

TO: **REGULATORY COMMITTEE – 13 November, 2006**

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

FROM: **MEMEBERS' SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the progress of the Electoral Modernisation pilot to be submitted to the Department of Constitutional Affairs and the Electoral Commission by the Returning Officer.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The 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.
- 2.3 The Regulatory Committee gave their support for this pilot on 17 July, 2006.
- 2.4 The DCA published their prospectus for the May 2007 Electoral Pilots in October. They wish to build on the knowledge and learning from previous pilots, taking in to account the recent changes in electoral legislation and refining the systems and processes that they wish to test.
- 2.5 This will mean that the requirements for the nature of pilots and the detail of the systems and processes used will be more closely defined by the DCA and will be focusing on the specific areas that they wish to test.
- 2.6 The prospectus contains examples of the types of pilots they envisage conducting in May 2007:
 - **Remote electronic voting pilots** - being internet and telephone voting services.
 - **Supervised electronic voting pilots** – these include the provision of electronic facilities, such as e-voting kiosks or PC based solutions, for use in supervised locations. With particular interest in piloting these systems in polling stations or polling places which provide voting capability for a number of contests within a specified area.
 - **Early voting and 'vote anywhere'**. In order to build upon learning from previous pilots in respect of advance / early voting, they would particularly welcome applications for advance voting innovations from local authorities who piloted in the May 2006 local elections. Early voting may be combined with electronic voting.
 - **E-counting pilots** - these include, in particular, e-counting processes not yet trialled in pilots to date and piloting that provides learning on the capability, accuracy and scalability of e-counting which supports the development of standards to underpin legislative rollout.
 - **'Administrative'** (i.e. non-electronic) changes to existing processes that enhance access, security or administrative efficiency. They are interested in considering changes that could benefit the further development of elections processes and security that meet with the objectives and themes outlined above.

- Other electoral innovations, especially those which could improve the efficiency, transparency and security of elections.

2.7 The DCA are interested in pilots where a number of authorities combine to gain benefits around scale and exposure of a large electorate to innovations. This is an important tool in assisting the transfer of learning and knowledge from Authorities with piloting experience onto those who not have been involved in the programme before.

2.8 The Returning Officer is considering:

- The benefits of group working with Stratford District Council using the same suppliers and to combine the opening of postal votes. This would be held at a joint counting centre i.e. Town Hall, Leamington Spa. Candidates and agents would be invited as usual to oversee the procedure.

- **Vote Anywhere:**

Early Voting: Electors would be allowed to cast their vote in allocated locations within the District i.e. the Connections, from Saturday 28 April, 2007 until Wednesday 2 May 2007. Polling hours will be 9am to 5pm each day.

Each location will have on-line live registers so that an elector can vote at any of the centres for their particular Ward/Parish. To facilitate this, printers will be provided to print off individual ballot papers. Electors will still have to sign to say they have received their ballot paper.

As part of making elections more transparent the on-line register could be made available to party agents so they can better co-ordinate their political activities i.e. door knocking.

Ballot papers would be verified every evening and candidates/election agents would be invited to attend these verifications. New seals would be applied each evening to ballot boxes and the numbers of these recorded both by the elections office and the election agents.

Polling day:

The same method would be employed as in the early voting in allocated locations. This would be extended to the normal polling stations within the District, although not every polling station might be employed as a Vote anywhere site due to electronic access in some of the villages.

- **Early Internet voting:**

Electors will be able to cast their vote on-line anywhere in the world but most likely in their own home or at their work place. This will take place from 9am Thursday 26 April (absent vote applications will then have closed) until 5pm on Wednesday 2 May 2007.

A method of pre-registration is envisaged so that electors can choose their own log in to the internet site.

It is envisaged that there will be a free phone helpline for electors to contact the internet provider to deal with any technical problems. Electors will be able to request an email confirmation that they have successfully voted.

Those electors that also have Parish or Town elections will be presented with both votes at the same time but will be able to choose just one type if they so wish and return at a later time (or visit the polling station) .

In addition candidate's statements could be added on a separate website with a link from the voting website.

Poll cards for electorate will be amended to give information regarding the methods open to the elector, the web address for more information on the pilot and a web address to find out more about the candidates.

The customer facing parts of the pilot will be fully publicised using as many media methods as possible.

- **E-Counting:**

- All postal ballot identifiers will be checked electronically.
- All paper ballots will then be verified and counted electronically.
- Internet results will be incorporated after paper ballots have been verified.
- Electronic displays will give current 'state of play' regarding the elections.
- There are two options regarding the electronic count which do require further discussion:
 1. Individual counts: Each authority counts their own ballots at a count centre within their District.
 2. Single Count Centre: The whole group use one count centre at a convenient central point.

(In both cases displays can be transferred to remote locations, such as party offices for the candidates to see the results come in and not have to travel to a different location).

3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK

Should the Council be successful in its bid for running the election pilot the cost of will be funded by the DCA.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to support the Returning Officer in the submission of an application for an election pilot for group working with Stratford District Council, Vote anywhere, early internet voting and E-counting.

Gillian Friar
Electoral Services Manager

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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