

DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES WORKING GROUP

20 FEBRUARY 2023

Commenced: 4.00pm

Terminated: 4.55pm

Present: Councillors Cooney (In the Chair), Costello, Fairfoull,, McNally, North, Ward and Warrington.

Apologies for Councillors Feeley, Kitchen and Ryan
Absence

9. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Group held on 29 November 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to the reference in Minute 7 to 2022 being amended to 2012.

10. MAY 2023 ELECTIONS

Members considered a report of the Chief Executive/Returning Officer, which explained that there would be Borough and Parish Council Elections on 4 May 2023. It was stated that there would be significant differences to standard Borough Council elections in that all 57 seats would be elected following the boundary review, the implications of 'all out' election on the administration of the election was set out in the report. In addition the May 2023 elections would be the first at which voter ID would be required to vote in polling stations, again the implications of this were set out in the report.

Members received an update on the number of postal votes and the responses received following the Household Notification Letter that had recently been sent to all properties in the Borough informing residents of the introduction of voter ID requirement to vote in polling stations.

The Notice of Election would be published on 27 March 2023 meaning that the formal nomination period would commence on 28 March 2023 and end at 5pm on 4 April 2023. Given that there were three vacancies in each ward there would potentially be significantly more nomination forms submitted than is the normally the case. Given that the statutory timeframe for submitting nomination form was only a week it was intended to arrange for nomination forms to be informally checked in the week prior to the publication of the Notice of Elections (w/c 20 March 2023), although it was not possible to formally submit nominations until after the Notice of Election has been published, it would be possible to have the nomination forms informally checked prior to formal submission.

It was explained that the legal requirement for assentors on Borough Council nominations had been reduced to two on a permanent basis. Therefore, the nomination form would only ask for a proposer and seconder.

It was noted that for the previous two elections parties had collected nomination packs for groups of candidates rather than all individual candidates collecting their own, it was suggested that this approach should continue for the 2023 election. To help ensure that paperwork was collected and returned in an orderly way appointments should be made for collection and return of nomination papers.

One of the implications of all-out elections was that the three successful candidates in each ward were elected for varying terms of office. Part 1, Section 7 of the Local Government Act 1972 set out when ordinary elections for Borough Councils should take place. In the case of a Metropolitan Borough such as Tameside the Act stated that:

“The ordinary elections of metropolitan district councillors shall take place in 1973, 1975 and every year thereafter other than 1977 and every fourth year thereafter.”

This meant that the next ‘fallow year’, when no Metropolitan Borough Elections took place was 2025. It was explained that for all-out elections where three seats were elected the candidate who received the most votes was elected for the longest term of office (maximum four years); the candidates receiving the second most votes was elected for the second longest term and the candidate receiving third most votes was elected for the shortest term. What this meant in practice was that at the May 2023 Borough Council election the candidate receiving the most votes in a ward would be elected until May 2027; the candidate receiving the second most votes is elected until May 2026 and, because 2025 has to be a fallow year the candidate receiving the third most votes is elected for one year until May 2024.

Members were reminded that at the May 2023 local elections it would be necessary to show photographic ID in order to vote at a polling station. If a voter turned up at a polling station with no accepted photo identification, they would not be issued with a ballot paper and would need to return with an accepted form of photo identification. The law specified the types of documents that were accepted forms of ID, details of which were set out in the report.

Electors who did not have one of the accepted forms of ID would be able to apply for free ID online at voter-authority-certificate.service.gov.uk or by completing a paper form. The deadline to apply for free ID before the May elections was 5pm on 25 April. Applicants must be registered to vote, and would need to provide their date of birth, National Insurance number, and a photograph with their application. To apply for the Voter Authority Certificate, voters would need to provide a photo, full name, date of birth, the address at which they are registered to vote and their National Insurance number. Electors who needed any help completing the online form or require assistance could call the customer services team. It was also possible to use one of the local library computers to apply, these were fitted with cameras and blank backgrounds were available. Library staff were trained on the requirements for applying for a certificate. The report set out the process that would be followed when an elector goes into a polling station. Given the new requirements it was intended to have an additional Poll Clerk at every polling station. This means that every polling station will have three staff. When an elector goes to vote the poll clerk would:

- ask the elector for their photographic ID.
- Check that the ID provided is included on the list of accepted photographic ID.
- Check that the ID provided includes a photo that is a good likeness of the elector.
- Check that the name included on the photographic ID matches the elector’s entry on the register.
- Check that the photographic ID provided appears to be genuine and not forged.

The report stated that there may be instances where an elector requested to have their photographic ID checked in private. This could be for a variety of reasons. The elector was not required to give a reason for this request, and they would not be asked to explain why they want to have their photographic ID checked in private. If an elector requests that their photographic ID be checked in private, arrangements would be made for this to happen.

Members were informed that given the new requirement to show voter ID at polling stations a letter had been sent to all properties in the Borough explaining the new arrangements. Personalised postal vote application forms were included with the letter together with pre-paid reply envelopes should electors prefer not to vote at a polling station. In addition a leaflet would be included with Council tax bills and there would be a concerted programme of communication with electors nearer to the election.

With regard to postal votes Members were informed that postal votes were scheduled to be dispatched on Wednesday 19 April 2023. Members considered the arrangements for opening of returned postal votes and it was agreed that postal votes would be opened on a constituency basis

i.e. all wards within each constituency being done at the same time. With this approach there would be two postal vote opening staff per ward, therefore requiring the number of observers per candidate (or party) to be two. This approach would require four postal vote opening days.

As the Borough Council Elections were all out with a larger number of candidates and agents being entitled to attend the count it was recommended that the verification and count should take place at Unit 7, Plantation Industrial Estate. As voters would be able to vote for up to three candidates in each ward it will be necessary to count votes using the 'grass skirt' method of counting. The verification of votes would be undertaken in the same way as normal. The verification of votes for all wards will begin at 10pm on 4 May following immediately by the counting of vote.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the statutory timetable for 4 May 2023 Borough Council elections be noted;**
- (ii) That the terms of office for elected candidates be noted;**
- (iii) That it be noted that nominations can be submitted from 9am on Tuesday 28 March 2023 until 4pm on Tuesday 4 April 2023;**
- (iv) That the arrangements for completing and submitting nomination papers be noted;**
- (v) That the reduction in the number of assentors from 10 to 2 be noted;**
- (vi) That the requirements for Voter ID be noted;**
- (vii) That the communications about Voter ID and boundary changes be noted;**
- (viii) That the polling stations to be used at the election be noted;**
- (ix) That Members note the intention to dispatch postal votes on Wednesday 19 April;**
- (x) That postal votes be opened on a constituency basis with two staff per ward opening;**
- (xi) That the Count be undertaken at Unit 7, Plantation Industrial Estate and that it be noted that the Count stage would use the 'grass skirt' method.**

CHAIR