



Doncaster Council

Report

26th November 2019

To the Chair and Members of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

PREPARATIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update to Members on the preparations for the parliamentary general election to be held on the 12th December 2019. The report also updates members on the ongoing review of polling districts and polling places and outlines some changes that have been made in preparation for the parliamentary election.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Committee is asked to note the report.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. Having accessible and well organised elections is key to public engagement in the democratic process. Comprehensive reviews ensure that there are appropriate polling districts and polling places available which contributes to the smooth and efficient operation of elections. This is key to ensure residents of the Borough are able to vote when an election occurs.

BACKGROUND

5. The terms of reference of this Committee provide for an overview of Electoral Services issues. A Parliamentary General Election has been called for the 12th December 2019 and preparations are well underway for the conduct of that election in the 3 parliamentary constituencies in Doncaster.

6. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires local authorities to undertake a full review of polling places and polling districts (“the review”) every four years. The Act requires the current review to be started and completed between the 1st October 2018 and the 31st January 2020.
7. Set out below is the current position in respect of preparations for the election and an update on the review.

Parliamentary General Election Preparations

8. Preparations for the Parliamentary General Election are now at an advanced stage. The Electoral Register was published on the 4th November 2019. The Returning Officer has scheduled regular meetings with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Electoral Services Manager, Head of Communications and other key officers.
9. Polling stations have been booked and confirmed with the following 11 new polling stations identified. These new polling stations will be highlighted on polling cards notifying electors of a change to their previous place.
 - Doncaster Central
Polling Districts CF and CH - Town Field Pavilion has been designated as the new polling station, replacing Town Field Primary School and the International Centre, respectively. The former is to avoid the need to use a school and a suitable alternative venue is available. The latter is a change as the original venue is to close. These may be recommended as permanent changes at the conclusion of the review.
 - Don Valley
Polling District GJ - The Community Centre on Reresby Walk temporarily replaces the Community Centre on Hickleton Street where repairs are currently being undertaken.
Polling District JC - St Michael’s Church replaces St Michael’s Primary School. The venue replaces a school where a suitable alternative venue is available. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.
Polling District KE – Holy Trinity & St Oswald’s Church replaces St Oswald’s Academy. The venue replaces a school where a suitable alternative venue is available. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.
Polling Districts LC and LD – Kinsbourne Green Communal Hall replaces Broadwater Drive Communal Hall which is no longer available. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.
 - Doncaster North
Polling District RC – Stainforth Youth Centre temporarily replaces Stainforth Methodist Church which is not available for this election.
Polling District SF - Mexborough Library replaces Mexborough Family Hub as the library is thought to be a more suitable venue. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.

Polling District TC – All Saint’s School, Hooton Pagnell replaces a portable unit at the Pickburn Arms Public House which has closed and is no longer available. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.

Polling District TO – Goldsmith Community Centre replaces the Levett School as the Community Centre is a more suitable venue. This may be recommended as a permanent change at the conclusion of the review.

10. Recruitment is well underway for the necessary staff to work on the election. There is a requirement to recruit 34 staff for each postal vote session, 172 Presiding Officers, 233 Poll Clerks, and approximately 300 members of staff to work on the election count. Wherever possible any staff that we employ on polling stations will not be engaged on the Thursday evening verification/count.
11. There will be a separate election count for each of the 3 parliamentary constituencies in Doncaster. The verification and counts will both take place on the night of the 12th December 2019.
12. Unfortunately the normal count venue of Doncaster Racecourse is not available. However, the Elections Team have secured an excellent alternative venue for the count.

The Polling Places Review

13. The review involves an evaluation of each existing/proposed venue against issues such as accessibility, voter convenience and availability for polling (including at short notice). The Elections Team commenced the current review in September 2019 and the original intention had been to present the final findings of the review. However, due to decision to hold a General Election at short notice it has not yet been possible to conclude the review.
14. The work undertaken on the review to date and the requirement to prepare for the imminent parliamentary election has led to the identification of a number of new polling venues for this election, as set out in paragraph 9 above. The proposed changes have been shared with members as part of a consultation exercise. Some of these changes may be recommended as permanent changes when the review is complete. The review will be completed by the deadline of the 31st January 2020 and a report setting out the findings and recommendations will be presented to this Committee shortly thereafter.
15. There will be a polling station finder on the Council’s website and the details will be included on all polling cards. This will allow electors to search for their polling station by typing in a post code or address and they will be given their polling station location, map and directions of how to get there from their home address.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. The review is a statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. This report is primarily for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

18.

Outcomes	Implications
<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better access to good fulfilling work• Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish• Inward Investment	
<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster• More people can live in a good quality, affordable home• Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport• Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean• Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage	
<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school• Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better• Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work	

<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>The Council has statutory duties to support elections</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

19. Every effort is made to drive Individual Electoral Registration to ensure the Council meets the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards and complies with its legal duties.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF Date: 16/11/19]

20. There are comprehensive statutory provisions covering the delivery of electoral activity.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: AT Date:18/11/19]

21. The costs of the general election are reclaimed from central government and so are not expected to be an additional pressure on the Council's budget. Therefore, it is important that accurate cost information is supplied to the Elections Team so that all eligible costs can be reclaimed.

The Election Claims Unit have allocated initial advances totalling £375k and a final reconciliation and claim will be submitted post election. Estimates of cost range between £500k and £600k but due to the short notice of the election and time of year definite cost projections are difficult to make. It is not clear when this funding will be received but is likely to mean a financial year-end adjustment.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

22. Human Resources implications have not been requested.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

23. Technology implications have not been requested.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

24. Health implications have not been requested.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF Date 16/11/19]

25. The Council has a duty to ensure Elections are well managed to allow all eligible electors to freely vote by secret ballot ensuring freedom of expression and political debate by exercising their vote

CONSULTATION

26. N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27. Previous EDSC reports.

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Scott Fawcus
Assistant Director -
Legal & Democratic Services
Tel: 01302 734640
E-mail: scott.fawcus@doncaster.gov.uk

Damian Allen
Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer