

MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Monday, 10 March 2014 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Liam Curran, Alan Hall, John Paschoud, Sven Griesenbeck, Ami Ibitson and Stella Jeffrey.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Jacq Paschoud and 2 members of the public.

12. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor Ami Ibitson be elected as Chair and Councillor Stella Jeffrey be elected as Vice-Chair for the Municipal Year 2013-14.

13. Declaration of interests

There were none.

14. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on November 7 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

15. GLA Review 2012

The report was introduced by the Head of Law who concluded that the election process had been relatively smooth and well run.

Councillor Hall queried the number of votes which had been rejected and was told by the Electoral Services Manager that procedures pertaining to postal voting were heavily prescribed and only now would the Council be able to write to postal voters whose ballots had been rejected, setting out the reasons for the invalidation unless fraud was suspected.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

16. Combined elections 2014

The report was introduced by the Head of Law who confirmed GLA staff had been recruited by the Chief Executive to support him in his additional role as Regional Returning Officer.

Councillor Jeffrey asked for further information about contact made with 'G' voters. The Electoral Services Manager said there was a prescribed form that potential voters had to sign and return. He said 17,000 forms had been posted and 3,000 had been returned to date and that an overall return rate of about 30% was expected. Members requested that they be sent a sample of the letter sent to 'G' voters for their information.

The Head of Law outlined arrangements for the election counts which would be held in Holly Hedge House in Blackheath. She said the venue allowed for

only 130 counters rather than the 180 deployed in the larger hall used for the 2010 counts. She added that the timetabling of counts over several days would allow a key core team of officers who had overseen previous elections to again be present at all counts.

Councillor Curran expressed strong concern over the timing of the local authority count which his research indicated would be the latest in London. He asked that this count be advanced to Friday May 23.

The Head of Law said the timing of counts was a decision for the Returning Officer and that comparisons with other boroughs were not possible as they had use of larger venues allowing more counting staff and that most were not also holding an election for a directly elected Mayor.

Councillor John Paschoud said he accepted the officer advice on count timings but he urged the public relations aspects to be addressed and a communications strategy put in place to inform voters about the delays in issuing results. He also inquired about the design of postal voting packs and was informed that the proofs could be supplied to Committee members for information but that the design was prescribed by law and could not be amended.

Councillor Jeffrey queried the use of DLC3 in paragraph 11.7 of the report and was informed this had been approved already and that polling districts would be the subject of statutory review after the elections.

Councillor Hall urged Officers to reconsider their plans for the election counts, especially if Lewisham was the only borough in London to be counting local authority wards on a Saturday. He suggested Council staff be surveyed to see if any had significant experience of running elections and if not enough were available, other senior staff should be trained to undertake the roles. The Chair suggested that the Chief Executive be asked to review the plans to see if viable alternatives could be suggested. Councillor Curran added that one solution might be the erection of a marquee in the enormous Holly Hedge House parade ground. Councillor Hall wondered if relinquishing the role of Regional Returning Officer could add capacity. Councillor Paschoud added that if the final outcome was that the proposals remained unchanged, work on how they were to be communicated should be undertaken.

The Head of Law confirmed the issues raised would be brought to the attention of the Chief Executive and all members of the Committee and the Mayor would be informed about the outcome of his deliberations.

RESOLVED that proposals for the timing of election counts in 2014 be reviewed by the Chief Executive to see if consistency with other local authorities can be achieved.

17. IER update

The report was introduced by the Head of Law who concluded that the outcome of Individual Elector Registration could be the loss of one million

registered voters from electoral rolls in London.

Members expressed deep concern about the possible loss of so many voters from electoral rolls and the Chair suggested the Elections Committee should meet again in the Autumn of 2014 to review the impact of Individual Elector Registration. She added that officers should also consider organising an all member briefing on this topic prior to any meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.42pm