

## **ANNUAL COUNCIL – 22 MAY 2023**

# **ELECTIONS 4 MAY 2023 – REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**

### **1. RECOMMENDATION**

1.1 That the Returning Officer's report, be noted.

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

2.1 The quadrennial elections for members of the District Council and Parish and Town Councils in the New Forest District took place on Thursday 4 May 2023.

2.2 Following the conclusion of the Electoral Review of the District Council, carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, the number of New Forest District Councillors reduced from 60 to 48 for these elections.

2.3 Notices of election for the 48 seats on the District Council and the 350 seats on the Parish/Town Councils were published on Monday 20 March 2023. The number of candidates validly nominated were:

- District Council – 160
- Parish/Town Councils – 367

2.4 At the elections in May 2019, there were 130 candidates for District Council seats and 361 for Parish/Town Councils.

2.5 This set of elections has been particularly complex and in line with good practice we will undertake a review to identify where improvements can be made for future elections. The conclusions of this review will be brought forward as an item to General Purposes & Licensing Committee in due course.

### **3. POLLS**

3.1 All 26 District Wards were contested.

3.2 Elections were held in the following Parish/Town Councils

- Fawley Parish Council (Blackfield & Langley and Holbury Ward)
- Fordingbridge Town Council
- Hythe & Dibden Parish Council (Butts Ash Ward, Dibden Purlieu Ward, Dibden Ward, Hythe East Ward, Hythe West Ward and Langdown Ward)
- Lymington & Pennington Town Council (Buckland Ward, Lymington Ward and Pennington Ward)
- New Milton Town Council (Ashley North Ward, Ashley South Ward, Ballard Ward, Barton & Becton Ward, Bashley Ward and Milton Ward)
- Ringwood Town Council (Ringwood North Ward and Ringwood South Ward)
- Totton & Eling Town Council (Totton Central Ward, Totton East Ward, Totton North Ward, Totton South East Ward, Totton South Ward, Totton South West Ward and Totton West Ward)
- Woodgreen Parish Council

- 3.3 38 Parish/Town Councils or Parish/Town Council wards were uncontested, and 199 candidates were elected unopposed.
- 3.4 Polling took place at 98 polling stations. The verification and the counting of votes were held at Applemore Health & Leisure following the close of poll.
- 3.5 Postal ballot papers were issued to 22,450 electors, and 16,002 items of post were returned. 15,732 district postal papers were included in the count. 10,196 parish postal papers were also included in the count. 0.3% of the postal votes returned were rejected on opening because the signatures or dates of birth were missing or did not match those recorded at application. A further 1.1% were rejected due to there being no postal voting statement. These were not included in the count.
- 3.6 A total of 45,511 District ballot papers were included in the count. 353 ballot papers (0.8%) were spoilt and were rejected. This is lower than the 2.8% rejected in 2019.
- 3.7 A total of 28,985 Parish ballot papers were included in the count. 328 ballot papers (1.1%) were spoilt and were rejected. This is higher than the 0.9% rejected in 2019.

#### **4. DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS**

- 4.1 The results are shown in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The overall percentage poll for the District Council elections was 32.4% which matched the turn out recorded at the last quadrennial elections in May 2019.

#### **5. PARISH COUNCIL POLLS AND ELECTION RESULTS**

- 5.1 All Parish/Town Council election results are on the District Council's website at [www.newforest.gov.uk/article/3298/Town-and-parish-election-results](http://www.newforest.gov.uk/article/3298/Town-and-parish-election-results)
- 5.2 The overall percentage poll for the Parish/Town Council elections was 30.6%
- 5.3 Where insufficient nominations were received to fill all the vacant seats, the Parish or Town Council may within 35 days of the election, co-opt members to fill the vacancies. Any person co-opted must meet the usual qualification rules for membership of a Parish or Town Council.
- 5.4 Insufficient nominations were received for Rockbourne Parish Council and therefore a new notice of election was published on the District Council's website on Tuesday 9 May 2023.

#### **6. VOTER ID**

- 6.1 These elections were the first subject to the new Elections Act 2022 regulations which required electors to produce an accepted form of photographic ID before they may be issued with a ballot paper.
- 6.2 56 voters applied for and were not initially issued with a ballot paper. Of those 57.1% later returned with an accepted form of ID and were issued with a ballot paper.

6.3 24 electors applied for but were not issued with a ballot paper by close of poll, representing 0.1% of eligible electors.

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