



City of Doncaster Council

Report

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
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
Comments:				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work				✓
Comments:				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
Comments:				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all				✓
Comments:				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs				✓
Comments:				
 Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough				✓

Comments:				
 Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓
Comments:				
 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities				✓
Comments:				
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
<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

Damian Allen

Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer