

*Subject to approval at the next meeting*

ELECTORAL REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

14 August 2013 at 6.00 pm

Present:- Councillors Chapman (Chairman), L Brown (Vice-Chairman), Bower, Dendle, Northeast and Wensley (Substituting for Councillor Mrs Brown).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Brown (who was being substituted by Councillor Wensley) and Oppler.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer has advised Members of interim arrangements to follow when making declarations of interest. They have been advised that for the reasons explained below, they should make their declarations on the same basis as the former Code of Conduct using the descriptions of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Reasons

- The Council has adopted the Government's example for a new local code of conduct, but new policies and procedures relating to the new local code are yet to be considered and adopted.
- Members have not yet been trained on the provisions on the new local code of conduct.
- The definition of Pecuniary Interests is narrower than the definition of Prejudicial Interests, so by declaring a matter as a Prejudicial Interest, that will cover the requirement to declare a Pecuniary Interest in the same matter.

Where a member declares a "Prejudicial Interest", this will, in the interests of clarity for the public, be recorded in the minutes as a Prejudicial and Pecuniary Interest.

Councillor Northeast declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 8 (Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations) as he was the Council's nominated representative on the Keystone Centre Management Committee. Councillor Northeast confirmed that he was also the Chairman of this Management Committee.

*Subject to approval at the next meeting*

Councillor Gammon also declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 8 (Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations) in his capacity as being a Member of Littlehampton Town Council.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2013 were approved by the Sub-Committee as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. START TIMES

The Sub-Committee

RESOLVED

That the start times for its meetings during 2013/2014 be 6.00 pm.

5. REVIEW OF THE WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTION – 2 MAY 2013

The Sub-Committee received a report from the Head of Democratic Services which reviewed the arrangements within the Arun District for the West Sussex County Council Election held on 2 May 2013.

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Sub-Committee that overall the feedback that had been received from those who had been consulted had been positive and that minimal comment had been made in relation to the procedures that had been put into place in planning for the Election. The detail of the feedback received from candidates and agents had been set out in Appendix 1 attached to the report.

The Sub-Committee was advised that the turnout across West Sussex had been less compared with the last Election held in 2009.

Having thanked the Head of Democratic Services for her report, the Sub-Committee noted its contents.

6. INDIVIDUAL ELECTOR REGISTRATION - UPDATE

Having received an update on Individual Elector Registration (IER) at its last meeting held on 25 March 2013, the Sub-Committee received a further update report from the Head of Democratic Services. This report also set out the plans that were in place for the transition to this new system.

The Sub-Committee was advised that the Cabinet Office was leading on this project and was funding the net costs of the transition to the new system. An initial grant of just under £8k had been received from the Cabinet Office to support the on-going work and it was explained that further funding would be received for 2014/2015 though the amount expected had not been confirmed at this stage.

*Subject to approval at the next meeting*

The Head of Democratic Services outlined that work was continuing on the Cabinet Office's project plan that had been produced and that a project team, engaging various departments of the Council, had been created to work to the key timescales set out in the plan.

The timetable set out within the report outlining the key stages over the next two years was explained. This confirmed the importance of this year's canvass which needed to be as comprehensive as possible to assist the electorate through the transition to IER in July 2014. Based on recent canvass response rates it was explained that the existing budget was unlikely to enable this to happen and so a request for a supplementary estimate in the sum of £20k was being made to the meeting of Cabinet on 27 August 2013 to cover reintroducing the first reminder form (using Royal Mail rather than a canvasser to see if this brought an improved response) and to fund additional house to house enquiries to non-responding properties using a new canvasser team. In explaining the importance of this work, the Sub-Committee was asked to support this request which would be recommended to Full Council for approval on 4 September 2013.

The concern was that it was already difficult to encourage people to register by just providing their address details and so it was envisaged that by asking electors to provide more information there would be an increased percentage of people who would not wish to provide these further details. It was explained that the Electoral Commission would be responsible for designing a public awareness campaign and that once the details and timing for this were known, then a member of the Communications Team would join the IER project team to explore how Arun's own public awareness scheme could be used to promote the new arrangements locally.

In looking at possible ways of encouraging the electorate to register the Sub-Committee discussed various ideas and methods that could be used in forming a local public awareness campaign. These ideas would be fed into the project team.

Following some further discussion, the Sub-Committee noted the contents of the report.

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

The Chief Executive presented to the Sub-Committee a report which explained the approach to be taken to the 2013-2015 review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations.

The Sub-Committee was informed that this review was the regular formal review that had to be undertaken but that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 had revised the arrangements meaning that this review had to be concluded ahead of the Parliamentary Election to be held in May 2015.

*Subject to approval at the next meeting*

The Sub-Committee's attention was drawn to Appendix 1 of the report which set out the polling stations used for the West Sussex County Council Election held on 2 May 2013. The premises trialled for suitability at this election had been highlighted in bold and it was explained that the feedback received from consultation undertaken following the election had been reviewed and a further information sheet outlining the supplementary information had been produced and circulated to the meeting.

The Sub-Committee was now being asked to feedback its views on the information received and on any other premises that it felt required further investigation as part of the planned review. It was outlined that the polling stations to be used for the European Parliamentary Election to be held on 22 May 2014 needed to be confirmed by early January 2014.

In discussing the report, comments were made about two polling stations. In relation to the North Bersted Youth and Community Centre, it was agreed that the premises were in a poor condition with poor access and so the proposal to explore using the Holy Cross Parish Church as an alternative station was supported. With the Keystone Centre in Littlehampton various issues of concern had been outlined in the report. Councillor Northeast confirmed that the Centre had now received two major grants and as a result a rolling programme of improvement works was now planned so that the problems highlighted within the report could be addressed. Councillor Northeast confirmed that this work would be completed in 2013 and asked if consideration could be given to continue using the Centre as a polling station in light of the work to be undertaken.

Following further discussion the Sub-Committee noted the report and the updates provided at the meeting.

8. ELECTORAL REVIEW OF ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL – UPDATE

The Sub-Committee received and noted the update provided on the Electoral Review of Arun District Council as had been set out in the covering agenda.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Sub-Committee noted its dates for future meetings as set out in the Calendar of Meetings for 2013/2014.

(The meeting concluded at 6.40 pm)