



Doncaster Council

Report

To the Chair and Members of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

2021 ELECTION RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides members with detailed information and results of the combined Mayoral, Borough, Parish, Police and Crime Commissioner and Edenthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum elections which took place on Thursday 6 May 2021.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. This report is for information only. 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. Having accessible and well-organised elections 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.

BACKGROUND

5. Elections are a significant project, which are delivered by a small core team supported by hundreds of individuals both internally across the Council and externally, who undertake various duties such as working at polling stations, processing postal votes and the counting of votes.
6. There had been much speculation on whether the scheduled 2021 Elections and 2020 postponed elections would take place on the 6th May 2021 due to

safety concerns and logistical challenges due to the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.

7. On the 5 February 2021 the UK government confirmed that the 2021 scheduled polls in England and those delayed from 2020 would go ahead on 6 May 2021 and published a delivery plan.
8. The Government allocated £92 million of government funding to Returning Officers and local authorities for the elections; of this, £31 million was an uplift to directly address costs associated with making the elections Covid-19 secure. This package of funding supported Returning Officers to secure venues and staffing and run Covid-19 secure elections. Doncaster received £101,823.
9. This is the first time Doncaster has had the combined polls for the Mayor for Doncaster, all-out Council Borough elections for all 55 seats and all-out Parish elections for all 304 seats and these three elections will be combined going forward every four years. In total across all 3 elections, 466 Candidates were nominated for election.
10. Due to their postponement during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner Election and Edenthope Neighbourhood Planning Referendum were also held on 6th May 2021.
11. This was an election like no other and regionally Doncaster faced the most challenging programme of elections of any other Council with the number of Elections combined and the number of separate counts needed, all with Covid-19 restrictions in place. It is worthwhile understanding the logistics behind such an operation. Whilst simultaneously sourcing polling stations and carrying out risk assessments, the elections team also had to appoint staff to run those stations. To operate in a covid-secure manner the advice of the Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators was to employ extra staff on each polling station to deal with Covid-19 restrictions. This meant an extra 161 poll clerks had to be recruited on top of the usual numbers at a time when many people had not worked out of their own homes for almost a year. In total 484 polling station staff were recruited and trained to help voters understand the different methods of voting on each ballot paper and to ensure anyone voting was able to do so in a safe Covid-19 compliant environment.
12. The combination of elections meant that every polling station had to issue 3 or 4 ballot papers to each voter and have 3 or 4 ballot boxes, one per election. In total 509 ballot boxes were issued to Presiding Officers across the 161 polling stations. In order for Presiding Officers to safely collect those ballot boxes they booked a 10 minute contactless collection slot within a 3hr window at Doncaster Racecourse and had their ballot boxes and PPE safely put in the boot of their car, much the same way as when they drop off their ballot boxes at the close of poll. A huge number of ballot books needed to be proofed and quality checked, in total the Electoral Services team quality checked 6,075 ballot books (totalling 607,500 individual ballot papers for all polling stations).

13. **Local Elections**

Mayor for Doncaster, Borough Councillors, Police and Crime Commissioner

As the electoral franchise for these local elections were all the same; everyone entitled to vote could vote for all three elections - Mayor of Doncaster, Borough Councillors and Police and Crime Commissioner we were able to combine the postal vote pack. There was an electorate of 227,679 of which 60,205 were registered postal voters. 752 postal vote packs were rejected due to the personal identifiers not matching and letters have been sent to those electors to inform them of the reason why.

Mayor of Doncaster

There were 7 Candidates for the Mayoral Elections. On polling day 27,839 (16.62%) electors cast their vote in the 161 polling stations across Doncaster and 36,023 (59.83%) voted by post giving a total of 63,862 ballot papers verified and a total turnout of 28.05% for the Mayor of Doncaster election.

Borough Councillors

In total across all 21 wards there was a total of 168 candidates. On polling day 27,843 (16.63%) electors cast their vote in the 161 polling stations across the borough and 35,974 (59.75%) voted by post giving a total of 63,817 ballot papers verified and a total turnout of 28.02% for the Borough Councillor Elections.

Police and Crime Commissioner

There were 3 candidates for the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner. Doncaster's breakdown on polling day 27,801 (16.60%) electors cast their vote in the 161 polling stations and 35,531 (59.02%) voted by post giving a total of 63,332 ballot papers verified and a total turnout of 27.82% for the Police and crime Commissioner Election.

14. **Parish Elections**

There are a total of 37 Town and Parish Councils in Doncaster with 55 Parish wards and 304 seats. Out of the 55 Parish wards, 41 Parish wards were uncontested for a total of 281 candidates. 14 Parish Wards were contested and elections took place on the 6th May with a total of 106 candidates. There was a total of 24 polling stations out of the 161 which issued Parish ballot papers for these wards. In total 8,760 postal votes were issued in separate single packs with a total of 5,101 returned. 152 Postal Vote packs were rejected due to the personal identifiers not matching and letters have been sent to those electors to inform them of the reason why.

15. **Edenthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum**

There was an electorate of 3,922 electors of which 1,136 were registered postal voters of those 28 postal vote packs were rejected due to the personal identifiers not matching and letters have been sent to those electors to inform them of reason why. On polling day 526 (18.89%) electors cast their vote in the two polling stations in Edenthorpe and 637 (56.07%) voted by post giving a total of 1,163 ballot papers verified and a total turnout of 29.65%. The outcome of the Referendum was in favour of using the Neighbourhood Plan for Edenthorpe to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

16. **Covid-19**

The elections were delivered in a Covid-secure manner. Following advice from Government, Electoral Commission, Association of Electoral

Administrators and the Council's Director of Public Health, many Covid-19 safety measures were put in place to ensure our staff, voters and candidates remained safe at all times during all electoral events:

17. Polling Stations

Unfortunately, some of our usual polling stations had to be changed this year due to a number of reasons, including refusal from building managers, buildings remaining closed through the pandemic, unavailability or because buildings could not be made Covid-19 compliant. Early on in the planning stage we were informed that the NHS were using portable units across the country for Testing/Vaccination sites so many were already hired out, this included our regular portable units. We were informed that if we wished to secure units a non-refundable payment was required at a cost approximately 200% higher than previously invoiced. Public Health later advised that portable units were not recommended to be used as polling stations as any staff and electors voting in them could not comply with the Covid-19 rules of remaining 2 metres apart at all times and most do not have windows to allow air circulation it would put staff and voters at risk. Therefore, we implemented that advice and did not use any portable units as polling stations in order to not put staff or voters at risk.

On the 11 February, the Minister of State for School Standards and the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office wrote to all Returning Officers to request wherever possible that Schools not be used as polling stations. Therefore, the Elections team began to review all used Schools to see if any suitable alternatives could be sourced.

On 22 February, following national guidance, the Council's Director of Public Health advised that all polling stations were to have a Covid-19 Risk Assessment carried out for use as a Polling Station (this was additional to any previous building Risk Assessment which may be in place). As poll card data was to be supplied to the printers by the 15 March it provided a three week window to source alternative school polling stations and carry out Covid-19 Risk Assessments on all 161 finalised polling stations. All electors within the borough who had a change of polling station were notified of the change on their poll card letter as well as how to apply for a postal or proxy vote. Candidates were also informed of the location of Polling Stations within their candidate packs.

Every Polling Station was equipped with plastic "sneeze" screens which were placed between those staff working on the station and also those electors entering to vote. Staff were provided with individual packs of Type IIR face masks, individual hand sanitiser, individual visors, a tape measures to mark 2m distance, large tub of wipes for enhanced cleaning regimes, masks and hand sanitiser and single use pencils for voters, Covid-19 signs and an extra member of staff to meet and greet voters and ensure they followed social distancing restrictions, one ways and provided masks and hand sanitiser on arrival and exit.

18. Postal Vote processing

Due to the number of candidates and agents entitled to attend postal vote opening sessions our usual venue was not suitable nor available this year. Therefore, we looked to source an alternative building that was large enough to accommodate staff to work at a 2 metres distance and those

observing could also be 2 metres away from staff and each other. One of Doncaster Racecourses large function rooms was Covid-19 Risk assessed and deemed suitable. It allowed staff to spread out across the room using “sneeze” screens between them and observers. Staff were provided with individual packs of Type IIR face masks, individual hand sanitiser, individual visors and pencils and plenty of wipes for enhanced cleaning regimes.

19. Counts

Our usual count venue Doncaster Racecourse Exhibition Hall was used and four Counts took place for each election separately. Mayoral on Thursday 6 May at close of poll, Borough Councillors on Friday 7 May, Parish Councillors and Edenthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum on Saturday 8 May and the South Yorkshire Police and crime Commissioner on Monday 10 May. Due to the large number of Candidates entitled to attend these counts and to ensure the safety of staff, candidates and election agents due to Covid-19 restrictions, space in the count venue and the maximum number of people within the count hall at any one time, it was necessary to reduce the number of guests and counting agents across all elections.

In order to ensure count staff remained at a 2 metre distance from each other and from those observing, we had to reduce the usual number of counters we normally use due to the space available within the room. Count staff were allocated an individual table with a “sneeze” screen between them and observers, they all received individual packs of Type IIR face masks, individual hand sanitiser, individual visors and pencils and plenty of wipes for enhanced cleaning regimes.

20. The total number of staffing positions allocated for these elections across all roles was 1,551 in total. Due to Covid-19 restrictions staff had to be trained remotely via Microsoft teams which proved successful and also created more interaction than the usual face to face training previously used. In order to ensure the safety of all those staff and the safety of voters, candidates, agents and observers, anyone attending (except voters) or working at any electoral event, were required to undertake rapid lateral flow Covid-19 tests (if not already undertaking twice weekly testing) by visiting one of Doncaster’s testing centres.

21. Despite the challenges, the voting, postal vote processing and count operations were carried out effectively and efficiently. Overall, the elections were successfully delivered with a very significant contribution made by individuals and teams throughout the Council.

Results

22. Members present at the counts will appreciate that a significant feature of the all-out elections was the need to utilise counting sheets rather than simply allocating single vote ballot papers to the relevant candidate. Overall, the elections and counts were successfully delivered with a very significant contribution made by individuals and teams throughout the Council. A number of positive comments have been made by Candidates, Agents and staff in relation to the election process and specifically Covid-19 safety measures put in place at polling stations, the change in venue to use the Racecourse to process postal votes and the verification and counts.

23. A summary of the results for each election is set out at **Appendix A** of this report. The results, including the number of votes for each candidate, the rejected votes and the % turnout, are also published on the Council's website:-

<http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/the-council-democracy/election-results-for-doncaster>

24. A collection of photos are set out at **Appendix B** of this report showing some of the challenges faced and the Covid-19 PPE and measures put in place.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

25. Elections are statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

26. This report is primarily for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

27.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	

	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	
	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>The Council has statutory duties to support and deliver elections</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

28. Ensuring the necessary arrangements are in place to deliver well-run elections improve our reputation and meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SF Date: 05/07/2021]

29. 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
- Representation of the People Acts 1983, 1985 and 2000
- Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
- Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 06/07/2021]

30. The costs of the Mayor for Doncaster and Borough Councillor elections are at a cost to Doncaster Council. The cost of the Police and crime Commissioner Election and neighbourhood planning referendum is claimed back in full from the Government. The cost of the Parish elections are claimed back accordingly from each Parish/Town Council proportionately.
31. The Government allocated £31 million to Councils to directly address costs associated with making the elections Covid-19 secure, from this Doncaster was allocated £101,823.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

32. Human Resources implications have not been requested.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

33. Technology implications have not been requested.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

34. Health implications have not been requested.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: TB Date: 05/07/21]

35. 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.

CONSULTATION

36. N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

37. Previous EDSC reports.

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