

MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 January 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Janet Daby, Alan Hall, Stella Jeffrey (Chair), Alicia Kennedy and John Paschoud

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Roy Kennedy

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Liam Curran

24. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2014 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

26. UK Parliamentary General Election 7 May 2015

The Committee considered a report on the current status of preparations for the UK Parliamentary General Election, to be held on 7 May 2015.

The Head of Law updated the Committee that paragraph 6.5 of the report should be amended to read '7 May 2015'.

The Committee was informed that in order to vote by post at the 2015 UK General Election, postal voters needed to be registered under Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The Electoral Registration Officer was required to delete the postal votes of those electors carried forward onto the 1 December 2014 register who were not IER registered. 1436 Postal Voters were removed in December, although the electors concerned would still be able to vote at polling stations. The Electoral Registration Officer was required to write to these electors inviting them to register under IER enclosing postal voting application forms and Invitations to Register. This process was currently underway.

The Electoral Services Manager commented that all postal voters removed from the register in December 2014 had received at least 3 Invitations to Register before December, and would now be sent a letter saying that they would be removed, and sent a further two further reminders before the election in May. It was clarified to the Committee that of those 1,436 Voters, a number of them may no longer be residents at that address, and the Elections team would have a clearer understanding of the numbers by the end of January.

The Committee was updated on the amended Count arrangements. Provisional arrangements had previously made to count the votes overnight on 7-8 May 2015 at Forest Hill School. However, these arrangements were under reconsideration for a number of reasons. Of major concern was the need to provide and operate a

robust personal vote identifier system at close of poll to accommodate postal votes returned by Lewisham based Presiding Officers, and Presiding Officers from three Bromley wards. As a result of the experience of remote postal vote checking in 2010, the Council has since then conducted this on site in the Civic Suite in rooms 1 & 2. To bring all of the postal votes to the Civic Suite, check their personal identifies and then transport the postal votes to Forest Hill to be with the other votes could have the potential to cause delay to the count start.

Given that the Cabinet Office had mandated that the Count must start 4 hours after the close of poll, the Acting Returning Officer had suggested that the use of the ground floor at Laurence House would be sufficient for the count of all constituent parts of the election to be conducted together. The Head of Law further commented that at the local and European elections last year, half of the ground floor had successfully been cleared for a two day period.

The Chief Executive confirmed that during this time the library and access point would temporarily be closed for the duration. Alternative temporary arrangements for the access point and library were currently under active consideration, and any final plans would ensure disruption was minimal.

The Committee was assured that a range of alternatives to Forest Hill School had been considered, and that Laurence House was considered to be the most workable solution. Space planners had already assessed the ground floor of Laurence House and if Members were minded to support the Count being conducted at Laurence House, further assessments would be undertaken to ensure the process was as undisruptive as possible.

A number of Members commented that it was important to ensure that access points remained open to the public throughout the period that the ground floor of Laurence House was in use, and the Chief Executive clarified that alternative arrangements would be examined to secure this. Furthermore, the Head of Law noted that it would be important that the closure of the library and access point was adequately advertised with as much notice as possible.

Councillor Alicia Kennedy suggested that library book loan periods be extended during the disruption so that nobody would incur fines while the library was closed.

The Committee was accordingly of the view that the amended Count arrangements would be satisfactory.

The Head of Law updated the Committee that the Elections team had been in close dialogue with officers from the London Borough of Bromley, and that similar arrangements as adopted in 210 would be put in place to manage the three Bromley wards incorporated in Lewisham West & Penge constituency. The respective Electoral Service Managers of Bromley and Lewisham would attend each other's candidates' and agents' meetings, and Lewisham would also provide support to Bromley in respect of training for polling station staff in the Lewisham West & Penge constituency.

Councillor John Paschoud queried why officers from Lewisham attended candidate and agent meetings held at Bromley Council. The Head of Law commented that as Lewisham had responsibility for counting votes from three

Bromley wards, it was important to ensure that there was consistency between what was being said to candidates and agents in Bromley and in Lewisham.

With regard to registering individuals under IER, the Electoral Services Manager commented that once an individual had requested to register under the IER, Lewisham would send their details to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for data matching. Lewisham had no control over this process and there was a concern that data matching information was not being received by the Council in a timely manner. Furthermore, it was also noted that recently there had been a number of stories in the media about non-registration issues relating to IER.

Councillor Alicia Kennedy queried whether the Council received a large number of requests from people not registered during the last election, and the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that 3,000 requests to register had been received in the last 10 days before the 2010 General Election.

The Electoral Services Manager noted that it would be useful if the Election call centre was kept open a week after the election so that any queries regarding the election could be responded to, and people could be encouraged to register under IER for the next election.

The Committee thanked the Head of Law and the Electoral Services Manager for their update.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

27. Update on IER

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Lewisham.

Given that the Electoral Registration Working Party was scheduled to follow directly from the meeting of the Elections Committee, Members were minded to reserve an in depth discussion on the update on IER to the Working Party meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Meeting closed at 7.55 p.m.