



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 7 DECEMBER 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 9
Subject	ELECTION COUNT REVIEW REPORT
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr. Joe Harris - Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jan Britton, Returning Officer Tel: 01285 623103 Email: jan.britton@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	The Association of Electoral Administrators have conducted a peer review of the election count processes and the final report makes a number of recommendations. These recommendations have been converted into an action plan for agreement and implementation.
Annexes	Annex A - Count Peer Review Report, Association of Electoral Administrators. Annex B - Action plan
Recommendation/s	<i>To agree the action plan and timetable for review.</i>
Corporate priorities	Rebuilding trust and confidence in the Council by promoting a culture of openness and transparency.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None

1. BACKGROUND

It is vital that the counting of votes at any election is held in a transparent and efficient manner, as quickly as possible but ensuring accuracy. In the past, some counts in the District have taken longer than expected, most notably the 2015 Parliamentary and District & Parish elections. There have also been individual ward counts which have caused concern due to perceived inefficiencies in the system. Since 2015, changes to the systems have been introduced but there remain concerns about the efficiency of the process.

To address these issues and understand the strengths and weaknesses, the Returning Officer asked the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) to conduct a review of the current procedures and to present recommendations.

The recommendations made by the AEA have been converted into an action plan and this will be used to implement changes to plans for the count at future elections. The action plan allows for some recommendations to be implemented for the 2021 elections with a full update of the count plan in time for the 2023 District and Parish elections.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The AEA conducted the review during October 2020. They received details of current procedures, job descriptions and plans and reviewed these with a number of key staff and members.
- 2.2. Two members of AEA staff held online interviews with the various groups of officers and councillors to establish current processes, including any areas which may need improvement.
- 2.3. The final report gives a comprehensive review of the current process and the areas for improvement.
- 2.4. The recommendations have been converted into an action plan. This can be split into two timescales – those which can be implemented for the 2021 elections and those which will be considered after May 2021 for implementation at the 2023 District and Parish elections.
- 2.5. It is noted that the May 2021 elections will need to comply with any COVID guidance in place and this may necessitate changes to current timings, locations and processes.
- 2.6. A full review of all aspects of the election process will take place after May 2021. All stakeholders will be consulted as part of this review.
- 2.7. A review of this report and the election debrief will be brought to members in October/November 2021. This will give an action plan for the Returning Officer to establish a full count plan for the 2023 District and Parish elections.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The action plan gives a framework for planning the count process. Any new processes and procedures will need to be evaluated to ensure that costs remain within budgets.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The Returning Officer is responsible for the conduct of elections and the count. This report seeks to ensure that members have the opportunity to engage with the Returning Officer's decision making process for the conduct of the count. It should be noted that any final decisions on how the count is conducted rest with the Returning Officer.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The count process is integral to the election and needs to have clear processes, be transparent and maintain the confidence of all candidates and agents.
- 5.2. Risk assessments will form part of the planning process for the count and will be included in review documentation.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. None in this report.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The review of the procedures will include consideration of climate change in any updated processes.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1. The Returning Officer identified the need for a review of count processes and alternative methods were considered, including a review conducted by the Electoral Services team. It was felt that using the AEA would give all stakeholders an opportunity to give objective views.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. None.

(END)