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MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 February 2011 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Oluyole, Bowen, Curran, Hall, Paschoud and Peake

Kath Nicholson Head of Law
Malcolm Constable The Electoral Services Manager

Apologies for absence was received from the Chief Executive, Barry Quirk

1. Minutes

The 18 October 2010 minutes were agreed as an accurate account, subject to the following changes:

- Councillor Curran stated that many polling stations such as St Bartholomew are flat with boundary walls and fencing, and so easily obstruct polling signage. Councillor Curran proposed that as a general guidance to presiding officers, polling signage be positioned at a right angle to the boundary of polling stations.
- Councillor Hall made a point of information. He highlighted that one of the main motivation in requesting that a referral be sent to Mayor and Cabinet was to ensure that there was sufficient budget, however He felt that the reference did not mention resources. However, the Head of Law clarified that there are no proposals to reduce the election budget.

2. Declaration of Interest

Councillor Curran declared that he works for the public affairs company

3. Follow up to Election Committee meeting 18 October 2010

The Chair invited the Electoral Services Manager to present the updated report.

4. THE ELECTORAL AGENDA: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

As requested by the Elections committee a copy of the above report was sent to the Mayor and Cabinet on 19th January 2011 where its contents were noted and agreement given that the Elections Committee be consulted on all matters related to electoral changes, especially on boundary changes.

With regards to 4.7.5, Councillor Curran inquired when verification of the poll for the referendum has to be completed by. The Head of Law replied that verification has to be done by 1pm and then there has to be a 3 hours gap, but the counting cannot begin before 4pm on the same day, however we are estimating that we will be finished by 6pm.

Councillor Curran asked how long before the referendum is information sent out, and whether only one set of information will be sent out, or whether an opportunity will be taken to send out other information at the same time. The Electoral Services manager confirmed that the electoral commission will be mailing information to all house holds between 4-14 April 2011.

The Chair raised concern regarding the over prescription of the Electoral Commission as no consultations were held. He asked what the Committee could do to raise these concerns. The Head of Law replied that there is very little the committee can do in the way of changing the actions of the Electoral Commission as they are now responsible for all activities during this time.

With regards to 4.9.5, the Chair asked whether there was any future for the electoral services. The Electoral Services Manager replied that there is a short term and long term issue. The short term is that if it goes right the Electoral Commission will deem this as their success and suggest that they should take over the Electoral Services nationally, and if it goes wrong the local service will be blamed. There is a longer term discussion about the future of Electoral Service and who runs it, as there is a view outside of the Metropolitan Boroughs who have restricted resources that there could be some performance failures.

Regarding the electoral boundary, Councillor Pachoud asked when the committee can feed into the debate. The Electoral Services Manager stated that at some stage there may be consultation and this could provide an opportunity for the committee to feed into it. However, at present they are testing whether data matching is going to work, so a number of pilots are being tried, before going onto the next stage.

Councillor Pachoud asked officers to explain the wider debate about the use of credit agencies. The Electoral Services Manager replied that there was a consultation about the edited register and whether this should be continued to be compiled. The professional view is that the register should be used for electoral purpose; it is not prove of residency, but a self declaration. However t is a concern that we had to have sell the register at a prescribe rate whilst Experian is making a lot of money out of its use, but we are not sure whether it is being used probably. Many Lewisham electors have reported the difficulty of removing themselves from edited registers. There are a lot of concern about the use of these registers.

5. CANVAS 2010

The Head of Law commended the Elections team for increasing the canvas by 3%, to 95%.

With reference to paragraph 5.11, The Head of Law explained the reason for the big drop between December 02 and December 03. She stated that there has been a process of clearing the register at this point, i.e. when details of those who have not responded are taken off the register so that the integrity of the registry was kept. From December 03 the overall number increases; that the parliamentary goes down whilst the European goes up so its about the nature of our population, and not that people are leaving the borough.

Councillor Hall asked whether non UK citizen are counted in the calculation of British population so that the borough is financed adequately. The Head of Law replied it is usually the local government electorate that its taken into account for working out the formula for RSG. This counts is very important as its the basis for boundary field.

6 REVIEW OF THE PARLIAMENTARY, MAYORAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 2010

The Chair asked at what stage can the committee have a say in the boundary electoral review debate. The Manager replied that at present when the bill gets passed into law, at which point the parliamentary boundary review commission will have to look at how they will implement it, and at that stage there may be some consultation. But the timetable is unclear not clear and how much room will be given to changes.

RESOLVED that

- i. the committee will require a further report on the parliamentary boundary review; and
- ii. a report on any implication of the PVSC when it becomes law and information on any guidance or consultation when it becomes available.

Finished 8:05pm