

Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 02 February 2021

Portfolio: Leader (Councillor C Whitbread)

Subject: Elections Planning Progress Report

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1) **That the Committee review the update from the Elections Planning process for the elections to be held in May 2021**

The Elections Planning Group continue to meet on a monthly basis and reconvened in September 2020.

Due to the postponed elections from 2020, this election presents a scale that has never been seen before. In addition to the volume of ballot papers we are also presented with the challenges and restrictions of the pandemic and a very complex process which we will need to manage. A detailed project plan, risk assessment and register are being completed in January 2021.

Election count

The order of count has been confirmed as the following:

- Thursday 6 May – Essex County Council
- Friday 7 May – Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (postponed from May 2020 owing to the current pandemic);
- Saturday 8 May – Local elections (postponed from May 2020); and Local elections (due in May 2021)

Staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements are in place for the top tables and apart from possible impact from the current pandemic, this requirement is expected to be sufficiently met.

With regards to the staffing arrangements for the count and the polling stations, an email will be going out in January to understand availability. All of the staff planning will consider the risk that the current pandemic may present, where individuals may be unable or hesitant to attend.

Electoral Registration

A new system has been put in place this year and the process is now carried out electronically, with householders only needing to reply if there are changes. Under the new Canvass Reform arrangements 95.6% of the properties which were required to respond by law did so.

Polling Stations

80 polling stations will be required for this election. At the time of writing we are currently awaiting clarification from several of the venues, this is due to the uncertainty around the usage as a result of the current pandemic. Venue changes from previous years for the following stations have been confirmed:

- Gilwell Park, Chingford, would move to High Beach Village Hall; and
- St Giles Hall, Nazeing, would move to the nearby Scout Hall.
- Thomas Willingale School would move to Barrington Centre in Barrington Close

Postal Votes

It is expected that we may receive more postal votes than previous years, due to the pandemic. The impact of this will be continuously reviewed as we move towards the deadline of application for postal votes in April. Adequate staffing and storage will be included as part of the planning process.

Count Centre

Due to the requirements, previously used venues would not be suitable, and a larger space is required. A hangar has been identified at North Weald Airfield and it is felt this would also provide adequate parking. At the time of writing this report further discussions are taking place to identify the additional requirements that would need to be in place for this venue to operate.

Reason for decision: No decision required.

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal or governance implications arising from the recommendations of this report. However, any implications arising from actions to achieve specific objectives or benefits will be identified by the responsible Service Director.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the Safer, Cleaner and Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues with the district. Relevant implications arising from actions to achieve specific objectives or benefits will be identified by the responsible Service Director.

Consultation Undertaken:

Programme updates provided to:
Leadership Team
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Stronger Council Select committee

Impact Assessments: This will be completed in January and on an ongoing basis.

Risk Management: A risk assessment will be complete in January and on an ongoing basis.