

4. 2004 CHRISTCHURCH CITY ELECTIONS: EARLY PROCESSING AND ORDERING OF CANDIDATES' NAMES ON VOTING DOCUMENTS

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The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the early processing of the returned voting documents used at the next Christchurch City triennial elections, to be held on Saturday 9 October 2004. A decision is also sought as to the order in which the candidates' names are to be shown on the voting documents used at that election.

(a) EARLY PROCESSING

Section 79 of the Local Electoral Act 2001 permits a local authority to process (but not count) returned voting documents over the voting period.

Early processing of voting documents was introduced for the 1998 Christchurch City elections (but restricted to the 84 hours before the close of voting) and was used very successfully throughout the country. Because of the success of early processing in 1998 and the benefits which early processing provides, the early processing period was subsequently increased to the whole three week voting period now provided under the current legislation. The immediate benefit of adopting early processing is that much, if not all, of the cumbersome and time-consuming task of extracting and checking the voting documents is undertaken progressively over the three week voting period (under strict security and under the supervision of a Justice of the Peace). This means a quicker and more accurate result can be achieved on polling day.

Recommendation: That the returned voting documents for the 2004 Christchurch City elections be processed during the voting period, such early processing to be undertaken in accordance with section 79 of the Local Electoral Act 2001; the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 and the Society of Local Government Managers' Code of Best Practice.

(b) ORDER OF CANDIDATES' NAMES ON VOTING DOCUMENTS

Formerly, candidates' names were required to be listed on the voting documents in alphabetical order, by surname.

Clause 31(1) of the Local Electoral Regulations 2001 now allows the Council to decide whether the 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 below:

Arrangement 1 - Alphabetical Order of Surname

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

Arrangement 2 - Pseudo-Random Order*

Under this arrangement, the candidates' names for each issue 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 issue in the order in which they are drawn.

(* Note: Although the term "pseudo random order" is used in the Local Electoral Regulations to describe this arrangement, this is a somewhat imperfect description, in that the term "pseudo random" is understood by mathematicians and/or information technology specialists to have a quite different meaning.)

Arrangement 3 - Random Order

Under this arrangement, the names of the candidates for each issue 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.

The Regulations provide that if a local authority has determined that pseudo-random order or 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. Any person is then entitled to attend while the arrangement is in progress.

Comparative Costs of Each Arrangement

The cost of printing the voting documents employing either Arrangement 1 or Arrangement 2 will be identical. Should the Council adopt Arrangement 3 (random order) there will be some increase in cost, because of the need to individually laser print each voting document. While it is not yet possible to give an estimate of the likely additional costs which will arise from this arrangement, these are not expected to be substantial.

Recommendation: That the names of the candidates at the 2004 Christchurch City elections be arranged in pseudo-random order.