

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Council
MEETING DATE:	19 <sup>th</sup> July 2012
TITLE:	<b>Electoral Services Review: a review by the Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b>
WARD:	ALL
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b>	
Appendix 1: Copy of the Electoral Services Review Report	

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel held a facilitated workshop on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011 which provided the opportunity to review how the recent local government elections went and identify any issues that may have arisen from the operation or process. This would enable the Council to learn from these issues and make any necessary improvements for future elections. A mixture of Council/ Parish Members, Officers and Election Agents were invited to the session.
- 1.2 The findings from the workshop were presented to the Resources Panel at its meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2012 and it was agreed that any recommendations would go to full Council during 2012. The key findings from the workshop session and recommendations are attached as Appendix 1.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked to consider the recommendations from the Resources Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel as follows:

- i. Electoral Services could identify wards with care/residential homes and contact them to find how if/when any of their residents were planning to vote at their local polling station and then speak to relevant Presiding Officers to ensure that all their additional support needs are met in a timely and appropriate manner.
- ii. Training for Poll Clerks/Presiding Officers should include how to deal sensitively with voters who require additional support.
- iii. The Council's website could be utilised to provide a link to the Electoral Commission's 'How to Stand as an Electoral Candidate' permanently rather than just in the run up to an election.
- iv. The Council, through Electoral Services, should capture feedback from new candidates to find out whether additional information could be provided in future.

- v. The Council should seek clarification and guidance from the Council's Monitoring Officer on signing of nominations, which could provide a better understanding for new candidates and help to improve the process.
- vi. The Council should write to the Electoral Commission asking them to ensure that the verification procedure for any future referendums does not slow up the counting process or declaration of results.
- vii. At the count, candidates and agents should be told by the Deputy Returning Officer at the counting centre which counting system is going to be used and kept informed of how the count is going at each stage of the process
- viii. Electoral Services should investigate the options suggested for future polling stations at Keynsham East and Midsomer Norton.
- ix. Electoral Services should consider whether Timsbury or Wellow have the facilities to host the counts for Bathavon West and Bathavon South
- x. Electoral Services to undertake future research in order to identify the different languages spoken in our Local Authority area and the impact that this may have on their voting experience.

### **3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 The costs associated with the Electoral Services Review were met within the annual budget available to the Panel. We believe that implementing the recommendations would not have financial implications as this would involve either modifying existing process or a commitment to investigate the feasibility of potential polling/council sites.

### **4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone: the Electoral Services Review highlighted the elections process in Bath & North East Somerset works very well, although a number of suggestions have been made which could, if implemented, potentially improve the experience for voters, candidates and agents wishing to participate in future elections.*

### **5 THE REPORT**

- 5.1 After any elections there are often issues that arise from candidates and agents as to the operation of the event. The workshop session on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011 provided the opportunity to review how the recent elections went and identify any issues that may have arisen from the operation or process. This would enable the Council to learn from these issues and make any necessary improvements for future elections.

- 5.2 A mixture of Council/ Parish Members, Officers and Election Agents were invited to the session. On the day the turnout was fairly low, however the smaller number of groups enabled more detailed discussions to be made. The facilitated workshop sessions looked at the following subject areas:

- (1) Voters experience of access to the electoral process
- (2) Voters experience of accessing polling stations
- (3) Voters experience of the operation of the polling station

- (4) Electoral information provided to candidates, agents and Councillors
- (5) Counting systems
- (6) Polling/count station locations

5.3 This review excluded the Parliamentary Boundary Commission Review; the borders and names of local authorities, and also electoral areas within Local Authorities.

## 6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## 7 EQUALITIES

*An Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed but equalities issues were considered as part of the facilitated workshop session and in formulating the Panel's recommendations including ease of physical access to Polling Stations, availability of written information in alternative formats and support available to both candidates and voters during the election process.*

## 8 CONSULTATION

8.1 *Ward Councillor; Parish Council; Town Council; Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Service Users; Monitoring Officer*

8.2 A facilitated workshop session was held on the 14th December 2011 having sent invitations to all current Councillors, all electoral candidates at the last local elections, all elections Agents and community organisations.

8.3 A number of written submissions were also received from those who were unable to attend the event.

## 9 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

*Corporate; Health & Safety*

## 10 ADVICE SOUGHT

10.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

<b>Contact person</b>	<p><i>Policy Development and Scrutiny:</i></p> <p>Lauren Rushen (01225 396410)</p> <p>Donna Vercoe (01225 396053)</p> <p><i>Task &amp; Finish Group Members:</i></p> <p>Councillor John Bull (01225 835100)</p> <p>Councillor Charles Gerrish (0117 9868426)</p>
<b>Background</b>	Workshop briefing pack which was included as appendix 2 when the

**papers**

report was discussed at the Resources PD&S meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2012

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