greater **WELLINGTON**
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Report   **07.39**
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Committee   **Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee**
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2007 Triennial Elections

1.   Purpose

To provide councillors with the timetable for the 2007 triennial local authority elections and to seek decisions on the early processing of votes and the order in which candidates' names are to be arranged on the voting documents.

2.   Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3.   Background

The 2007 triennial local authority elections will be held on Saturday 13 October. The Council has already made a decision on the electoral system and planning for these elections has commenced. A final decision on the Council's representation arrangements must be made by the Local Government Commission before 11 April 2007.

4.   Timetable

The timetable for the elections is set out in the Local Electoral Act 2001 (the Act) and the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 (the Regulations). A copy of the timetable for the 2007 elections is included as **Attachment 1** to this report. The critical dates are shown in bold.

5.   Method of voting

The territorial authorities in the Wellington region carry out much of the work for the regional council elections. Decisions on the method of voting (i.e. postal or ballot box) can be made by territorial authorities but not a regional council. The method used for regional council voting within the district of a territorial authority must be the same method used by the territorial authority. Territorial authorities are required to consult with regional councils on the

method of voting and it would be appropriate for the Council to provide an indication of its preferred method, while recognising that it is the territorial authorities that make the decisions.

All territorial authorities in the Wellington region have applied the postal voting method since the 1995 elections. There is no move, that officers are aware of, for any authority to change back to the ballot box method. It is recommended that the Council indicate that postal voting is its preferred method of voting.

6. Order of names on voting papers

Prior to the enactment of the Regulations, candidates' names were required to be listed on the voting documents in alphabetical order, by surname.

Clause 31(1) of the Regulations now allows the Council to decide whether the candidates' names are to be arranged on the voting documents in alphabetical order of surname, pseudo-random order or random order. In the absence of any Council resolution approving another arrangement, the candidates' names must be arranged in alphabetical order of surname.

The features of each arrangement are described as follows:

Option 1 - Alphabetical order of surname

This is the order which has been required to be used at previous local authority elections, and is self explanatory.

Option 2 - Pseudo-random order

Under this option, the candidates' names for each election are placed in a hat (or similar receptacle), mixed together, and then drawn out of the receptacle, with the candidates' names being placed on all voting documents for that election in the order in which they are drawn.

Option 3 - Random order

Under this option, the names of the candidates for each election are shown in a different order on each and every voting document, utilising software which permits the names of the candidates to be laser printed in a different order on each paper.

Public notice

The Regulations provide that if a local authority has determined that pseudo-random order is to be used, the Electoral Officer must state, in the public notice required to be given, the date, time and place at which the order of the candidates' names will be arranged and any person is entitled to attend.

Comparative cost of each option

The cost of printing the voting documents employing either Option 1 or Option 2 will be identical. Should the Council adopt Option 3 (random order) there will be some increase in cost, because of the need to individually laser print each voting document rather than having them pre-printed. While it is not yet possible to give an estimate of the likely additional costs if this option is chosen, these are not expected to be substantial.

Option chosen by territorial authorities within the Wellington region

At the time of writing this report, Carterton District Council and Kapiti Coast District Council have resolved to have candidates names printed on the voting documents in alphabetical order. Porirua City Council has resolved to have names printed in pseudo-random order on the voting document. The remaining territorial authorities in the Wellington region have not yet passed a resolution on the order of candidate names to go on their voting documents.

Comments on various options

Alphabetical order

This is the simplest method for the elector. It is the method they are familiar with and is the system used at the parliamentary elections. There is a suggestion that candidates with a surname starting at the top end of the alphabet have an unfair advantage over others with a "lower" alphabetic ranking.

Pseudo-random order

This system could possibly be more difficult for the elector to locate the candidate they wish to vote for, especially if there are a large number of candidates standing for election.

Although it would resolve the issue (if there is one) of those candidates with a surname starting with the letter "A" or "B" etc having an unfair advantage over those candidates whose surname starts with a middle or later letter of the alphabet, that advantage would then be given to the first few candidates whose names are drawn out of the hat.

Random order

This option suffers from the same (possible) difficulty for the elector as described under the "pseudo random" method.

Although it may not be particularly user friendly this method is possibly the fairest to all candidates.

7. Early processing of votes

The Council must resolve to allow the processing of votes during the voting period in order for territorial authorities in the region to carry out early processing of votes for regional council candidates. Electoral officers in the region have indicated that territorial authorities wish to carry out early processing of all votes, whether for regional council candidates or otherwise.

In fact, territorial authority electoral officers have indicated that a decision on the part of this Council not to allow early process of regional council votes would prejudice their ability to print, distribute and process all votes. This is because it would be necessary to print and distribute a regional council voting paper separately from that of territorial authorities and district health boards. In addition to the added cost associated with doing this, there is concern that it would not be practically possible to print and distribute these new voting papers given the time available and the number of suppliers capable of doing the work. For this reason, it is recommended that the Council resolve to allow the early processing of votes.

8. Communication

As soon as practicable after the close of nominations on 24 August 2007, the Electoral Officer is required by section 65 of the Act to give public notice of the election on 13 October 2007. Among other things, the notice must state whether a resolution has been made that voting documents are to be processed during the voting period.

The Council's decision relating to the voting method will be communicated to Electoral Officers in territorial authorities and to the public in the necessary public notices.

9. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. **Receives** *the report.*

2. **Notes** *the timetable for the 2007 triennial local authority elections.*

3. **Recommends** *to Council that:*

> (i) *it advises territorial authorities in the Wellington region that its preferred method of voting is postal voting.*

> (ii) *the names of the Greater Wellington Regional Council candidates at the 2007 local authority elections are to be arranged on the voting paper in (choose one of the following):*

>> • *alphabetical order of surname; or*
>> • *pseudo-random order; or*

- *random order.*

(iii) the voting documents received by constituent territorial authorities in the Wellington region in respect of the Council's 2007 triennial election be processed during the voting period.

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Attachment 1: 2007 Triennial Election Timetable