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Report 02.15

28 January 2002

File: E/1/1/24

AE:Reports/Variou2002

Report to the Policy and Finance Committee
from Ted Maguire

Parliamentary Select Committee: Inquiry into 2001 Local Body Elections

1. Purpose

To consider a WRC submission to Parliament's Justice and Electoral Select Committee into the 2001 Local Body Elections.

2. Background and Comment

- 2.1 A letter from Parliament's Justice and Electoral Select Committee (**Attachment 1**) invites submissions by 15 February 2002 into an Inquiry it is undertaking into the 2001 Local Body Elections. These were the first undertaken under the new Local Electoral Legislation.
- 2.2 From a WRC viewpoint, I am not aware of any significant concerns. As WRC Electoral Officer, I experienced no problems and the relationships with the Territorial Authority Electoral Officers were excellent.
- 2.3 A more general concern is that overall, voter turnout was lower than hoped for nationally and various views have been expressed as to why this may have occurred. Voting was universally carried out by postal voting. One commonly held view is that the longer polling period allowed under the new legislation (three weeks compared with two weeks under the old legislation) was a factor.
- 2.4 Councillors were invited to submit their views to me. One view was that the expenditure limit for Regional Council candidates was too high. All Regional Council candidates spent substantially below the allowable limits (different spending limits applied in each constituency as it was based on population). This reinforces the commonly held view that the limits serve no real purpose apart from Mayoral elections in the larger centres.
- 2.5 The 150 word candidate profiles and photos were a helpful new innovation and seemed to work well overall.

Across the sector, there was a need for numerous legal opinions (one several pages long about what is “a word”). The profiles should, in my view, be continued.

- 2.6 The earlier announcement of results, which was made possible by progressive counting, worked well.
- 2.7 It will be noted that some of the questions raised by the Select Committee traverse matters that are dealt with in the Local Government Bill. There are other issues raised that have little direct impact to this Council, since many of the arrangements are conducted by Territorial Authority Electoral Officers under contract.
- 2.8 The question of whether STV should apply to the next WRC elections has yet to be considered. The system will be mandatory for District Health Board elections from 2004.
- 2.9 Concerning candidates deposits – in our case virtually all were refunded. However, it would be useful to be able to withhold refunds until candidates have filed their expenditure returns.

3. **Recommendation**

That the Select Committee be advised that the WRC is satisfied with the manner in which the legislation worked for this Council’s elections, but the points raised above be discussed in the submission.

TED MAGUIRE
Council Secretary

Attachment 1: Letter dated 18 December 2001 from the Justice and Electoral Committee