

Update on Implementation of Recommendations from Electoral Arrangements Scrutiny Review

Recommendations	Implementation as of July 2018
<p>i. Notes the very positive comments made by the Electoral Commission regarding the efficiency of York's electoral processes;</p>	<p>The Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer for York has always worked closely with the Election Commission since its inception in the early 2000's.</p> <p>Many examples of good practice have been adopted in their guidance and are now used throughout the country.</p> <p>The open door policy to the Electoral Commission to come at any time to view the work of both the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer will continue with the aim of providing a service that produces the most accurate Register of Electors possible within the budget constraints and producing an election result that is accurate and unchallengeable.</p> <p>York continues to be recognised by electoral professionals within the region and by the Cabinet Office, Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission as high performing in the administration of elections and electoral registration. York is used as national hub for training in elections and electoral registration.</p>
<p>ii. Expresses support for the Returning Officer's overriding objective of ensuring an accurate result at each count;</p>	<p>The Returning Officer will ensure that the aim of achieving an accurate and therefore unchallengeable result for any election or referendum held in York remains her overriding objective.</p>

<p>And recommends that the Returning Officer:</p> <p>i. Continues to consider options for alternative count venues allowing for increased numbers of count staff;</p>	<p>Following every election a number of closedown and review meetings follow that cover all aspects of the election process. The count process is one key area for review, both in staffing, systems and processes as well venue.</p> <p>For local elections (as with the City of York Council election due to be held on 2 May 2019) the count is held the following day as it is for the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections. Counts on the following day tend to be smoother and quicker as many of the required statutory processes can be carried out before count starts, rather than at the same time. This includes the checks on postal votes handed in up to 10pm, unused stationery and ballot paper accounts.</p> <p>Additionally, the access to quality staff available is increased, as anyone who worked on polling day can assist.</p> <p>Overnight counts do tend to be slower. Fatigue, staffing levels and the required checks, especially the anti fraud checks on postal votes handed in at polling stations, do delay the verification.</p> <p>Venues available for the Returning Officer in York are limited and, previous efforts to identify larger venues have been unsuccessful as there have been insurmountable obstacles including as to availability for the time period required.</p> <p>During 2018 a number venues are under consideration, including York Minster, Elvington Air Museum, Barbican, University of York Sports Village and David Lloyd Gym.</p>
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<p>ii. Endorses the ongoing work of the electoral registrations team and the Universities to promote electoral registration amongst students;</p>	<p>Electoral Services staff have worked closely with both universities in York regarding encouragement of students to register to vote. Both working with the Registrars and the Student Unions.</p> <p>The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 permits more data sharing between universities and Electoral Registration Officers, access to records will assist the checking of applications but does not permit automatic registration as under the previous registration system. The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 has impacted on the access, with students now having to state if they wish to “opt in” to the university supplying their details to the Electoral Registration Officer. The numbers have been low in agreeing.</p> <p>The model used by Sheffield of having both universities hosting page on their registration portal for students attending courses is being pursued by the Electoral Registration Officer.</p>
<p>iii. Endorses plans to review the work done by another local authority to make electoral register details available through their “My Account” system, addressing the implications of making a similar system available in York;</p>	<p>Since the scrutiny review was completed, the Cabinet Office has indicated Ministers are keen for an online checking facility linked in to the Department of Works and Pension portal, which is used when registering to vote. This will require primary legislation, the current timetable for Parliament does not permit such a change until post 2019 when the UK leaves the European Union.</p> <p>If implemented this would be a better solution as it would</p>

	<p>address residual legal issues relating to the use of the full register and not restrict access to those who have already set up an account with the Council. It is therefore appropriate to defer consideration of a local solution for the time being.</p>
<p>iv. Reviews count procedures including the process of managing the count, reducing downtime and the training and instruction of count staff;</p>	<p>The Returning Officer conducts a review at each election and this includes lessons which can be learned in relation to the conduct of the count. Elections staff have regularly helped other Councils at their counts (as well as having worked for other Councils) and so have practical experience of other count systems.</p> <p>The Elections Manager has recently organised a mock count attended by forty election staff from North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Councils. The three most common methods for counting multi vacancy Wards were tested by these experienced staff using identical ballot papers.</p> <p>While counting sheets were the quickest system for counting the dummy 1000 ballot papers, it was the most inaccurate and produced an incorrect result that “elected” a wrong candidate. Only two of seven candidates were allocated their vote accurately.</p> <p>Two other methods - grass skirts and counting boards – allowed the count to be completed in a very similar time and both produced an accurate result. Grass skirts were the most efficient for recounts.</p> <p>What the session did confirm is that reconciling the numbers of votes cast is quite time consuming as it involves</p>

	<p>transferring numbers from count sheets to reconciliation sheets before calculating total votes casts for each candidate. A member of staff will be allocated to carry out this task for each count team at future elections using a spreadsheet rather than the old manual process. Table Supervisors and other key staff have always received training sessions. Future training for supervisors will include a mock count similar to that used in the recent exercise. For counting assistants video training is under consideration to support the written instructions provided.</p>
v. Reviews the resources available for the organisation of elections;	<p>Since the introduction of IER in 2014 the Cabinet Office has provided each Electoral Registration Officer a grant each year to assist with the extra pressures of IER, this grant covers the extra cost of administrative processes required to be undertaken. However, all Electoral Registration Officer's have a reduction of grant each year as the burden of electoral registration is passed to local authorities, the reduction in grant for 2018/19 is around 20% which will impact on the work around encouraging registration.</p> <p>One major impact of the Individual Electoral Registration system is that an election, especially a national election, causes a more sharp increase in registrations on the Department of Works and Pension portal than under the old system. Many applications are duplicates where people re-register themselves. The staff time to check is the same as processing a new application.</p>

	<p>Electoral Registration is not currently a justifiable cost for national elections, and the additional cost is not met by the Cabinet Office. This issue is being raised nationally by the Association of Electoral Administrators.</p> <p>The elections team has a core group of staff from across the Council who it calls on during elections. This is very successful and means that, for example, the processing of postal votes received is carried out by experienced officers with minimal input from the core team. Work is underway to identify other tasks currently performed within the specialist team which could be performed by the Council’s business support function. That will provide far more flexibility to bring in staff to handle certain tasks at times of peak demand.</p>
<p>vi. Examines a targeted response time for the receipt of postal votes.</p>	<p>When an application to vote by post is received, a number of checks are required to be made, which includes capturing the signature and date of birth in specialised software which then is used for the checks undertaken for fraud during the postal vote return.</p> <p>Those electors who have a permanent postal vote set up, will always be the first to receive their postal vote Unlike many other areas where a second delivery of all new postal vote applications are sent out several days after the deadline for applications, in York we have moved to a system of daily issues so votes can be sent out as soon as they have been processed.</p> <p>There are two ways the Returning Officer can undertake</p>

issuing of postal votes, one is to use a print supplier to print the postal ballot packs, insert the ballot paper and post out directly. The system used for City of York Council is to have postal ballot packs printed with all the current postal voters in advance of the deadline for applying, these then have the ballot paper inserted by Returning Officer staff the week before the deadline ready to be sent out. For those electors who apply in the last two weeks before an election, they have a similar system with a printed label added to a blank postal ballot pack. From feedback from other councils in 2017 and 2018 where the Electoral Services Manager assisted Hambleton District Council and Harrogate Borough Council, the system used by the Returning Officer for York provides the postal votes faster than those using a print supplier by three days for the initial delivery.