

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2022

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU on TUESDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, 2022, 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.

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 12TH JULY 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7 ELECTIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report which provided Members with detailed information and results from the by-election held on Thursday 25th August 2022 for the Hatfield Town Council – Dunscroft Ward.

It was noted that turnout was 9.48%, and that Chris Taylorson (commonly known as Chris Taylo) had been duly elected with a total of 312 votes.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

8 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 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)). 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.

In answer to a question regarding the number of attempts made by canvassers when door knocking to make contact with residents, the Electoral Services Manager explained that canvassers were asked to make several attempts to make contact with residents. If they failed to obtain a response, canvass forms (open and not enveloped) were posted through the letter box in the hope that the resident would read it and respond knowing that the form had been hand delivered. This method had resulted in a number of responses being received.

The Electoral Services Manager explained, with regard to accessing HMOs, that these were often moved from Route 3 to Route 2, and that attempts were made to find out who the building key holders or supervisors were, especially for those HMOs that could only be accessed via a gated entrance, in order that canvassers could gain access. The local Royal Mail staff were also approached in some cases for advice on gaining access to HMOs.

In response to a question as to whether statistics were available on the response rates from HMOs, the Electoral Services Manager stated that it was not possible to separate out the statistics for HMOs from other properties, due to the fact that it was not always apparent from records that these properties were in fact HMOs until canvassers visited the property and they were also large in number. More accurate statistics on response rates were available for care homes because these were smaller in number (60) so it was possible to keep these on a separate spreadsheet from which reports could be generated.

With regard to communication, it was noted that the Electoral Commission ran national campaigns encouraging people to register online. The Commission also provided media pictures and posters which the corporate communications team used on the Council's various web and social media platforms to raise public awareness. The Council also sent out communications when the foot canvass was underway, so that residents were aware that canvassers might be visiting properties in the area.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

9 2023 PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW PROPOSALS

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the 2023 Parliamentary Boundary Review proposals published by the Boundary Commission, which were out for final consultation with the public for the four week period from 8th November to 5th December, 2022.

The Electoral Services Manager summarised the proposals affecting the three Doncaster constituencies, which were as follows:-

Doncaster Central CC (*proposed constituency name*)

- The name has changed back to the original current name of 'Doncaster Central' from the proposed 'Doncaster Town' due to Doncaster receiving City status.
- It resembles the current existing Doncaster Central constituency but without any part of the Stainforth & Barnby Dun ward.
- The proposal also contains all of the Tickhill & Wadworth ward, which is currently divided between constituencies.

Doncaster Central CC		
Ward	Local Authority	Electorate: 75,007
Armthorpe	Doncaster	10,475
Balby South	Doncaster	6,813
Bessacarr	Doncaster	11,476
Edenthorpe & Kirk Sandall	Doncaster	7,937
Hexthorpe & Balby North	Doncaster	6,679
Tickhill & Wadworth	Doncaster	8,823
Town	Doncaster	11,001
Wheatley Hills & Intake	Doncaster	11,803

Doncaster East and Axholme CC (*proposed constituency name*)

- In Humberside and South Yorkshire they have changed a constituency that crosses the county boundary which is Doncaster and North Lincolnshire by combining the Isle of Axholme area of North Lincolnshire unitary authority with wards from the east of the Borough of Doncaster.
- The Thorne & Moorends ward is currently divided between the current existing Doncaster North and Don Valley constituencies, and they propose this ward now be included wholly within the proposed Doncaster East and Axholme constituency:

Doncaster East and Axholme CC		
Ward	Local Authority	Electorate: 70,113
Finningley	Doncaster	13,806
Hatfield	Doncaster	11,576
Rossington & Bawtry	Doncaster	13,549
Thorne & Moorends	Doncaster	12,766
Axholme Central	North Lincolnshire	6,077
Axholme North	North Lincolnshire	6,436
Axholme South	North Lincolnshire	5,903

Doncaster North CC (*proposed constituency name*)

- The Stainforth & Barnby Dun ward is currently divided between constituencies and they propose that the existing Doncaster North constituency boundary be realigned to follow the ward boundaries, and include the whole of the Stainforth & Barnby Dun ward.

Doncaster North CC		
Ward	Local Authority	Electorate: 71,739
Adwick le Street & Carcroft	Doncaster	11,505
Bentley	Doncaster	12,442
Mexborough	Doncaster	11,438
Norton & Askern	Doncaster	11,524
Roman Ridge	Doncaster	8,565
Sprotbrough	Doncaster	8,992
Stainforth & Barnby Dun	Doncaster	7,273

Two Doncaster wards; Conisbrough and Edlington & Warmsworth (20,565 electors) will move into a Rotherham Council constituency with a Rotherham Member of Parliament, we would therefore provide ballot papers to Rotherham council for those wards when a parliamentary election takes place:

Rawmarsh and Conisbrough CC (*proposed constituency name*)

- They propose to group the remaining Borough of Doncaster wards (Conisbrough, and Edlington & Warmsworth) with the Borough of Rotherham wards to form a Rotherham Constituency and propose the constituency be called Rawmarsh and Conisbrough.

Rawmarsh and Conisbrough CC		
Ward	Local Authority	Electorate: 70,272
Conisbrough	Doncaster	12,240
Edlington & Warmsworth	Doncaster	8,325
Bramley & Ravenfield	Rotherham	7,207
Hooper	Rotherham	9,504
Kilnhurst & Swinton East	Rotherham	6,204
Rawmarsh East	Rotherham	6,879
Rawmarsh West	Rotherham	6,880
Swinton Rockingham	Rotherham	6,336
Wath	Rotherham	6,697

In response to a question regarding the logistics of running elections in the constituencies that were split across different local authority areas, the Electoral Services Manager explained that the fine details were still to be determined and arrangements were dependent on whether it was a combined election or stand-alone Parliamentary election. However, in the case of Doncaster East and Axholme constituency, she explained that it was likely that the ballot papers would need to be returned to North Lincolnshire Council for verification, before being returned back to Doncaster to be counted. Particularly for postal voters, as their personal identifiers would need to be verified by them as Doncaster would not hold that data. Similarly, for the Rawmarsh and Conisbrough constituency, the ballot papers for Conisbrough and Edlington and Warmsworth would be verified by Doncaster Council and then returned to Rotherham Council for counting. It was noted that while this practice was new for Doncaster, it was already being carried out by colleagues in Barnsley and Rotherham, so the Electoral Services Manager would be liaising closely with her counterparts in those other authorities to see how these arrangements worked in practice.

During discussion on the wider context and reasons for the boundary change proposals affecting Doncaster, Councillor Nick Allen explained that the principle changes were in East Yorkshire, with the abolition of the Brigg and Goole constituency, which was to be divided three-ways with part coming into Doncaster and another part into Scunthorpe.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

10 ELECTIONS ACT 2022

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the Elections Act 2022, with a particular focus on the measures due to come into force ahead of the 4th May 2023 polls.

The Electoral Services Manager summarised the new measures that would apply to UK Parliamentary elections in Great Britain, PCC elections in England and Wales, and English local government polls, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report.

It was reported that the biggest change, to be introduced from May 2023, was the new requirement for voters to show photo ID at polling stations before a ballot paper could be issued. The forms of approved photographic identification, such as a passport or driving licence, were listed in Appendix A to the report. It was noted that the documentation did not have to be in date, e.g. an expired passport could be used by a voter, as long as the photograph still remained a good enough likeness from which to identify the elector. For electors in Great Britain who did not have an accepted form of photo ID, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) would be required to provide an electoral identity document, called a Voter Authority Certificate, or Anonymous Electors Document to eligible electors who applied for one. It was noted that although there were no elections in Doncaster next year, it was expected that there would be demand for these new Certificates from electors as soon as the Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign on the new requirement commenced in January 2023.

The full implications of all the new requirements in the Elections Act were still to be determined, as details were still coming in, including the extent of any New Burdens Funding to be provided by central government to local authorities to cover the increased costs resulting from implementing the new measures in the Act.

In terms of arrangements in polling stations, it was noted that there would need to be a private area or booth available for those electors who wore face coverings for religious purposes or for anonymous electors, so that they could confirm their identities to the Presiding Officers in private.

Discussion followed, during which Members made comments/observations and asked questions on a number of issues including the following:-

- Concern was expressed that the requirement for photo ID would discourage some electors from voting, and also disenfranchise the elderly, who could potentially find it difficult to obtain photographic ID, including those living in care homes. With regard to care homes, the Electoral Services Manager explained that it was intended that the Electoral Services team would visit the homes to

explain the new procedures to the residents and staff, and to ascertain if residents had photographic ID or not. For other elderly electors needing assistance, the expectation was that, where possible, they would come to the Civic Office where staff would take their photograph and upload it with their application on the ERO portal, if they were unable to do it themselves. The Electoral Services Manager pointed out that there were various options to consider in terms of assisting electors, such as possibly holding events out in communities, where each ward would be visited and electors given the opportunity to have their photograph taken by staff so that they did not have to travel to the Civic Office. The Electoral Services Manager added that she expected examples of best practice to become apparent throughout 2023 as other local authorities started to hold elections and operate under the new legislation.

- It was confirmed that the Voter Authority Certificates would be issued free of charge to electors, and that there were no plans nationally at present to introduce digital voter IDs.
- Regarding public awareness of the new requirements, the Electoral Services Manager outlined the various ways in which the changes would be communicated to electors. It was noted that, in addition to the Electoral Commission's advertising campaign, the canvassing letter next year would make reference to the new requirements, and poll cards would include details of the approved forms of ID which electors could use. It was also hoped that it might be possible to 'piggy back' on other Council mailshots and communications to residents, such as Council Tax bills. The Electoral Services Manager stressed, however, that funding would not be provided by the government for sending any additional communications out to electors.
- In reply to a question, the Electoral Services Manager stated that she believed the Voter Authority Certificates would be valid for 10 years, although as they were going to be made of paper, it was unlikely that they would last that long. There was also provision for temporary certificates to be issued, and these would be valid only for the relevant polling day (not multiple elections).
- With regard to the scrapping of the 'fifteen year rule' to allow all British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections, regardless of when they left the UK (expected from July 2023), the Electoral Services Manager explained that it was very difficult to predict numbers of those who may come forward and apply to vote when this rule change was implemented. She pointed out, however, that she had already received some enquiries from British citizens living abroad. It was noted that the process for checking electors' applications could potentially be very time consuming, involving the use of national archives and local records and dependent on whether a full investigation would be required or if applications could be taken at face value, which was yet to be confirmed.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____