

TO: REGULATORY COMMITTEE – 17 July, 2006

SUBJECT: WARWICK DISTRICT & TOWN, PARISH ELECTIONS 3 MAY 2007

FROM: MEMBERS' SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The implementation of the Electoral Administration Bill this year will have a major effect on the organisation and running of the elections scheduled to take place in May 2007. The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the planned changes to be introduced by the current Returning Officer in her commitment to comply with the new Bill.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Once the Electoral Administration Bill receives Royal Assent the impact the Act will have on the 2007 elections will mean that changes are required in our working practices. As a result, the current Returning Officer has agreed to the introduction of the following measures:

1 POSTAL VOTING

- 1.1 Due to the large number of postal votes now being processed and the logistics of their issue and receipt, the current Returning Officer has organised the introduction of the automation of the issue and receipt of the postal voting process.
- 1.2 The new legislation requires security measures to be introduced in the checking and matching of 100% of signatures and dates of birth on the returned postal vote statements.
- 1.3 The requirement of the production of a marked register of postal voters and the matching documents requires all postal ballot papers to be bar coded.
- 1.4 Bar codes will give security in recording all postal ballot papers received including replacement postal votes. It will be possible to tell if an original ballot paper has been received from a voter as well as the replacement one.
- 1.5 The ballot paper will be of traditional size and shape and District, Town and Parish ballot papers will be processed simultaneously.
- 1.6 All Wards – single seat and multi seat will be processed electronically.

2. ACCOMMODATION

- 2.1 The Count for the elections to be held in May 2007 will be relocated from the Town Hall to Castle Farm Leisure Centre, Kenilworth. This is in preparation for the creation of the two new Parliamentary constituencies at the next UK Parliamentary election, for which the

Returning Officer will have responsibility and a central location is required to hold both counts together.

- 2.2 The receipt of Postal Votes will now take place in the Town Hall, Leamington Spa during the week of the election.

3. ELECTION PILOT

- 3.1 The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) is committed to a programme of modernisation through the gradual process of evaluated piloting, as it is considered the best way to investigate innovations while preserving the trust and confidence people have in the electoral system.
- 3.2 The current Returning Officer is considering undertaking a pilot of electronically counting all ballot papers at the District, Town and Parish Council elections to be held on 3 May 2007.
- 3.3 We already have the Government's support in the automation of the postal voting process, including the scanning of all returned postal voting ballot papers, but this can be then be taken a stage further by being part of an e-counting pilot.
- 3.4 To guarantee security and continuity the same company will be used to scan and process all the ballot papers at the Count as for the postal voting ballot papers.
- 3.5 The ballot paper will be bar coded and will be traditional in size.
- 3.6 The scanning machines will accept a cross, tick, numbers 1, 2, 3, or a line (straight & wavy) from the voter.
- 3.7 The Count will be conducted in the traditional two stages i.e. verification and counting.
- 3.8 The District, Town and Parish ballot papers will be counted simultaneously.
- 3.9 All Wards – single and multi seat will be counted electronically.
- 3.10 The pilot timetable is short with application forms being available in September ready for submission to the DCA at the end of October.
- 3.11 Following discussions with each Council, the DCA will make their decision in December on which pilots to accept.
- 3.12 During the months of January, February and March 2007 the Orders will be drafted in Parliament to allow the pilots to take place, and the testing out of systems to be implemented.
- 3.13 In August 2007 evaluation reports of the pilots are to be submitted to the Electoral Commission.

3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The cost of funding the automation of the issue and receipt of the postal voting process will be met within the normal budget for running Elections.
- 3.2 Should the Council be successful in its bid for running the election pilot the cost of electronic counting will be funded by the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to:
- 1 note the changes to be made by the current Returning Officer in the her commitment to comply with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Bill;
 - 2 support the current Returning Officer in the submission of an application for an election pilot for electronic counting; and
 - 3 appoint Councillors to attend a demonstration on the automation of postal voting and the electronic counting of ballot papers.

Gillian Friar
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BACKGROUND PAPERS - Nil

Areas in District Affected: *All Wards and Parishes in the District affected by the item.*

Key Decision: *No*
Included in Forward Plan: *No*

For further information about this report please contact:
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