

## PARISH CONFERENCE

17 FEBRUARY 2015

RBWM Councillors: Mrs Christine Bateson (Chairman)

RBWM Officers: Wendy Allum, Rob Cowan, Richard Ellis, Andrew Green, Chris Hilton, Harjit Hunjan and David Scott.

Parish and Town Councils:

Bisham: Amanda Robson Brown and Mary Cooper.

Bray: Janice Eden-Bagley, Chris Graham and Nick Pellew.

Cookham: Mandy Brar.

Cox Green: Hellen Doman and Gareth Jones.

Datchet: D Lyons-Davis and Graham Leaver.

Hurley: Michael Kiely (also representing Wraysbury).

Old Windsor: John Lee and Tony Troughton.

Shottesbrooke: Des Warren.

Waltham St Lawrence: John Birkett.

White Waltham: Keith Robinson, Heather Scott and Doug Stuart.

Wraysbury: Andrew Davies (also Chairman of DALC) and Diana Hughes.

Also Attended: Christine Lalley (BALC)

### PART I

#### WELCOME

The Chairman of the Conference, Councillor Mrs Bateson, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Frida Bovington, Betty Marlow, Christine Gadd, Anne-Catherine Buxton, Anne Martin, David Burfitt and Bob Austen.

#### MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1 October 2014 were approved.

Members of the Conference thanked officers for circulating the Travellers Consultation which was noted as a high quality document.

#### ELECTIONS

The Conference received a presentation from David Scott, the Returning Officer, regarding the upcoming elections. Mr Scott circulated a handout to attendees.

It was noted that Parish, Borough and Parliamentary elections would be taking place in May 2015. The elections would be the largest combination to take place in the Borough since 1974. Turnout was expected to be 70% or higher.

The elections would follow the following timetable:

- Notice of election published on 25 March
- Nomination period closes at 4pm on 9 April
- Deadline for withdrawals at 4pm on 9 April (The withdrawals deadline had changed and was same as close of nominations)
- List of Candidates published at 4pm on 10 April
- Opening of postal vote packs from 27 April
- Deadline for Counting Agents was 29 April
- Final Election register on 29 April
- Verification of votes from 10pm on 7 May
- Counting of votes from 5pm on 8 May (unless there were a vast number of contested ballots)
- Return of Expense declarations on 4 June

Clerks would be asked to put up notices on their boards regarding the relevant Borough Ward and Parish. The General Election Notice which was subject to writ was expected to be published on 1 April on the RBWM website, at the main council buildings and the libraries. The Nomination Period would start on the day notice of the election was given (25 March) and closed at 4pm on 9 April. There were 5 clear working days for local nominations before the general election nominations began.

Mr Scott highlighted that all candidates were required to return a completed expense declaration setting out what they had spent on their election campaign. The cost was not reimbursed. It was noted that Counting Agents could be appointed to observe the count however they could not touch the papers.

The Conference noted changes since the elections in 2011. It was noted that nomination papers had to be hand delivered by the candidate or someone they trusted to a member of the returning officer's staff. It was requested that appointments be made so informal checks and corrections of the form could be made at the time of delivery. Further information would be available at the candidates and agents briefings on 10 and 18 March.

It was noted that legislation had changed regarding withdrawals. Candidates could no longer see how many candidates were standing and withdraw from oversubscribed areas. If a candidate stood for more than one area in the same election the candidate had to notify officers which one they wanted to remain in otherwise all nominations would be invalidated.

Mr Scott stated that clerks should provide officers with a list of names and addresses of existing councillors so they knew who was entitled to the registers, with notes to say which of the existing councillors wanted to stand again so that packs could be posted directly to them with covering documents. Candidates were responsible for ensuring they kept to deadlines and ran their campaign according to the legislation.

Officers expected to receive 300 to 350 nominations over the 3 elections. There were currently 13,500 postal voters in the Borough. All candidates were entitled to attend the verification but they could not stay in the hall for the general election count unless they had been appointed to a position by a general election candidate or their agent. Results would be published initially on the RBWM website and then distributed to clerks to publish locally.

Mr Scott discussed the cost of the elections. He noted that for contested by-elections in late 2013 and during 2014, the Borough policy was to support them by paying 50% of the costs, invoices would be sent out shortly.

With regards to the May 2015 elections, the cost would be split in different ways for different elements. For example the counting cost for the Borough and the Parishes would be split two ways. Officers had already written to the Parishes outlining the costs, this was hoped to be a maximum cost however the amount might change depending on the number of contested elections where a third count evening might be required.

The highest individual cost for Parish Councils was for postal voting at £1.60 per pack, plus the cost of administration. This was costed and recharged on an actual basis and the amount for each Parish varied considerably.

Follow up questions could be asked of Mr Scott at [david.scott@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:david.scott@rbwm.gov.uk).

The Conference received an update from Andrew Davies, Chairman of DALC, highlighting the work of the Parishes. Mr Davies noted that there was an enthusiasm within the Parish Councils to let people know about the elections and encourage them to come forward as candidates. Parishes were utilising different means of promoting the elections such as Parishes newsletters, within local newspapers, distributing leaflets and working with community groups.

He noted that meetings of Wraysbury Parish Council had been well attended recently and attendees had been encouraged to stand as candidates.

It was noted that RBWM would help promote Parish Elections with a page in Around the Royal Borough as well as creating posters and leaflets, and utilising social media. Harjit Hunjan, Business and Community Partnerships Manager, and Louisa Dean, Communications and Marketing Manager, were looking into promoting the parish elections via local radio.

Mr Davies questioned whether financial assistance would be available from the Borough to cover the cost of distribution of leaflets.

**ACTION: Officers to look at the promotion of Parish Elections via local radio and to establish if financial assistance is available for the cost of distribution of leaflets.**

## PLANNING

The Conference received a verbal presentation from Chris Hilton, Director of Development and Regeneration, regarding planning matters. The presentation covered restructuring, an update on the Borough Local Plan, and training for Parishes.

Mr Hilton noted that his remit covered the Council's property portfolio, economic development, regeneration (focused on Maidenhead), tourism and town centre management. From January he took over control planning services with building services and building control forming a shared services with Wokingham Borough Council. He noted that he would be reviewing the development control structure to free up the development control manager for a more strategic role. Mr Hilton noted his priorities were getting the Local Plan through, putting the Community Infrastructure Levy in place and supporting Neighbourhood Planning.

Mr Hilton noted the Borough Local Plan. He informed the Conference that the Members Working Group had chosen to recommend the development of only brownfield sites, previously developed greenfield sites and one greenfield site in Ascot High Street identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. If agreed by Cabinet consultation would take place in June 2015. The Plan was hoped to take effect in June 2016.

It was noted that officers were in the process of diarising training for Members and for Parish Councils which would take place after the election.

The Conference noted a briefing note regarding the restatement of site notices for planning applications in respect of tree work in Conservation Areas.

**ACTION: The Clerk to circulate a revised organisational chart of officer roles in the Borough after the election.**

## DEVOLUTION OF SERVICES

The Conference received a verbal presentation from Harjit Hunjan, Community and Business Partnership Manager, and Andrew Green, Community Partnerships Co-ordinator, regarding devolution of services.

It was noted that a workshop had taken place on 13 January 2015 where a number of Parish Councillors had attended. It was noted that the feedback would be used to create a new menu of opportunities which would go to the Big Society Panel in a few weeks. One of the key themes was communication, information on things happening in Parish areas, and contact information of key people in the Borough. A regular newsletter was also suggested.

The new emphasis was maximising opportunity to influence how services were delivered, rather than taking on responsibility for delivery. For example, 10 parishes had been given copies of their local cleaning schedule which they could have amended to make more efficient use of resources. It was noted a streetcare officer should visit Parish Councils on a regular basis. It was noted that officers from the

Children's Services and Adults' Services directorates were interested in getting Parishes influence and involvement with volunteering and referrals. Suggestions included loneliness and children's centres.

Mr Hunjan noted that RBWM had received money from the Department of Communities and Local Government called 'Delivering Projects Differently in Neighbourhoods'. The money would be used to research how the Borough could work collaboratively with Parishes, Town Councils and Delivery Organisations. The project would be implemented in March 2016.

**ACTION: To receive a presentation at the next Parish Conference regarding what services from the Children's Services and Adults' Services directorates could be added to the Devolution of Services Menu.**

**ACTION: To consider bus services in rural area at the next meeting of the Parish Conference.**

#### DATE OF NEXT CONFERENCE

It was noted that the dates of future meeting were to be confirmed.

#### MEETING

The meeting, which began at 7.00pm, ended at 8.45pm.