

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**STANDARDS AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2023****OUTCOME OF THE 2023 COMBINED LOCAL ELECTIONS****REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND EXECUTIVE SUPPORT MANAGER****PART A – SUMMARY REPORT****1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the outcomes of the 2023 combined District and Parish Elections for South Staffordshire.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Delivering a successful election is key to the delivery of all the priorities in the Council Plan.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	Not applicable – information report only
	Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed?	
	No	Not applicable – Information report only.
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No	Not applicable – report to Standards and Resources Committee
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	Not applicable.	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	Elections are funded via a dedicated budget with recharges being applied as set out in the report.
LEGAL ISSUES	No	Compliance with the legislative requirements around elections is mandatory.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable	Not applicable.	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	Not applicable.

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

3.1 Combined Parish and District Elections for South Staffordshire were held on 4th May 2023 with a total of 42 District and 293 Parish seats up for election.

3.2 Combined Local Elections in numbers.

- All 42 District seats were contested.
- 48 Parish seats were contested across 7 parishes.
- Over 350 members of staff were employed either at a Polling Station or as part of the verification/count process.
- 73,209 electors were eligible to vote in person at a Polling Station.
- Over 20,000 ballot papers were issued at Polling Stations.
- 78 Polling Stations were used.

Preparation for this election started in November 2022 and was continuously reviewed until election day. The Elections Team worked tirelessly to deliver a successful election given the pressures of the voter identification requirements and to implement the changes in accordance the Local Government Boundary Review.

3.3 Voter ID in numbers

- There were 67 electors recorded who had applied for but were not issued with a ballot paper due to insufficient or unaccepted Photo ID.
- 42 of those 67 electors later returned with an accepted form of Photo ID and were issued with a ballot paper.
- Over 100 electors applied for a Voter Authority Certificate in South Staffordshire.

3.4 Awareness and engagement

The election website pages were refreshed to make it easier for candidates/agents and electors to quickly find information in relation to nomination forms and guidance. Social media was a key mechanism to share information with the electorate with a number of Parish Council's re-sharing the posts.

Like many Councils, South Staffordshire followed the national advertising campaign in respect of Voter ID which followed a standardised format of advertising which was effective. In addition, we worked with Parish Councils across the district to ensure that they had the tools to do their own advertising and were able to sign post any individuals that needed the required identification.

In respect to Poll Cards, we followed national legislation by incorporating Voter ID information onto the back of the card. We also sent out household notification letters to all properties in the district which included information on their voting options including information about how to apply for a voter authority certificate.

Our experience from previous elections shows that electors can sometimes find instructions or information by video better than written text. This year, we incorporated YouTube videos onto our website showing examples of the relevant voter identification including a British Sign Language option.

3.5 Nominations

The nomination period was opened earlier than required, on the 22nd March instead of 27th March to enable more time to deal with the processing of the nomination papers and this enabled candidates sufficient time to have their papers informally checked over and make any adjustments.

The nomination packs were tailored accordingly for Parish and District candidates and also included a full copy of the Electoral Commission's Guide for Agents and Candidates including the return of expense forms.

3.6 Verification and the Count

For the purposes of counting multi-member seats, we used a system of block voting and grass skirts. We held a number of training sessions with head and assistant counters and the training proved invaluable. On count day, we were able to balance back on all tables to the number of ballot papers that had been verified ahead of the predicated time.

The count process was smoothly carried out with only one ward area subject to a requested recount. This slightly delayed the finalisation of all declared results for both district and parish seats.

3.7 Polling Stations

After each election, we always review the Polling Station Inspectors log books, Presiding Officer log books and any complaints that we have received. Whilst the majority of comments related to equipment or miscellaneous queries, there were a number of stations which were considered by the staff working there 'too small' or 'unsuitable'. Prior to the next scheduled election, a polling station review will be carried out to ascertain best use of potential stations within locality areas.

3.8 Post-election – Parish Re-charges

For the 2023 Combined Elections, it was agreed by the Returning Officer that if an election was uncontested, then the Parish re-charge would be £70 fee per ward and that the costs of production and delivery of the Poll Cards would be shared 50/50 with the District Council.

The £70 fee covers the early management of an election including nomination packs, taking receipt of the nomination packs and various notices. For those areas where

there was a contested election, the team produced a detailed breakdown of the costs for Parish Council level approval.

3.9 Police and Crime Commissioner Election will be held on Thursday, 2 May 2024.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Not applicable.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Not applicable.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That, the outcomes of the 2023 Combined Local Elections are noted.

Report prepared by:
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