

MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Monday, 7 November 2011 at 6.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Curran, Oluyole, Hall, Paschoud and Griesenbeck

4. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor Owlabi-Oluyole be elected Chair and Councillor Griesenbeck be elected Vice Chair of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2011/12.

5. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations

6. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee, which was open to the press and public, held on February 3 2011 be confirmed and signed subject to Governance Support correcting minor typographical errors and to the following amendments:

Page 7 third paragraph 4.9.5 to read "what was the future for electoral services"

Page 7 fourth paragraph 'IER' to replace 'the electoral boundary'.

7. Polling District and polling place review

The report was introduced by the Electoral Services Manager who said the most significant changes arising from the statutory review which took place every four years arose from a proposal by Councillor Davis to move 203 properties in polling district DLA1 to DLA6 and a suggestion by Councillor Jeffrey which moved 53 properties from DLC5 to DLC1. The Electoral Services Manager confirmed the Council was able to amend polling districts within a ward but had no power to move polling districts between wards.

In response to a question from Councillor Paschoud, in his capacity as Chair of the Children & Young People Select Committee, the Head of Law confirmed no secondary schools were to be used as

polling stations and that while numerous primary schools were to be used, officers were open to considering suggestions about any reasonably priced alternative locations.

Councillor Curran reiterated previously expressed concerns about electoral signage and was assured by the Head of Law that revisions had been made in time for the 2011 Referendum and that training in effective signage deployment had been given to Presiding Officers and to Visiting Officers. Councillor Curran said he had not been able to closely monitor the Referendum campaign but that he was grateful that his concerns had been addressed.

Councillor Paschoud inquired about the accuracy of the high quality maps on the website and was informed by the Electoral Services Manager that the maps did not display the current proposals but that they would be updated once they had been agreed by the Council.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to agree that the polling districts and places set out in Appendix A, which includes amendments in paragraph 6 of the report, be adopted and the changes be included in the Electoral Register published on 1 December 2011 and that they be effective at subsequent elections.

8. Referendum Review

The report was introduced by the Head of Law who reported the Referendum had been relatively uneventful. She highlighted one potential concern arising from action by the “Yes to Fairer Votes Campaign” which had mailed out 56,000 postal vote applications. Only about 700 were returned, but had all these applications been returned, they could have created capacity problems for the administration of the election. Some concerns had also been raised among the electorate, as some electors believed the applications had come from the Council.

The Committee believed that while it was important to encourage the democratic process by ensuring that application forms were readily available, there should be a clear separation of electoral administration from political campaigns and that it should not be possible for anyone to produce literature that purported to come from the electoral authority.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. Parliamentary Boundary Review

The report was introduced by the Head of Law who informed the Committee that Boundary Commission for England had undertaken consultations in the Town Hall on October 24 and 25 2011.

Councillor Hall proposed that the November meeting of the Council should consider making a representation. He suggested that in accordance with BCE guidelines, a new configuration be drawn up for Lewisham that allocated wards to the following proposed seats:

- (a) Catford & Lewisham (including Ladywell).
- (b) Deptford & Nunhead.
- (c) Lewisham West & Penge.

Councillor Hall said a ward breakdown would be provided to the Head of Law subsequent to the meeting and that officers should frame a proposal that was in accordance with Boundary Commission for England requirements.

RESOLVED That the Head of Law be asked to draw up a representation to the Boundary Commission for England on proposed parliamentary boundaries for agreement by the November 2011 meeting of the Council.

10. GLA 2012

The report was introduced by the Electoral Services Manager who outlined arrangements that had been put in place for the three elections scheduled for May 2012.

Councillor Hall asked about the funding of the three elections and was informed funds would be provided in the form of reimbursement by the GLA to a cap of approximately £300,000. He was told that some of the GLA assumptions in forming their cap, such as numbers of counters and remuneration, and a reduction in payments to Presiding Officers as compared to the 2011 Referendum, were unrealistic.

Officers stated Lewisham would put in place robust arrangements to ensure the high turn out anticipated in connection with the London Mayoral election would be effectively managed. These included allocating 100% of the ballot papers provided by the GLA and providing an additional evening poll clerk at up to 30 of our polling stations from 4.30pm.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

11. Electoral Legislation

The Committee agreed to concentrate discussion on Individual Elector Registration (IER) and note the other items that had been reported to them.

The Head of Law outlined the IER proposals and explained the impact of IER was potentially very significant and that it would become compulsory in 2014.

Councillor Paschoud asked what support would be given to vulnerable people to complete IER and was informed by the Head of Law that none had been finalised as of yet, but support arrangements would be addressed. She advised that input from canvassers undertaking the doorstep registration process had hitherto provided input but this would be eliminated under the new arrangements.

Councillor Paschoud further asked about the point of data matching using agencies such as the DVLC and the DWP. The Electoral Services Manager said data matching was intended to maintain the accuracy given the fact there would no longer be an annual canvass. The Head of Law opined the changes could see the loss of up to 20% of electors from the Lewisham Register.

Councillor Curran asked that amendments to the scheme should be considered that maintained and improved current levels of registration. The Electoral Services Manager suggested the concept should be piloted locally first rather than introduced nationally

Councillor Hall suggested, and the Committee agreed, that Officers be asked to draft a response to the White Paper and that the contents be agreed by the Chair in consultation with Committee members. Members asked to receive an update at their next meeting in February 2012.

RESOLVED That officers be asked to formulate a submission to Government on Individual Elector Registration to be agreed by the Chair in consultation with Committee members.