



<b>Subject:</b>	Local Government Elections May, 2023 - Update
<b>Date:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> March, 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Local Government Elections in May, 2023.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Note the contents of the report.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<b><u>Background</u></b> The Committee will be aware that the Returning Officer (EONI) appoints the Chief Executive to be the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) for the Local Government Elections. It is therefore his responsibility to organise the Election Count, amongst other things, from the Notice of Election through to the Counting of the ballot papers to determine the 60

Councillors who are elected to serve the Belfast District for the next Council term: May, 2023 till May, 2027.

3.2 To assist him in this process, the DRO has appointed Jim Hanna and Stephen McCrory as Assistant Deputy Returning Officers who are authorised to take all decisions in relation to the election in his place. The Chief Executive will be present throughout the count.

**Date of Election**

3.3 This year's Local Government Election poll was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> May, with the Counts to each of the 10 District Electoral Areas to take place on Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 6<sup>th</sup>.

3.4 However, due to the Coronation of King Charles III on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May and the possible impact on the count, the Northern Ireland Minister has determined that the date of the Election will be moved as follows:

Polling Day	Thursday, 18 <sup>th</sup> May
Overnight verification of unused ballot papers	Thursday, 18 <sup>th</sup> – Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> May
Count - Day 1 (5 DEAs)	Friday, 19 <sup>th</sup> May
Count - Day 2 (5 DEAs)	Saturday, 20 <sup>th</sup> May

3.5 The election timetable is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

**Count Venue**

3.6 The venue for all of the counts will be the City Hall. This would require 3 counts to take place in the Great Hall and 1 each in the Banqueting Hall and the Reception Room.

**Order of Counts**

3.7 It is recognised that most Members would prefer the count for the DEA in which they are standing to take place on the Friday rather than the Saturday. In deciding which 5 DEAs should be counted in which room, there are some logistical matters which need to be taken into account:

3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Reception Room is being used as a count venue and it is significantly smaller than the other count venues in the City Hall. The Banqueting Hall is the largest of the venues being used.</li> </ul>
3.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 10 DEAs do not all elect the same number of councillors. Black Mountain and Ormiston DEAs elect 7 members each; Balmoral and Botanic DEAs elect 5 members each; and Castle, Oldpark, Court, Collin, Lisnasharragh and Titanic DEAs each elect 6 members.</li> </ul>
3.10	<p>It is accepted that the number of members to be elected to a DEA does not necessarily mean that the count will take less time to complete but that is the only variable which can reasonably be used to assess which counts should be held in which venue. Accordingly it is suggested that the following breakdown is agreed:</p> <p>Reception Room – Balmoral and Botanic DEAs (5 members each)  Banqueting Hall – Black Mountain and Ormiston DEAs (7 members each)  Great Hall (1) – Castle and Oldpark DEAs (6 members each)  Great Hall (2) – Court and Colin DEAs (6 members each)  Great Hall (3) – Lisnasharragh and Titanic DEAs (6 members each)</p>
3.11	<p>In 2014 the Committee agreed which counts would be held on which day. It was agreed also that the counts held on the Saturday in 2014 would be held on the Friday in 2019 and this was subsequently confirmed at that time. Again, it is recommended that the counts should alternated and be held as follows:</p> <p><u>Friday 18th May, 2023</u></p> <p>Reception Room – Balmoral DEA  Banqueting Hall – Black Mountain DEA  Great Hall 1 – Castle DEA  Great Hall 2 – Court DEA  Great Hall 3 – Lisnasharragh DEA</p> <p><u>Saturday 20th May, 2023</u></p> <p>Reception Room – Botanic DEA  Banqueting Hall – Ormiston DEA</p>

	<p>Great Hall 1 – Oldpark DEA</p> <p>Great Hall 2 – Colin DEA</p> <p>Great Hall 3 – Titanic DEA</p> <p><b><u>Pre-Election Period of Heightened Political Sensitivity</u></b></p>
3.12	<p>The Pre-Election Period of Heightened Political Sensitivity (previously known as Purdah) will commence with effect from 6th April. Whilst there is currently no legislation in Northern Ireland which governs the publicity and council activity during the pre-election period for local government, the Council has previously approved an Election Protocol which provides guidance in dealing with issues which might impact on the election process and a copy is appended to this report.</p> <p>Motions and Issues raised in advance by Members</p>
3.13	<p>In previous years, Motions and issues raised in advance by Members have been perceived as publicity which could influence public opinion or to promote the public image of a particular candidate or group of candidates. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that these will be accepted for inclusion on the agendas for Committees during the month of April (please note that this will require the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> April to be cancelled).</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.14	<p>The costs of the Local Elections in May 2023 will be met out of the existing elections budget.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.15	<p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Local Elections Timetable</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Belfast City Council Election Protocol</p>