

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2015

A MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the 007 B - CIVIC OFFICE on TUESDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2015, at 10.00 am.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Phil Cole
Vice-Chair - Councillor James Hart

Councillors Sean Gibbons, Pat Haith, Charlie Hogarth, Majid Khan, John McHale, Kevin Rodgers, Clive Stone and Sue Wilkinson

APOLOGIES:

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jane Nightingale

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

6 MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7TH JULY 2015

Councillor Charlie Hogarth asked whether the inconsistencies in the wording of the Electoral Register had been resolved. Trina Barber, Electoral Services Team stated that system had been amended and an example copy would be forwarded to Members following the meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7th July, 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7 REVISIONS TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Committee were presented with a report which proposed revisions to the Council's Constitution in response to issues which had arisen since the Constitution was last reviewed. Specifically, those that related to the Council Procedure Rules (Section 1, Part 4 of the Constitution) and the Executive Procedure Rules (Section 4, Part 4 of the Constitution).

The proposed amendments were set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report and Appendix A to the report. Following a request by a member of the public seeking the approval to allow Motions by the public to the Council, the Committee were also asked to consider the request in accordance with its remit.

At this point, with the Chair's consent, the public that were in attendance were afforded the time to ask questions. Mr Tim Brown addressed the Committee, expressing concern with regard to proposal for questions to be put on notice by the public at future Cabinet meetings and the lack of consultation with the public that attend. In response, the Chair thanked Mr Brown for his comments and stated that by amending the procedure to receive questions in advance of the meeting would provide the public with a more meaningful response to their questions. It was also noted that Appendix A to the report stated that the public would receive a written response to their question within 2 weeks of the meeting.

Mr Stark raised a number of issues/concerns. In response, the Chair stated that some of the issues raised go beyond the remit of this Committee but offered to speak to Mr Stark following the meeting.

In relation to the request for members of the public being allowed to submit motions to Council meetings, the Committee unanimously felt that the procedure that was currently in place should remain and felt that it was important that there was a clear distinction in the role between an Elected Member and a member of the public when submitting motions to a Council meeting.

RECOMMENDED to Full Council that:-

- (1) the proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules outlined in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report be approved;
- (2) the proposed amendments to the Executive Procedure Rules, as detailed in Appendix A to the report be approved; and
- (3) the submission of Council Motions should remain the responsibility of elected representatives.

8 ANNUAL CANVASS UPDATE

The Committee received an update in relation to the work being carried out on the Annual Canvass. Trina Barber, Electoral Services reported that as of today the current electorate stood at 218,264 and as the annual canvass was still in progress this was subject to change on a daily basis and any non-confirmed electors under IER would be removed from the register on the 1st December. It was reported that the Team were doing all that they could to encourage people to register through a variety of methods outlined within the additional documentation handed out at the meeting.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions which were as follows:-

Councillor Sue Wilkinson asked whether the register-to-vote website enabled people to find out whether they were registered or not, which would avoid duplication. It was stated that the Government Website did not provide that facility but it was something they were in the process of investigating.

Councillor Charlie Hogarth asked whether the information stored on the Council Library System could be used. It was reported that a National Insurance Number would still be required but the team could use the system to data match.

Councillor Sean Gibbons stated that Mexborough produce a newsletter and suggested that an advertisement be placed in the newsletter to highlight the register-to-vote information.

Councillor John McHale requested that when all the information was collated, it be forwarded to Members in its original form of graphs and pie-charts.

In relation to the reference to unapproachable areas of the borough, the Chair indicated that this was a perception by canvassers of particular neighbourhoods and the Council as an Authority did not feel that Doncaster was a dangerous place to live.

Roger Harvey, Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services took the opportunity to highlight the good work carried out by Trina and the Election Team and thanked all officers for their great cooperation throughout the Council. He also highlighted that the Government could have made the process easier by unlocking the keys to the national data bases but this lesson could be learnt for future years.

The Chair and Members thanked all staff for all the hard work undertaken and passed their appreciation to Trina and the Elections Team.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9 EVALUATION OF THE TICKHILL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING REFERENDUM HELD ON 23RD JULY 2015

The Committee received a report advising Members of the first Neighbourhood Planning Referendum election that took place in Tickhill on 23rd July, 2015. The report provided an evaluation of the election and an update on any future Neighbourhood Planning elections.

The outcome of the results were set out at paragraph 4 of the report and the outcome of the referendum was in favour of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Tickhill area. The Neighbourhood Plan now becomes part of the development plan and Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Details of a further 5 Neighbourhood Plans which were underway within the borough were highlighted at paragraph 12 of the report.

Following the introduction of the report, members were afforded the opportunity to make comments and ask questions which were as follows:-

Councillor John McHale welcomed the report and congratulated/commended Tickhill on the hard work carried out. It was also noted that the process in producing a Neighbourhood Plan was a long process and a suggestion was raised by Councillor Hart stating that ward Members should make themselves available to provide as much support as they could to their Parish Council/Community Groups.

Councillor Sue Wilkinson sought clarification as to who would be eligible to formulate a Neighbourhood Plan as some wards of the borough did not have a Parish Council. It was advised that any Local group as long as it was deemed to be legitimate could produce a Neighbourhood Plan and it didn't necessarily need to be a Parish Council.

Councillor Sean Gibbons stated that as a ward Member for Mexborough which doesn't have a Parish Council, he asked how the town could move forward in producing a plan and how the elected Members could help with that process. The Chair made the suggestion that liaison take place with other areas already going through the process or those who had completed a Neighbourhood Plan. He also stated that information could be shared by speaking to fellow elected Members.

Councillor John McHale stated that although there were differing levels of understanding it should be recognised that there were a number of capable people within communities of the borough and Elected Members were elected as community champions.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

10 PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW

The Committee received a verbal update in relation to the parliamentary review. It was reported that following the completion of register of electors, the register had to be forwarded to the Boundary Commission by the 1 December. It was noted that for those Councils that have had bi-elections they had until February to submit their register.

The Chair reported that the Boundary Commission would seek to reduce the UK down into 9 regions, the seats cannot cross regions but would be able to cross sub-regions for each electoral quarter. He stated that the Boundary Commission would establish a plus or minus 5% which only gives a small margin and makes it difficult to piece together seats that make community sense. It was noted that the Commission had to report to Government by 2018.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to make comments and ask questions. Councillor Sean Gibbons asked when the electorate would be informed of the all-out elections in 2017.

Roger Harvey reported that there shouldn't be a significant problem with regard to the all-out election in 2017, but highlighted that particularly with regard to the Mayoral election it was noted that some people were not entirely sure what they were voting for. He stated that there needed to be a real message sent out to avoid any confusion to the electorate. Roger also stated that with regard to the Mayoral election there were limits placed on Authorities as to what advertising can be published so the Council would need to think carefully about the electoral literature they use to avoid any confusion for voters.

At this point, with the consent of the Chair, Mr Stark raised a number of concerns in relation to the election process particularly with regard despatching of electoral literature by using canvassers. In response, the Chair stated that he would speak to Mr Stark following the meeting to address any concerns he may have.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.