relating to the Elections Act and any unspent funding should be rolled forward at year end.

## **18. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

Human Resources Implications have not been requested for this report.

## **19. TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

Technology Implications have not been requested for this report

## **20. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

Ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure the Council, RO and ERO meets the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards and complies with their legal statutory duties. Delivering well-run elections improve our reputation and meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

## **21. CONSULTATION**

Not applicable

## **22. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Association of Electoral Administrators newsletters [www.aea-elections.co.uk](http://www.aea-elections.co.uk)

## **23. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ERO – Electoral Registration Officer

RO – Returning Officer

DLUHC - The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

## **REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

Trina Barber, Electoral Services Manager  
Legal & Democratic Services

Tel: 01302 734398

E-mail: [trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk)

**Damian Allen**

**Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer**

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