

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 17 July 2006, in the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 10.00 am.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Goode (Chair); Councillors Coker, Doody, Harris, Mrs Knight

(Councillor Mrs Mellor substituted for Councillor Mrs Bunker)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Kundi.

241. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 2 May and 6 and 27 June 2006, were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

242. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

243. WARWICK DISTRICT AND TOWN, PARISH ELECTIONS – 3 MAY 2007

The Committee considered a report from Members' Services regarding proposals to implement the terms of the Electoral Administration Bill in relation to the District and Parish/Town Council Elections to be held on 3 May 2007.

Once the Bill received Royal Assent, changes would be required to the working practices for the May 2007 elections, and beyond. As a result, the returning Officer had agreed that postal votes should be issued and received using an automated system.

The legislation would require security measures to be introduced in the checking and matching of 100% of signatures and dates of birth on the return postal votes statements. The production of a marked register of postal voters and matching documents required all postal ballot papers to be bar coded and this would provide security in recording all postal ballot papers received, including replacement postal votes. The ballot papers would be of traditional size and shape and the papers for both types of elections would be processed simultaneously.

As an extension to this arrangement, and as the same technology would be involved, it was proposed that an application for an election pilot be submitted for electronic counting at the elections.

The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) was committed to a programme of reorganisation through the gradual process of evaluated piloting, as it this considered the best way to investigate innovations whilst preserving the trust and confidence that people had in the electoral system.

REGULATORY COMMITTEE (Continued)

To guarantee security and continuity, it was proposed that the same company that carried out the postal voting process would be used to scan and process all the ballot papers at the count. This would be conducted in the traditional two stages of verification and counting, and it would be possible to count the District, Town and Parish ballot papers simultaneously.

Application forms for pilots would be available in September and had to be submitted to the DCA at the end of October. The decisions would be announced in December as to which pilots would be accepted and, during the early part of 2007, Orders would be drafted in Parliament to allow the pilots to take place.

The report also referred to arrangement for the Count for the elections in May 2007 to be held in Castle Farm Leisure Centre, Kenilworth rather than at the Town Hall. This would be in preparation for the creation of the two new parliamentary constituencies at the next parliamentary elections, for which the Returning Officer would have responsibility. A central location was required to hold both counts together but the Town Hall was too small for this purpose. The receipt of postal votes would take place in the Town Hall during the week of the election.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the changes to be made by the Returning Officer in connection with the issue and receipt of postal votes be noted;
- (2) the submission of an application for an election pilot for electronic counting be supported; and
- (3) members of the Committee be invited to attend a demonstration of the automation of postal voting and the electronic counting of ballot papers.

(The meeting ended at 10.30 am)