

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERS SERVICES SCRUTINY
PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 28 JULY 2014
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1
AT 7.05 - 8.10 PM**

Members Present: Mrs M Sartin (Chairman), A Watts (Vice-Chairman), Mrs M McEwen, J Philip (Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder), Mrs C P Pond, D Stallan (Housing Portfolio Holder) and G Waller (Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio Holder)

Other members present:

Apologies for Absence: S Weston

Officers Present G Chipp (Chief Executive), W MacLeod (Elections Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was advised that there were no substitute members present.

2. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 18 March 2014 be agreed.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were noted.

(b) Work Programme

The following was noted:

(i) Item 3 Joint Consultative Committee – Terms of Reference and Constitution regarding representation of non-union staff

The Panel was advised that the last Joint Consultative Committee had recommended no proposals for changing the current arrangements for representations.

(ii) Item 4 Constitution Review Initial Scoping Report

Although a scoping report was being submitted to the September Panel meeting, Members suggested that a panel sub-group should be planned to deal with certain aspects of the review.

5. LOCAL ELECTIONS 22 MAY 2014

The Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding the Local Elections on 22 May 2014.

The following elections were held on 22 May 2014:

- (a) Election of 7 Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region of the UK;
- (b) 19 District Council Wards; and
- (c) 1 Parish Council by-election for Buckhurst Hill West.

Voter turnout at the various elections ranged between 44% in the Buckhurst Hill East Ward and 28% in Waltham Abbey Paternoster Ward. Turnout for the European Parliamentary Election, within the district, was 35.58%, compared with a turnout of 35.90% across the region.

It was noted that there were few issues with the election, generally all practices were completed successfully. Members were advised of the following:

- (i) A total of 8,309 postal votes were issued, only 8 packs failed to reach electors and were re-issued;
- (ii) 73% of postal votes were returned, which equated well with previous elections;
- (iii) One nomination paper delivered on 24 April 2014 did not have the necessary consent to include a political party logo on the ballot paper. The agent had insufficient time to rectify this error, before the submission deadline;
- (iv) Project planning and a Risk Register for the elections were prepared in December 2013 and reviewed regularly;
- (v) There were 80 polling stations in 64 buildings with 72 presiding officers and 125 poll clerks;
- (vi) All of the polling stations were opened on time, however at Murray Hall, Loughton, with two polling stations, there was some confusion for voters. Consideration would be given to improving directions for electors when using such buildings;
- (vii) A complaint received about a candidate for Nazeing was referred to the police. The Returning Officer received some complaints about imprints on election literature which were also passed on;
- (viii) The issue of postal votes went smoothly. Initially problems were experienced with software and scanners used for checking personal identifiers, but this was resolved remotely. 196 postal votes were rejected for various

reasons, over 60 of which did not contain a ballot paper or postal voting statement. It was advised that new legislation required the Electoral Registration Officer to inform electors, after a poll, that their postal vote identifiers had been rejected;

(ix) No in-house printing problems were experienced, however the logo for one group was not reproduced as agreed following the 2013 elections. A proof had currently been accepted with this group's agent before the forthcoming election. As per usual, manual checks were undertaken on each printed ballot paper;

(x) The verification and counting of ballot papers took place at Theydon Bois Village Hall on 23 and 25 May. The count went smoothly; and

(xi) Police liaison was adequate during the whole process.

Members thanked officers for their work on a well run election and count.

Members were concerned about potential difficulties in the forthcoming May 2015 General, District and parish elections, where verification would be carried out at the same time. It was acknowledged that more counters would be needed, but members supported using Theydon Bois Village Hall. The Panel suggested using the stage and moving the press to another area. The Returning Officer agreed with this principle but agreed that a review was required to assess whether the venue was adequate for the upcoming elections and how the space could best be used.

Members suggested that a different rota of staff could be employed at the count from those involved on polling day. The Returning Officer agreed to undertake a review of the implications of using different staff rotas.

The Panel requested that refreshments be provided at the count for visitors and guests with more space for them. It was noted that these were not provided for non-staff. The issue of count location and space should be factored into the reviews being undertaken if possible. It was also suggested that non-issued attendance tickets to the count could be allocated elsewhere and the Returning Officer agreed to look into the legality of this.

Members requested weighted polling station signs as some were light enough to be blown over.

The Panel was advised that reminders would be given next year to political parties and agents of the importance concerning collection of poll cards from electors at polling stations. Members suggested a protocol with the parties to advise on the disposal of poll cards collected by tellers. It was noted that voters were under no obligation to hand poll cards to tellers, it was done at their discretion. However, tellers could hand any cards that came their way to Presiding Officers or Poll Clerks.

RECOMMENDED:

That the report regarding the Local Elections held on 22 May 2014 be recommended to the Council for approval.

6. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 made it compulsory for this authority to carry out a review of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places within 16 months, starting from 1 October 2013, with further reviews starting on 1 October of every fifth subsequent year. It was necessary for the Council to consider polling districts and places in the Epping Forest Parliamentary constituency and those parts of the Brentwood and Ongar and Harlow situated within the district.

A polling district was a geographical area created by the sub division of a UK Parliamentary Constituency for the purposes of an election. A polling place was the building or area in which polling stations would be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station was the room or area within the polling place where voting took place.

Notice of a review together with details of the existing polling districts, polling places and polling stations were given on 24 March 2014. Copies were made available at the Civic Offices, local libraries, and details published on the Council's website. Consultation took place via the Council Bulletin, with details sent to the three local MPs, Eastern Region European Union Members, Parish and Town Councils, local County Councillors, political party agents, Returning Officers for the three District Parliamentary Constituencies and those with specific experience of assessing disabled access.

The consultation period ran from 24 March to 30 May 2014.

Results of the Consultation Exercise

Epping Town Council requested that Homefield Close, Epping was split between two polling districts with electors occupying numbers 1-6 voting in one place and those at 7-19 voting elsewhere. It was recommended that house numbers 7-19 be transferred to the United Reformed Church.

The Returning Officer for the Epping Forest Constituency highlighted the following:

- (a) Parking difficulties at Allnutts Institute, Epping polling station could not be resolved as there was no suitable alternative within the polling place. However recently the District Council had funded works at the Institute for making the entrance safer and more user friendly.
- (b) The Returning Officer had purchased a portable ramp for Hastingwood Village Hall polling station to facilitate easier access for wheelchair users.
- (c) The community governance review, in 2012, for Matching Green Village had changed the boundaries for parish, district and county council elections but there had been no opportunity for changing the Parliamentary constituency boundaries. As a result the parliamentary election in 2015 would involve some voters in Brentwood and Ongar using a polling station in Harlow. Although not ideal, the situation could be managed with careful publicity stressing that there would be two polling stations at Matching Village Hall.

No representations were received from the public in respect of the Returning Officer's representations and none were received by the Returning Officers for the Brentwood and Ongar and Harlow constituencies. The following comments and views were received:

- (i) District Councillor G Chambers requested a different venue for the polling station for Buckhurst Hill West district ward, suggesting the library in Queens Road. There were two polling stations serving that ward currently, representations were made to Essex County Council regarding possible use of the library. The Library Service felt that polling day being a Thursday was their busiest day and therefore would be unwilling to close. They added that the public area was quite limited and it was impossible to open both the library and a polling station at the same time.
- (ii) Stapleford Abbotts Parish Council felt that having one polling station at the village hall was adequate for the parish.
- (iii) The re-development works proposed for buildings adjacent to the polling station at St. Mary's Parish Centre, High Road, Loughton could disrupt access for electors advised Loughton Town Council. They requested an alternative location.
- (iv) Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Council requested that polling stations for the High Laver East and Little Laver polling districts should be changed from Matching Village Hall to Magdalen Lower Village Hall.
- (v) An elector living at The Windsors, Buckhurst Hill who currently voted at the Woollard Centre advised that she previously had voted at the Church Hall, Lower Queen's Road, which was more convenient, particularly for elderly electors. It was advised that the Woollard Centre had been the polling station for many years, with the Church Hall only used when the Woollard Centre was being renovated.

A new polling station would be needed at Chigwell Row as the current one was being demolished.

RECOMMENDED:

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending:

- (a) That the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Epping Forest District as set out in Appendix 1 and the reasons set out in Appendix 2 be approved;
- (b) That the proposals be published and copies made available for public inspection at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each Parliamentary Constituency covering the Epping Forest District and on the Council's website;
- (c) That the intention of the Electoral Registration Officer to reflect in the revised electoral register to be published on 1 December 2014 any alterations required as a result of the review be noted; and
- (d) That the returning Officer when determining the location of Polling Stations for future elections, take account of the comments made about Polling Stations during the consultation period.

7. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The following two reports would be submitted to the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (a) Local Elections 22 May 2014; and
- (b) Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

8. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Panel would be held on Tuesday 23 September 2014 at 7.00p.m. in Committee Room 1.