

KARMIEL ELECTIONS

On Tuesday, 31 October 2023 residents of Karmiel, along with citizens throughout the country, will have the opportunity to vote for a new city council and mayor for a five-year period. Election day is now a paid holiday for the working population.

All municipalities, local councils and regional councils will be up for election as will mayors. Top-two run-off elections will be held on Tuesday, 14 November where no leadership candidate won a minimum of 40% of votes cast in the first round.

Two ballot papers are used, colour-coded white for the council, yellow for the mayoral vote and blue for regional local committees where such exist (not Karmiel). All elected councillors and council leaders will assume office 21 days after the election. Unlike national elections where the minimum voter age is 18, the age of eligibility for local elections is 17. Voters must reside in the locality in which they are registered, a minimum of 40 days before the election.

Karmiel mayor, Moshe Koninsky will be defending his mayoralty won in 2018 (only the third mayor in the 59-year history of the city). Like politics the world over, the race will be tough with no quarter asked or given by all the candidates, Mayor Koninsky, Alon Azulai and Bat-Sheva Abuhasra.

For example, a petition issued in July of this year by Avi Koriat and his Opposition Faction, Renewal with Responsibility, which advocates for the candidacy of Alon Azoulai, includes several clauses concerning the alleged involvement of municipal employees in electioneering propaganda for the mayor.

Among other allegations, the petition claimed that a number of municipal employees took part in the opening conference at the mayor's election headquarters. Also that a number of employees hung signs supporting Koninski on the front of their dwellings which is strictly against neutrality rules for municipal employees. It is also alleged that municipal employees shared content on a *Facebook* group with more than 15,000 members and which supports the mayor's re-election bid.

The petition was largely but not wholly rejected. In regard to the section that was accepted by the committee, the judge ordered Mayor Moshe Koninski to leave a Facebook group that he and some municipal employees who are involved in managing and which contains content that allegedly includes election propaganda in his favour. The municipality was also obliged to pay the petitioners NIS 2,000 in expenses.

In their defence, the mayor and the municipality claimed that the petition submitted lacked clarity. It is also stated that the Facebook group in question is not operated nor associated with the municipality. Moreover, the mayor stated that he did not order any of municipal employees to hang signs or take part in election propaganda in his favour.

However, he said that he cannot prevent them from expressing an opinion on Facebook, as anyone may do. The municipality stated that it has distributed guidelines to all its employees regarding the special prohibitions that apply to them in connection with local election publicity.

The judge acknowledged that she cannot issue an order for employees to remove such signs nor send a team of inspectors to check they have been taken down nor check Facebook nor other social media platform posts. She was however, satisfied that the municipality had acted in good faith to prevent its employees propagandising for the incumbent.

Azouli is running on a ticket to prevent Karmiel becoming a *'mixed'* city (make of that what you will!) and Abuhasra is concentrating on increasing cultural facilities within Karmiel. Meanwhile Koninsky stands by his record of a mostly well-run, clean and generally safe city while his advertising hoardings proclaim *"Karmiel is in good hands"*. Karmiel City Council member, Guy David Marciano, makes up the list of four candidates.

Whoever one votes for, it is important for citizens to use their vote, as much of the world's population do not possess this basic right to elect who governs them.

