

Report to Overview and Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 6 October 2005



Portfolio: People First

Subject: Review of May 2006 Elections

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Committee Secretary: Zoe Folley (01992 564532)

Recommendation/Decision Required:

That the Committee notes that the Returning Officer has decided to proceed in planning for the May 2006 District Council Elections on the basis of three separate counts all to be held on the evening of Polling Day.

Report:

1. (Councillor R Morgan) At the last meeting, the Committee referred back to the Overview and Scrutiny Constitutional Affairs Standing Panel the question of counts following polling in the 2006 District Council Elections. At our last meeting on 1 September 2005 we considered this issue again.
2. The Returning Officer advised us that the decision on the organisation of polling and counting for these elections is a matter reserved to the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer informed us that although he would listen carefully to member views on how counts should be held next year, he had to reserve the right to organise counting arrangements which make best use of available staff and financial resources.
3. He informed us that he had reservations about convening counts on the night of polling in a centralised venue. This would mean that all 19 district wards will be counted in one place after the close of polling at 9.00 p.m. Based on a rough calculation that each ward could take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete, it is likely that even if it were possible to hold concurrent counts in different rooms, the count would not finish until at least 3.00 a.m. and possibly later if there are re-counts. The Returning Officer has decided that this will place an undue strain on the counting staff, many of whom would be served on polling stations throughout the day. He considered that there was a health and safety issue concerning the welfare of staff engaged on Polling Day which would best be met by decentralising counts so that major counts could be conducted concurrently at different Centres thereby speeding up the whole process.
4. The Returning Officer also needs to proceed with planning for next year's elections now and he made the point to us that he was not clear whether there was a strong consensus among members and that he was obliged to make a decision now so that planning could proceed. He outlined to us the arrangements which could operate: namely three Count Centres - one for Chigwell, one for the Loughton area with the

remaining wards being covered at Theydon Bois. The Theydon Bois venue could be the central Count Centre and he would be making arrangements to ensure that Counts from the other two Centres were notified to Theydon Bois on election night.