

## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 6 September 2011**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Golby (Deputy Chair in the Chair); Councillors Beardsworth, Begum, Parekh, Patel and Aziz

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hallam and Caswell.

#### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the held on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2011 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising- at the last meeting Councillors had raised that the there were still some issues regarding polling stations, particular concerns being the situation of polling stations and their general accessibility. It had been agreed that the Elections Service and the Returning Officer be asked for an update on the position regarding a polling station review. Members were advised that

it was not appropriate to conduct a polling station review as a full review had only been completed and agreed in February 2011 prior to the Local Elections.

However it was agreed that the Democratic and Chief Executive Services Manager would contact all members and ask them for any feedback regarding the polling stations in their area and they will then be looked at individually. She would also welcome suggestions about any alternative venues.

Group leaders and Political Assistants will be made aware of the exercise so that they may assist Members. Results of this exercise will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Beardsworth also asked what the position was with regard to Lone worker policies and whether the Council had any responsibility for employees now working for Enterprise. She was advised that whilst the Council did not have responsibility but that the Head of Human Resources could be asked to send a letter to Enterprise reminding them off their health and safety duties and to advise Cabinet members of her actions.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **4. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

There were none.

#### **5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED**

There were none.

#### **6. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION WHITE PAPER**

The Committee considered a report on the proposals published in the White Paper on Individual Electoral Registration.

The main points of discussion were:-

Electoral registration is a statutory responsibility upon the Council who are responsible for maintaining a register of all electors eligible to vote in each type of election. There is no discretion as to how that is provided and it must be done based on the guidelines set out by central government.

Currently the system is based on a member of the household completing an electoral registration form on behalf of all of the members. The new system will require properties to be registered and also each individual will have to complete a registration form. They will also have to provide some means of identification, which is capable of being checked although there will not be a requirement for all individual personal identifiers to be checked.

This will result in a lot more work for the Electoral Registration Office. There will also need to be a need for new software and ways of working. There will be funding for the transitional period, but not long term. There will also still be a need for the Council to send out annual household enquiry forms so that costs would not be reduced in that way.

Some discussions have already taken place with other Northamptonshire Councils regarding the possibility of bulk purchasing of the necessary software. Currently all Northamptonshire Councils operate the same electoral registration software which would make any joint working easier.

One of the areas of discretion is the publicity issued by the Council regarding the changes. There will be national publicity. Publicity will need to do more to encourage registration. Experience in Ireland where this had already been introduced showed that registration numbers in the first year of operation of the system dropped dramatically.

It will make the registering by telephone and Internet easier.

Members asked what the current percentages were of those households making a return by phone or Internet in comparison with using the post, and also how simple these systems were to use. Currently paper returns are running at an average of 2,000 returns per day. Electronic returns were in the region of half of that.

Concern was also expressed regarding how to ensure that some of the harder to reach communities were aware of these changes. It was suggested that the various Forums may be a useful method of publicising the changes.

The meeting concluded at 6:30 pm