

Agenda Item 6.

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| TITLE | Returning Officer's Report on May 2023 Elections |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Council on 18 May 2023 |
| WARD | None specific |
| LEAD OFFICER | Andrew Moulton - Returning Officer |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform Council and residents of the results of 4th May 2023 elections.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council notes the report of the Returning Officer.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

On 4th May 2023, elections were held in eighteen wards of the Borough Council, and town and parish elections for Earley Town Council, Wokingham Town Council, Woodley Town Council, and Winnersh Parish Council.

The count for the Borough and parish elections was held on Friday 5th May. This was a particularly complex set of counts with 18 borough counts, and 25 counts for the various town and parish councils.

This set of elections was the first time that voters in polling stations were required to present photo ID. An extensive communication campaign took place nationally and locally in the run-up to the elections. Whilst there were relatively few issues in Wokingham borough, detailed information is being compiled for the Electoral Commission on the numbers of electors who were not able to exercise their right to vote due to not having the necessary ID. This information was not available at the time of writing this report but will be made available to Members as soon as possible and will form part of a national report being compiled by the Electoral Commission.

Overall, the administration of the various election processes was delivered without significant issues. Where more minor issues were identified, these were corrected by the Returning Officer.

Where feedback from electors and others has been received, this will be reviewed and, where appropriate, built into the planning for future elections.

The results from the Borough elections can be found at Appendix A

Background

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 4 May 2023, elections were held in eighteen of the twenty five wards of the Borough Council.
- 1.2 66 candidates contested the 18 available seats on the Borough Council across 18 wards. Of those, the representation of the various parties was as follows:-
 - 18 Conservative Party
 - 8 Green Party
 - 1 Heritage Party – Free Speech and Liberty
 - 3 Independent
 - 17 Labour Party
 - 1 Labour & Co-Operative Party
 - 17 Liberal Democrat Party
 - 1 Women’s Equality Party

2. The Election Process

- 2.1 Planning for elections takes place many months in advance of election day.
- 2.2 On the day of the poll, 58 polling stations were in use during the polling hours of 7am to 10pm. All polling stations had been previously risk-assessed. Visiting/inspecting officers attended all polling stations to ensure that all statutory procedures were adhered to under the Representation of the People Acts, and also that access arrangements were adequate for disabled voters. Feedback from this process will be used to help improve further the arrangements for future elections.
- 2.3 The verification and count of all ballot papers for the elections took place at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre on Friday 5th May. This year, there was a particularly complex and extensive set of counts, with 18 counts for the borough elections, and 25 counts for towns and parishes. Again, all feedback received about the venue and count process is being taken into account to improve future processes.
- 2.4 At the elections in May 2023, approximately 500 casual election jobs were staffed and I would like to thank all Deputy Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks, counting and postal vote opening staff, supervisors and the Democratic and Electoral Services Team who carried out this important task. I am also grateful to colleagues across the Council from IT, facilities, communications, web team, leisure services, and customer services who made significant contributions to ensuring the successful administration of this important corporate event.

3. Election Results

- 3.1 Full details of the Borough election results are set out in Appendix A.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Overall, the administration of the various election processes was delivered without any significant issues. Where any improvements are identified, these will be built into our processes for future elections.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | There are no specific financial implications of this report. | | |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | | | |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | | | |

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no other financial implications associated with this report.

Cross-Council Implications

Elections are a key corporate event that require a cross-Council approach to ensure their successful delivery

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty is taken in the planning and discharge of the election processes.

Climate Emergency – ***This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

There are no specific implications of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

List of Background Papers

None

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APPENDIX A**ELECTION OF BOROUGH COUNCILLORS – 4th MAY 2023****RETURN OF COUNCILLORS ELECTED**

| Ward | Name | Political Party | Retirement date |
|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Barkham | Ian Pittock | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Bulmershe & Whitegates | Tony Skuse | Labour | 2024 |
| Coronation | Alison Swaddle | Conservative | 2024 |
| Emmbrook | Rachel Bishop Firth | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Evendons | Adrian Mather | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Hawkedon | Andrew Mickleburgh | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Hillside | Caroline Smith | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Loddon | Abdul Loyes | Conservative | 2024 |
| Maiden Erlegh | Stephen Newton | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Norreys | Marie-Louise Weighill | Labour | 2024 |
| Shinfield North | Andrew Gray | Labour | 2024 |
| Shinfield South | Catherine Glover | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Sonning | Michael Firmager | Conservative | 2024 |
| South Lake | Laura Blumenthal | Conservative | 2024 |
| Twyford | Stephen Conway | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Wescott | Jane Ainslie | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Winnersh | Paul Fishwick | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |
| Wokingham Without | Jordan Montgomery | Liberal Democrat | 2024 |