

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

28 SEPTEMBER 2015

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

ELECTION AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION UPDATE

1.0 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To allow Members to consider and note the Elections performance and performance standards.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 **The Committee consider and note the contents of the report.**

2.2 **That the Committee agree to the setting up of a Sub Committee as required to consider and make decisions regarding the Boundary Review in line with para 5.1 of this report**

3.0 **KEY ISSUES**

3.1 **Individual Electoral Registration (IER)**

Individual Electoral Registration went live on the 10th June 2014. The confirmation live run was followed by the transitional canvass which was carried out between August 2014 and November 2014 for those electors that were not confirmed during the confirmation live run, with the new register of electors being published on the 1st December 2014.

3.2 From the 10th June 2014 electors were able to register on line via the IERSD, the government digital on line portal. There is still the facility for an individual to fill in a form should they not have access to the internet. For an elector to register now they have to provide their national insurance number and their date of birth on the application and then have the information verified by DWP.

3.3 From inception to September 2015 we have received over 3,000 digital applications of which over 1,000 were received in the last seven working days prior to the closing date for new application on the 21st April 2015 for the elections on the 7th May 2015. The digital channel has worked very well for registrations that are verified, however, some electors still do not seem to understand that using this does not automatically put them on the Register of Electors and that their information has to be verified by DWP.

3.4 For many, indeed most Council's, this digital registration and the misunderstanding about the verification process caused difficulties in the number of queries and follow ups carried out by Electors, including up to the point of exercising their vote.

4.0 **Elections**

4.1 **Elections 2015**

The 7th May 2015 was the biggest combination of elections since 1979. Carrying

out the duties relevant to these elections posed a huge challenge and necessitated significant teamwork and back up across the Council and particularly the core team. Given these difficulties it has been identified that the staffing structure to support Elections requires review.

4.2 **Parliamentary Election – Rutland and Melton Constituency**

The Mayor – Councillor John Wyatt was the Returning Officer for the Rutland and Melton Parliamentary Constituency with the Chief Executive being the Acting Returning Officer. The Returning Officer exercised his power to receive the Writ, which proclaimed that the election was to be held, and this was received on the 31st March 2014 and to also read the Declaration of Result at the end of the count.

The Acting Returning Officer was responsible for the planning and the efficient running of the election, working closely with our cross boundary authorities, Harborough District Council and Rutland County Council. Extensive planning meetings were held with all members of the Core Elections team from all three authorities to ensure that the complexities of the combinations were understood.

Polling day was busy within the stations across the constituency resulting in an overall turnout of 69%.

The verification for all of the elections on the 7th May was carried out after the close of polls, with the count for the Parliamentary Election following on the same evening. The verification included those Harborough and Rutland wards/Parishes which were contested.

The Declaration for the Member of Parliament for the Rutland and Melton Constituency was made at 6.00 am on the morning of the 8th May 2015.

4.3 **Borough and Parish Elections – 7th May 2015**

The sixteen Borough Wards and twenty-six Parish Councils were all up for election on the 7th May. Eight Borough wards and eight parish councils or parish council wards were contested following the close of nominations. These elections were combined with the Parliamentary Election.

As indicated above, the votes for these elections were verified at the close of poll together with those for the Parliamentary Election. The Count for the Borough Elections took place at 11.00 am on the 8th May 2015 and for the Parish Councils at 2.00 pm on the 8th May 2015

4.4 **Borough and Parish By Elections – October 2014 to 31st March 2015**

We had no Borough or Parish By Elections during this period. There were a number of parish councils that had casual vacancies, but no requests for an election were received, so these were filled by co-option.

4.5 **Polling Place Review**

The statutory review of polling places for the Borough was carried out between November 2014 and February 2015 with the report being presented to Governance Committee on the 11th February 2015. The recommendations of this report were accepted in full and implemented in the May elections.

The Future

5.1

Leicestershire County Council Boundary Review

The Boundary Commission for England commenced the review of the boundaries for the divisions within Leicestershire County Council on the 12th May 2015 with a closing date for submissions on the 21st July 2015. The draft recommendations from the Boundary Commission will be published on the 6th October 2015. A further consultation on the draft proposals will take place with the final recommendations being expected in April 2016. The new electoral arrangements will come into force for the Leicestershire County Council Elections in 2017. It aims to standardise the electorate levels in the wards. Leicestershire County Council has made its submission. There will be a further stage to comment on the Boundary Commission proposals and it is requested that delegated authority be given to a specially formed sub committee to make decisions on the Council's position on this matter if and as required.

5.2

Police and Crime Commissioners Election

This election is to be held on the 5th May 2016. Melton Borough Council's Chief Executive will be a Local Returning Officer (LRO). The planning and cross Leicestershire and Rutland meetings have already commenced.

5.3

EU Referendum

The commitment to the holding of the European Union Referendum has been included in the Queen's speech on the 27th May 2015. The referendum must be held before the end of 2017,

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Performance Standards

6.1

Electoral Registration

Transition to Individual Electoral Registration

On October 13 – the Council submitted our Public Engagement Strategy to the electoral Commission as the only Performance Standard that is in place at present. The Interim assessment of this document indicated that the Council had a well-developed strategy.

6.2

Returning Officers Performance Standards – May 2015 Polls

Melton Borough Council was included in the sample of authorities for monitoring for Performance Standards the polls on 7th May 2015

Submissions Required –

1. Project Plan and Risk Register
2. Count and Verification Plans which included providing the following:-
 - a. overall planning for the verification and count (including assumptions on turnout, number of candidates, speed and capability of count staff, expected timings, contingencies, sharing of

- information with others and consultees in the decision making process)
- b. timing of the verification and count (including extent of combination factors, reviews during the count against expected progress, packing and storage of combined election ballot papers during parliamentary count, arrangements for cross-boundary constituencies)
- c. staffing and training (Including identification of numbers of staff required, and training requirements for each role)
- d. layout and equipment at the verification and count venue (including a layout plan of the count, information to be provided to attendees at the count)
- e. communication during the verification and count (including arrangements to communicate various stages and progress)
- f. managing attendees (including briefings, expected behaviour, policy on use of mobile phones etc)
- g. ensuring the security of ballot papers (including storage plans, any liaison with SPOC, briefing of candidates and agents about arrangements)

The documentation that was required as evidence was as follows:-

- A description of or information on how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision (e.g. you could include information on timing, staff resources, location etc).
- A summary of and/or copy of documentation showing your arrangements for communicating results to voters
- A summary of and/or copy of any documentation showing arrangements in place to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes (e.g. instructions to senior count staff which show the complete end-to-end process)

Following the assessment of the documentation submitted for both Performance standards the Returning Officer received the following assessment:-

‘Further to a review of our proposed assessments by a panel of members of the UK Electoral Advisory Board and senior members of the Electoral Administration team here at the Commission, I am writing to inform you that we have taken the decision to assess you as **meeting the standards.**’

There is no higher standard that can be achieved for these Returning Officer Standards.

7.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The effective delivery of elections on behalf of the local community is a key reputational issue for the Council, particularly complicated taking into account the Council’s size and the very complicated and different election procedures. The Council’s existing team worked very hard to manage these processes.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no Financial implications arising directly from this report as budgets

are allocated in advance by the Government and the Council. These have not been exceeded.

9.0 **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

9.1 Elections and Electoral Registration is run in line with the relevant legislation.

10.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

10.1 There are no community safety issues directly arising from this report.

11.0 **EQUALITIES**

11.1 There are no equality issues directly arising from this report.

12.0 **RISKS**

12.1 There are no direct risks related to this report.

13.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

13.1 There are no climate change issues directly arising from this report.

14.0 **CONSULTATION**

14.1 There is no requirement for consultation on this matter.

15.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

15.1 All Wards

Contact Officer Angela Tebbutt / Sally Renwick
Date: September 2015
Appendices : None
Background
Papers:
Reference : X: Committees/Governance/201516