

**NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL (NLC) LOCAL ELECTIONS 2023
AND NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE TOWN AND PARISH ELECTIONS (T&PC) 2023**

CANDIDATES/AGENTS/ TOWN AND PARISH CLERKS BRIEFING MEETING

INFORMATION NOTE

Postal Vote Process and Polling Day/Verification/Count

Purpose of Information Note

This document summarises key arrangements for the May 2023 North Lincolnshire Council Local Elections and contested Town and Parish Council Elections. It provides an overview of roles and responsibilities with contacts; sets out information on key electoral timetable dates, times and arrangements to enable candidates and agents to participate in and observe the electoral process.

Background

1. The North Lincolnshire Council Local Elections and contested Town and Parish Council Elections will be held on Thursday 4 May 2023 (election/polling day)
2. Polling Stations will open at 7.00 a.m. and close at 10.00 p.m.
3. The verification and count of all NLC Local Elections, together with the verification of contested T&PC Elections will commence from 10:00pm on Thursday 4 May 2023 and the count for contested T&PC elections will take place from 12noon on Friday 5 May 2023.

Key Roles

4. Returning Officer (RO) – Pete Thorpe, Chief Executive North Lincolnshire Council - responsible for the overall strategic leadership of delivering NLC Local Elections and contested T&PC Elections.
5. Deputy Returning Officers – appointed responsible officers from the council's Senior Leadership Team and senior managers of the Governance and Partnerships team – responsible for leading, managing and implementing all required election operations and processes (please see contact details at the end of this document).

Polling Day – 4 May 2023

6. The North Lincolnshire Local Elections and Town and Parish Council Elections will be held on Thursday 4 May 2023. These will consist of -
 - Election of 43 members across 19 Wards to North Lincolnshire Council.
 - Election to X (*to date not yet known*) number of contested Town and Parish Councils in North Lincolnshire.

7. Polling Stations will open at 7.00 a.m. and close at 10.00 p.m. Presiding Officers and other staff will then make their way to The Pods in Scunthorpe - the count venue - with their ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts, any postal votes and other election material. It is anticipated that all ballot boxes should have been returned to The Pods by 11.30 p.m. (All Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks receive up to date training on all responsibilities prior to election day).

8. These elections will include a statutory requirement to present an approved document of 'Voter Identification' before voting in all Polling Stations.

9. There will be 114 polling stations in North Lincolnshire for the two elections above. Those polling stations covering the North Lincolnshire Council Local Elections and contested Town and Parish Council Elections will potentially have two ballot boxes. Each polling station will be staffed in line with the ratios recommended by the Electoral Commission and at busier stations have an extra poll clerk particularly to support voters with the new requirements of Voter Identification and disability access – enhancing the voter experience. Each polling station will be visited by a designated polling station inspector.

10. On election/polling day the elections team will be available from 6.30 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. and after be available at the Pods (count venue) until the close of poll at 10:00pm. The staff will deal with calls throughout the day from polling station staff, candidates, agents and the public etc. These can range from general enquiries or issues to re-issuing spoilt or lost postal votes, dealing with voter identification matters and emergency proxy applications and any other matters that may arise during the day. (Presiding Officers will also be able to maintain contact with the Elections Office and Inspectors throughout Election Day using mobile phones/email etc.)

The Postal Vote Opening Arrangements

11. The first issue of postal votes will be on 18/19 April 2023 and a second issue on 24 April 2023. Postal votes for those North Lincolnshire Council wards which also have contested Town and Parish Councils elections will be combined in envelopes (separate ballot papers) and be returned in one envelope. (Ballot papers will use the colours – white for NLC elections and yellow for contested Town and Parish Council elections). Postal votes will start to be received back from around 19/20 April 2023. As in previous years it is anticipated that the initial response will be large, and Voter Identification may have an impact, possibly increasing numbers.

12. Postal vote opening will be held on the dates below. Following the success of previous years, it is intended to alternate the dates initially between those North Lincolnshire Council wards located within the Scunthorpe Parliamentary Constituency and North Lincolnshire Council wards located within the Brigg and Goole Parliamentary Constituency, together with any contested Town and Parish Councils in those area as follows:-

- **Monday 24 April** – Ashby Central, Ashby Lakeside, Bottesford, Brumby, Crosby and Park, Frodingham, Kingsway with Lincoln Gardens, Messingham, Ridge and Town (10)
- **Tuesday 25 April** – Axholme Central, Axholme North, Axholme South, Barton, Brigg and Wolds, Broughton and Scawby, Burringham and Gunness, Burton-upon-Stather and Winterton, and Ferry (9).
- **Wednesday 26 April** – As for Monday 24 April above
- **Thursday 27 April** – As for Tuesday 25 April above
- **Friday 28 April** – As for Monday 24 April or all wards combined alphabetically – *notice to be given.*
- *(Bank Holiday – Monday 1 May)*

- **Tuesday 2 May** – As for Tuesday 25 April or all NLC wards combined alphabetically – *notice to be given.*
- **Wednesday 3 May** – All NLC wards combined alphabetically.
- **Thursday 4 May AM** – If required for all NLC wards alphabetically – *notice to be given.*

13. Each opening session will be held in the Conference Room at Church Square House, Scunthorpe commencing at 10:00am and finishing at approximately 5:00pm (*unless notice of a change of start time is given and depending on the numbers of postal votes received each day and the related workloads*). Access to the Conference Room to observe the opening of postal votes will be available to all candidates and their postal vote agents (maximum of 5 agents per political party in the room at any one time but a pool of agents/observers is permissible). *Admittance of postal vote agents will only be allowed following prior notice of their names being submitted by candidates/agents to Electoral Services before the opening process commences.* The management of the process will be carried out by Electoral/Democracy core staff and will include staff scanning the postal vote statements and making date of birth and signature verification checks as required.

14. At the above postal vote opening sessions ballot papers are to be kept **face down** at all times. Candidates and Postal Vote Agents are not permitted to look at the ballot paper to attempt to see how it is marked. (In the context of tallying, it is not the act of counting itself that is prohibited, but the necessary pre-requisite of looking at the individual ballot papers to see how they are marked). Mobile phones should also not be used in the Conference Room, calls and texting etc. this should take place outside of the Conference Room. *The secrecy of the postal vote opening/ballot must remain at all times.*

15. Any remaining postal votes will then be dealt with during the verification/count at 10.00 p.m. that evening. This will include any further votes received from polling stations, those collected by inspectors or hand delivered before 10.00 p.m. and those received from any final Royal Mail sweep.

Verification and Count Arrangements

16. The verification/count will be held at The Pods Leisure Centre, Ashby Road, Scunthorpe. It will be led by the Returning Officer – Pete Thorpe who will be assisted by a number of Deputy Returning Officers and other Legal and Democracy staff.

17. The arrangements for the Count timings are as follows –

- Evening of 4 May from immediately after 10:00pm and as ballot boxes arrive –
 - Verification of postal votes and all remaining postal votes opening.
 - Verification of 19 Wards of North Lincolnshire Council and X number of contested Town and Parish Councils
- Evening of 4 May and early morning of 5 May, the counting of 19 Wards of North Lincolnshire Council
- Afternoon of 5 May – 12:00noon the counting of X number of contested Town and Parish Councils

18. Candidates, agents, observers etc. are likely to be invited to start arriving at The Pods around 9:30pm on Thursday 4 May and 11:30am on Friday 5 May. Strictest security and identification by initial invitation will be applied.

19. The verification/count process on the evening of 4 May and early morning of 5 May will be carried out by 9 teams of 8 Counting Assistants (72 Counting Assistants). Following completion of the verification process for ballot boxes, the count will be carried out for the 19 Wards of North Lincolnshire Council.

On 5 May at 12:00noon the counting of X number of contested Town and Parish Councils will be carried out by X teams of X Counting Assistants, to be determined by the number of contested elections.

20. At the verification and counts ballot papers are to be kept **face up** at all times. Digital information will be displayed at the verification/count to make announcements (alongside oral announcements), information on verification/counts being carried out at which tables, ward result/turnout etc and national television. Refreshments will also be available outside of the Sports Hall in the café.

21. It is anticipated that the verification/count on 4 May maybe be completed by around 5:00am and similarly by 5:00pm on 5 May. These timings are of course approximate and may differ depending on various factors at the time.

22. Useful Contacts at North Lincolnshire Council

If you have any further questions following the briefing meeting, please contact the officers below:

- elections@northlincs.co.uk - electoral services email address
- anthia.taylor@northlincs.gov.uk - Electoral Services Manager
- richard.mell@northlincs.gov.uk - Head of Democracy