

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM 10

REPORT TO CABINET

15 MARCH 2007

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

COUNCIL DECISION/CABINET DECISION

Corporate- Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Coleman

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION ACT & SECURITY MEASURES AND ELECTIONS 2007

1. Summary

To update progress regarding the Act and security measures, together with the support arrangements for the May 2007 elections. Specifically the report covers changes to the timetable and nominations and candidates, introduces the new performance standards framework and updates members on locations of polling stations for the forthcoming elections. In addition the report illustrates progress with the postal vote exercise and discusses a range of pre count activity currently underway.

The report also recommends that the appointment of the Director of Law and Democracy as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections and as Registration Officer be reconfirmed by full Council.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:-

1. Cabinet notes progress regarding the Electoral Administration Act and support arrangements for the May 2007 elections.
2. Council reconfirms the appointment of the Director of Law and Democracy as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections and as Registration Officer under Section 8 of the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To update Members on progress regarding the Electoral Administration Act and support arrangements for the May 2007 elections.

To reconfirm the Director of Law and Democracy as Returning Officer and Registration Officer.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

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ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION ACT & SECURITY MEASURES AND ELECTIONS 2007

SUMMARY

To update progress regarding the Act and security measures, together with the support arrangements for the May 2007 elections.

To appoint the Director of Law and Democracy as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections and as Registration Officer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:-

1. Cabinet note progress regarding the Electoral Administration Act and support arrangements for the May 2007 elections.
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DETAIL

Changes to the timetable

1. Principal changes are:-
 - Maundy Thursday is no longer a *dies non* and as such slightly alters the timescales
 - Closing date for postal votes now 11 days before polling day (18th April) – this was previously six days before polling day
 - Extended deadline to enable persons to register to vote at the election – 11 days before polling day (18th April)
 - Returning Officer (RO) can re-issue a lost or spoilt ballot paper up until 5pm on polling day
 - RO can rectify a clerical error up until 9pm on polling day

Nominations and candidates

2. Principal changes are:-

- Minimum age of candidate reduced from 21 to 18 – candidates must now include their date of birth in the consent
- Candidates can use commonly used surnames and forenames
- RO has the power to make minor alterations to nomination papers so as to correct spelling errors or incorrect electoral numbers.

Performance standards

3. The Electoral Commission has introduced a framework for delivering 'Quality Electoral Services' which we will be self-assessing the service against post 2007 elections. In order to measure Electoral services delivery the Electoral Commission has proposed a suite of 11 performance indicators that will be introduced during the coming year. The implementation of these standards has been incorporated into the Service Improvement Plan for 07/08.

Elections May 2007

Polling stations

4. The polling station review began in July 2006 when we contacted all schools that could potentially be used as a polling station. The exercise was not as successful as we hoped and we identified and approached other community buildings in the area as well as church halls etc. As a last resort we have had to hire mobile polling stations for certain locations where no other building has been able to accommodate us.
5. In parallel to this Group Leaders and all members via Democratic Services open day in December 2006 have been consulted on polling station locations, they have been instrumental in securing suitable venues.
6. This extensive review of polling venues and facilities is now complete and details of the polling stations can be seen at appendix 1. This work will contribute towards the full review of polling stations required by the Act before December 2008.

New postal and proxy vote provisions

7. The first part of the exercise is now complete and over 18,000 renewals have been returned. The remaining 7,500 will be sent a reminder next week and any non-respondents after that will be sent a deletion notice after 7 March which will also include a fresh application form.
8. Personal identifiers are stored electronically to enable faster and more consistent checking processes at the opening stage. It is essential that accurate records are maintained and any problems with the signature identified early to avoid the possibility of rejecting the electors vote at election time. **Any completed application form must bear the electors usual signature as it will be rejected if it does not match the signature provided on the security statement returned with the ballot paper.** To minimise duplication and the number of rejected postal ballot papers candidates and their agents have been asked to
- **Agree to use a request list whereby electoral services can check the elector's status first and send the form out to the elector directly** – this is the preferred option as the form will be personalised and include a barcode.
 - **Check if the elector already has a postal vote before getting an application form completed** – up to date lists are available from the elections office.

- **Use the Councils “approved” application form only** - blank forms are available from Electoral Services, Democratic Services.
- **Develop a process with local party campaigners to avoid duplicate applications and potential differences in records**

Pre poll Information

9. The Association of Electoral Administrators is encouraging authorities to seize the community engagement opportunity that pre-poll information presents. To deliver this we are considering using an A4 format that will incorporate the detail of the traditional polling card together with additional information to raise awareness of key dates e.g. last day for postal vote applications.

Electoral Suppliers

10. We are working very closely in this Election with ERS who are the main printing and packing supplier they will be printing all pre-poll, postal and ballot papers for this Election. We are also in close liaison with Royal Mail and are utilising the walk sort service to ensure cost effective delivery.

Count

11. The count hall will accommodate the counting of 16 wards at a time. The order of the count has been determined taking into account information from the last elections regarding the number of votes cast, the closeness of result and the number of seats. The first 16 wards will be the first to be verified and counted and the rest will follow as a table becomes available. The parish counts will follow the locals in the same order. **Appendix 2** shows the count order.

Communication

12. Regular briefings with Group Leaders continue and information updates have been sent to all councillors, parish clerks and regional party offices. A parish clerks meeting is to be held 13 February, a members seminar is to be held at Thornaby Pavilion 6 March and a briefing of all appointed election agents is to be held prior to the election. The briefings will include:-
- Codes of conduct
 - Polling and counting arrangements
 - Appointment of polling stations and local issues
 - Communication issues
 - Election expenses
13. It will also provide the opportunity for Agents to raise points of concern over the operational arrangements.

Police meeting

14. A liaison meeting has been arranged with the police nominated single point of contact (SPOC) to discuss the provision of policing response to a local election situation to enable free elections. The briefing will include:-
- Voting and counting procedures
 - The role of different participants
 - Potential offences

- Protocols about who does what
- Powers of arrest

15. Following this meeting we will be liaising with Stockton Security and Surveillance service to discuss arrangements as necessary.

Publicity

16. The Electoral Commission's campaign for elections in England and Wales uses the central theme of 'if you want to vote, make sure nothing stops you'. The campaign aims to communicate the need to register to 'have your say' by voting. The England campaign will begin by promoting the need to register, running from the week commencing **26 March to 17 April** and will be led by television advertising outside London. It will also include radio advertising in relevant locations, press and online advertising. We will also be running a series of local events to compliment this campaign. A second burst of advertising will run in the week immediately prior to Election Day, reminding people about the upcoming elections.
17. We have been working actively in the Borough for some months now regarding publicity around registration and voting with articles published in KYIT and the Stockton News.
18. We are also participating with our partners across the Tees Valley to maximise impact of publicity using adverts on the rears of buses and a 9 week campaign at Showcase Cinema Teesside.

Training and Recruitment

19. The recruitment drive has been successful in achieving the numbers of staff required and application forms had been sent to individuals during February asking for line managers approval. At the time of writing the majority of forms had been authorised and returned to the Democratic Services Unit.

Fees

20. A report was taken to the Tees Valley Chief Executives' Meeting on 6th September, 2006 regarding a consistent approach to election fees across the Tees Valley. The Chief Executives were largely in favour of the principle and referred the report to the Tees Valley Lawyers to give an oversight to the practicalities of a consistent approach.
21. Electoral Administrators from the five Tees Valley Authorities have met on two occasions to discuss the fees and their recommendations are attached as an Appendix 3
22. The fees as at Appendix 3 have now been agreed by the Returning Officer for Stockton.

Returning Officer and Registration Officer

23. The Director of Law and Democracy has previously been appointed by the council as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections and as registration Officer under section 8 of the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983. For insurance purposes this appointment should be reconfirmed before 3 May elections. It is therefore recommended that Council be asked to reconfirm the appointment.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

24. A duty to comply with the new Electoral Administration Act.

RISK ASSESSMENT

25. The Project Plan and associated Risk Log and Business Continuity Plan for the Local Government Elections 2007 will assist in mitigating the risks involved in relation to the administration and management of the electoral process.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

26. Liveability.

CONSULTATION

27. The implementation of revised arrangements will be consulted upon with CMT, and Cabinet/Council.

Director of Law and Democracy

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Background Papers:

Report to CMT 12 February 2007

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not Ward Specific

Property Implications:

None

