

Constituency - Torridge and West Devon

(Acting) Returning Officer – Mr K Miles

Date and Time of Count – 7th May 2010 at 13.30

Reasons

In taking a decision to count on the 7th May, a number of factors were taken into account. These are addressed below.

Geography

The Constituency of Torridge and West Devon is a very large Constituency stretching from Bideford and its surrounding area in the North to the outskirts of Plymouth in the South. Three ballot box collection points were designated throughout the Constituency, one at Bideford, one at Holsworthy and one at Tavistock. The ballot boxes were then all transported to the Count venue at Holsworthy. It was assumed beforehand that some boxes would not be delivered to the Count venue until around 01.00, but all boxes had in fact been delivered by 00.30.

Venue

The use of a venue in the centre of the Constituency would have made the process of transporting the boxes to the venue quicker, but the only suitable and available venue to hold the Count was in Holsworthy, to the North of the area. Other venues were looked at but discounted as too small or unsuitable for other reasons.

Staffing

Around 60 counting staff were used at the count. One of the major reasons for counting on the Friday was the fact that the Council was unable to find sufficient staff to carry out the Count on the Thursday night who had not already been out on polling station duty during the day. The Council had attempted to recruit additional staff through the banks etc, but had been unsuccessful. It was felt that, given the overriding requirement to deliver an accurate count, using staff who had already been working for 15 hours in a polling station was a major risk to the overriding objectives of the Count.

Volume of Postal Votes

It was envisaged that because of the geography of the area, very few postal votes handed in to polling stations would make their way back to the central office for an opening session on the afternoon of the 6th May. It was envisaged that a large number may be handed in and returned with the boxes. As it turned out around 500 postal votes were returned in this way and these were opened and dealt with on the night of the poll at the Count venue. This was completed by 2.00am.

Consultation with Political Parties

The candidates or agents representing candidates standing in the Constituency were consulted about whether to hold the Count on the Thursday night or Friday morning. Some of the candidates/agents stated that they would prefer a count to be held on the Friday. No candidates/agents raised any objections to the Count taking place on the Friday.

Conclusion

The above issues were considered before a decision was taken on whether to hold the Count on the evening of 6th May or during the daytime on 7th May. Because it appeared that the Count would not commence before 2.00am in any event, and because sufficient staff could not be found, a decision was taken to hold the Count on the 7th May. Verification commenced at 10.00am and the count proper commenced at 13.30.