

**Written evidence received for the 2010 Elections in London
Working Group:**

Election Review 2010

As of November 2010

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LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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Your Ref:
Our Ref:

Date: 8 October 2010

Dear Mark

2010 Elections in London Working Group

With reference to your letter dated 24 September 2010 addressed to the Chief Executive inviting contributions from Returning Officers. Our Borough Solicitor undertook a review of the May elections and produced a report recommending areas for attention. I set out below some edited extracts from the report which I hope will be of some use to the work of the Elections Review Working Group.

The factor that is fundamental to any review is that this was a joint election of Local and General, and a combination of two of the most complex elections taking place simultaneously, with the impact of a greater turn out generally and locally. The London Borough of Brent had a 62% turnout that added an extra dimension to running the local element. These complications were certainly echoed throughout London, with particular issues arising at a number of boroughs. There were other areas in the country where the Electoral Commission noted in their interim report particular difficulties arose, either with long queues or people not being able to vote. Brent fortunately did not experience problems of this nature.

The interest shared across the nation in relation to this General Election, added to an increase in both enquiries prior to the election and volume of voters turning out as well as queries on the day of the election itself. The raising of the awareness of the election in the media resulted in an increase in changes to the register. There was a very high volume of questions coming into the elections team and the types of questions such as, how do I vote, where is my polling station, why was I not able to vote for Gordon Brown, Nick Clegg or David Cameron etc. added to the pressure on the team. Other authorities also experienced an exceptionally high level of telephone queries

The Electoral Commission produced a good practice template of a project plan in 2009 which Brent used. The project plan anticipated a Local Election but highlighted that a General Election would need to take place by June 2010, and that there could be a dual election. This led to the need for dual planning until the General Election was announced.

It is only due to the considerable hard work and dedication of the Democratic Services team providing additional support to the Electoral Services team that enabled the work on preparing for the election to continue when there was extreme pressure on the service. In respect of colleagues



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across London, all colleagues have commented on the need to spend a minimum 12 hours a day, 5 days sometimes 7 days a week, in the run up the elections and at least 6-8 weeks prior to the election, due the intense pressures on working to get the register updated and sending out postal votes and dealing with a large number of queries.

One of the key issues in this and future elections is the number of postal votes. The number of postal votes in Brent had risen to approximately 18,000, and this added to the strain on the electoral services team, needing to send out postal votes as well as the continual updating of the register. This process was problematic in London and throughout England and certainly colleagues elsewhere had similar issues. Return of postal votes issued tends to be higher than the turnout at polling stations, at around 75%. Checking of postal votes is a project in itself requiring dedicated input from several staff over a number of days. The numbers returned to polling stations was such that checking of identifiers did not end until around 3:30am.

One of the items highlighted as a possible reason that a number of postal votes that allegedly went missing rather than being delivered was due to the prescriptive format of the envelope and the ballot papers which appeared similar to junk mail. This required the provision, in accordance with legislation, of urgent replacement postal votes right up to the day of the elections and of course this added logistical difficulties. The number of requests for votes to be re-issued on the election day became problematic.

One of the issues that was raised in the Electoral Commission report and in discussions with colleagues elsewhere were problems around the integrity of the register. Some of the information on the form to complete for registration and which is statutory caused difficulty. The forms which were downloaded from the Electoral Commission website led members of the public to believe that as soon as they had completed an online form they were registered. This was obviously not the case and indeed this often led to increased work for the authority in checking people's registration when they were already on the register. Some late registrations had to be investigated by Internal Audit, although they were ultimately found to be valid.

The information provided by members of the public in relation to names to be placed on the register is not always consistent, made worse by the different format of the Electoral Commission forms. Clerical errors did arise on the day of the election which were altered as required but this increased the volume of work.

Brent took the view that sending out confirmatory letters following publication of the register was important and it is considered that this led to as accurate register as possible although it is a very expensive exercise.

There was an increase this time in requests for proxy votes after the closing date for postal votes given the deadline for proxy votes is so much closer to the election date. This added pressure both on the day and prior to the election.

The training for presiding officers is crucial, including the importance of a run through of how the ballot paper accounts are undertaken at the close of poll. It is planned in future to use presiding officers who have undertaken the role on a number of occasions and have experience of where pinch point difficulties arise to provide pragmatic and practical solutions as to their ways of dealing with long queues, or difficult members of the public. One result of our review is that we are abandoning our practice of employing one PO per polling place so that there is a PO in each polling station.

There were errors in the printing of the ballot papers. The printers had previously successfully provided the authority with ballot papers but had problems meeting the demands of these joint elections. Reprints were necessary and this added tension for staff within the



Elections/Democratic Services Team. The final copies of ballot papers for the polling stations were only available and had to be collected on the bank holiday Monday at around 6pm.

The combination of the two elections was a considerable strain on the Elections team and on the Democratic Services team despite considerable support provided by colleagues elsewhere. This was still insufficient to deal with the increased workload for staff to the point that officers working 60+ hours a week for 6 to 8 weeks prior to the election entered the election day exhausted and not having had sufficient time to undertake all the planning that would have eased and made for a smoother election day. The General Election count lasted longer than anticipated leaving senior officers with very little opportunity for rest before the local election count began.

The fact that the election went as smoothly as it did and it was a successful count both on General and Local elections is a tribute to the dedication and hard work of all the officers involved. However it is considered that this pressure was too great and additional resources were required, at all levels.

In conclusion, London boroughs who were involved in dual elections had to manage a considerable increase in work in relation to the register, postal votes and the running of both elections. The team who deal with the elections at Brent are a very small dedicated team, who worked well beyond capacity. With an election taking place most years, a canvass taking place during August to November and a referendum planned in May 2011 this continues to be the case.

Yours sincerely

Peter Goss
Democratic Services Manager



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22nd October 2010

Dear Camelia Thomas

Comments for London Assembly 2010 Elections in London Working Group

I am writing on behalf of Camden's Returning Officer Moira Gibb in response to your letter of 24 September 2010 requesting contributions from Borough Returning Officers regarding lessons learned from the organisation and running of the 2010 General and local elections.

General Reflections from London Borough of Camden viewpoint

1. The planning of the elections on 6th May 2010 faced two unique challenges, firstly the likelihood from 2009 onwards that the local elections on 6th May 2010 would be combined with the Parliamentary election, and secondly uncertainty as to the date of the Parliamentary election, which persisted right up to a few weeks before 6th. This made planning for the elections extremely complex. Other factors too were different for these elections .

- new Parliamentary boundaries including in Camden taking in three wards from the London Borough of Brent for the Hampstead and Kilburn constituency;
- the first Parliamentary election with 11 day registration and postal voting on demand;
- different franchises and timetables for the two elections;
- need for a count venue to accommodate combined elections;
- intense public scrutiny of the whole process.

2. Given these intense pressures, it is pleasing to report that in Camden the elections were largely a success. Inevitably , there were some glitches and learning points for the future, but there were a number of parts of the election process which ran very smoothly –

- nominations processes completed on time and without problems for both elections;
- printing of election stationery (poll cards, postal vote packs and ballot papers) was all accurate, and delivered on time and in the required quantities;
- there was excellent liaison with Royal Mail;
- equipping the polling stations went well and there were no problems with stationery on the day;
- the absent vote processes worked well and coped with an increase from 18,000 to 25,000 postal votes.
- the count was successfully run for both the Parliamentary and local elections;

3. Areas where further planning was identified as needing to take place before future major elections in Camden are

- reviewing the processes for coping with the volume of late registration and postal vote applications on the 11 day closing date;
- elections office cover on election day;
- checking the postal vote numbers from each day's opening sessions to ensure accuracy at the count;
- implementation of detailed arrangements for the Parliamentary elections with Brent;
- detailed logistics of the count operation if held again at Haverstock School.

Polling Day

4. Overall, the organisation of polling day in Camden was seen as a success as confirmed by very positive comments from survey forms completed by electors at polling stations.

5. Camden did not experience the problems highlighted by the Electoral Commission at certain polling stations with queues at 10pm. Had this problem occurred, we had contingency planning in place for early warning from Presiding Officers to our Station Inspectors responsible for a group of stations, who would attend the station in question to manage the situation, for example by asking electors to have their poll cards ready and aiming to get ballot papers issued to all in the queue by 10pm.

6. Camden has also conducted a survey of the hourly voting totals to analyse peaks and troughs in voting during the day. This has shown that in Camden, there is actually more pressure at the beginning of the day than at the end, whereas 9pm to 10pm is one of our quieter hours for voting. This survey will enable us to direct resources for future elections to time periods which are busiest. In Camden, the busiest timeframe for voting is 6pm to 8pm and we will look to bolster polling station at this time with student poll clerks from Camden secondary schools, whom we use to help with major elections.

7. It should be noted that the introduction of Corresponding Number Lists does involve a longer period of time in issuing ballot papers than the former system whereby elector numbers were written on the ballot paper counterfoils, and therefore it is inevitable that there will be an element of queuing where more than one election is involved, as in May 2010 and with the number of ballot papers for the 2012 elections. This does mean that it is essential for the budget provision for polling station staff to be adequate to enable sufficient staff to be appointed for the level of turnout anticipated. For the national elections in May, the Ministry of Justice had made an assessed requirement of 1.8 poll clerks per station. Where this was adhered to rigidly in other parts of the country, this may have contributed to problems at polling stations. The Election Claims Unit is understood to be amending this formula to 2 poll clerks per station as from 2011, and it is considered essential that this formula should be allowed for the 2012 GLA elections.

8. One issue which arose for Camden on polling day this year, as well as for all recent elections, has been increased problems with party activity directly outside polling stations. Camden enforces a local 50 yard exclusion zone around the entrances to stations where no party campaigning activity can take place, which is policed by our Station Inspectors. We also provide a leaflet explaining to electors the role of tellers. This year we had examples of notices placed in buildings or front gardens directly adjacent to polling stations, cars parked outside stations with party posters and tables set up by parties in roads leading to stations with campaigning activity. For recent elections in Camden, this activity has generated the most problems and complaints on polling day from electors. We understand that the Electoral Commission has attempted to get the main political parties to agree a voluntary code of practice to deal with these issues but without success.

9. Voter understanding will be a key issue in 2012. For May 2010, Camden had pop up stands at the entrance to each polling station with simple information about the two elections and how many votes electors had in each. This was well received by voters. A similar device at the entrance to polling stations had been used in the 2008 GLA elections and we would recommend that this should be repeated in 2012.

Voter Registration

10. Camden sent out a voter confirmation letter in early February to confirm household details and also containing information about the new Parliamentary boundaries. Although this is an expensive exercise, it is seen as essential before any major election in order to ensure that the electoral register is up to date.

11. This was the first General Election with 11 day registration and postal voting on demand. Although additional applications were expected, the total numbers of late registrations exceeded all expectations. There were 4463 registrations processed from the beginning of March to the cut off date of 20th April and 2211 absent votes. For the GLA elections, even with the 30 day time table, the resourcing of dealing with a flood of late applications to each office

will be a major part of election planning . This also illustrates the need to have very clear publicity to encourage electors to register as early as possible before the 11 day deadline, to aim to mitigate the problems of processing large volumes of late applications.

The Count

12. The count processes for the May 2010 elections are of course markedly different from the GLA elections, given that a manual process was followed. It is therefore difficult to comment on specific parts of the count which may have issues for May 2012 as the processes are so different.

13. One point we would make is on the count length and explaining this to the parties and the public. In May 2010 there were a number of factors affecting the length of the count. This was the first Parliamentary election where postal vote statements had to be checked for signature matching, and this meant that the postal votes from polling stations and other late deliveries had to be checked at the start of the count. Secondly, as the Parliamentary election was combined with the local Council election, there was a need to check and verify all the local election boxes before the Parliamentary count stage could commence. In addition, there was a significantly increased turnout from 2005 and also in Camden's case the need to deal with ballot boxes and postal votes from three Brent wards in the Hampstead and Kilburn constituency. These problems were compounded by the use of a new count venue which required significant planning in order to work.

14. We had warned the political parties that the count would be longer than previous Parliamentary election counts, and had given estimates of completion times of 6-7 hours. In the event , one constituency completed after eight hours and the second constituency after ten hours with a recount. These times were not out of line with neighbouring Boroughs. Despite earlier advice to the political parties about the anticipated completion times, there was criticism during and after the count about the length of the process. We would therefore recommend that clear advance warning be given about the length that the 2012 count is likely to take, and the reasons, so that this can be understood before the count and to forestall unreasonable criticism.

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If you require any further information, please contact me on the above number.

Yours Sincerely

Asha Paul
Head of Democratic Services

Dear Camelia

I write further to the letters sent to Chris Duffield, the Town Clerk and Borough Returning Officer for the City of London, and myself, asking for comments on the elections in May this year, and lessons that can be learnt for 2012.

The City of London did not have any local elections on 5th May, and was responsible for only 4 polling stations for the General election. There were no reported problems in terms of electors casting their votes or registration of electors in our area.

We did work closely with Westminster City Council as we shared a Parliamentary constituency, and we are well aware of the problems that the huge number of registration and postal vote applications that were received up to the deadline caused in terms of the time and resources needed to process them in good time. Westminster conducted a thorough canvass in the autumn, and like many London boroughs sent out voter confirmation cards in February / March this year. However despite this, and despite the knowledge that a General Election had to take place this year, huge numbers of people left it to near the deadline to register. This is partly a reflection of the transient nature of London's population, but I think also a reflection of the interest generated as the election approached by the media coverage and particularly by the Leaders debates. The lesson here is that people will register if they are interested in the contest that is taking place and the most effective publicity is from the media themselves rather than through campaigns run by local authorities / the GLA / Electoral Commission. The 2012 elections will have a high profile in the media, and therefore the GLA should concentrate resources on the efficient conduct of the election itself, rather than spending large quantities on registration campaigns.

In terms of the problems experienced with queues at some polling stations, this will clearly be an area that will come under scrutiny, and it is possible that some people will test the system. It is of course possible that legislation may be changed in advance of 2012, but what ever the legislation, it needs to be applied in the same way across London. In 2010 some voters were allowed to vote if they were in the polling station at 10pm, others were not. This will require direction from the GLRO, and guidance and training for the staff involved. I would also suggest that the number of polling staff needs to be looked at closely. Electors will have 3 ballot papers to deal with, and 3 different electoral systems. Processing each elector will take as long as it did at stations that had combined elections in 2010. Constituency and Borough Returning Officers should be encouraged to appoint an additional poll clerk where turnout is expected to be high should resources be available for this.

I hope that my comments are of some use, but if you need any clarification or have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely
Seth Alker

Seth Alker
Electoral Services Manager
City of London

Report into 2010 Elections

1. Service Detailed Report

1.1 Background

On 6 May 2010, the council's Elections team, led by the Returning Officer, oversaw the running of UK Parliamentary elections for three Ealing constituencies, Ealing Central and Acton, Ealing North, and Ealing Southall. Full Borough Council elections across 23 wards (electing 69 councillors) also took place on the same day.

1.2 Independent assessment of the electoral process

Following the May 2010 elections, there has been widespread comment, including in particular by the Association of Electoral Administrators, in support of reform of the electoral process in the UK. For example, current rules allow Parliamentary elections to be called at only seventeen working days' notice. In the May 2010 elections for example, this resulted in Ealing being unable to confirm any orders or bookings for Parliamentary elections resources or materials, or to dismiss the possibility of Local and Parliamentary elections happening on different dates, until 12 April 2010. (ie. only three and half weeks before election day).

New rule changes mean that it is now possible for applications to be added to the register, including postal votes applications, to be submitted only three working days before poll cards are required to be dispatched. This necessarily results in tremendous (and perhaps unacceptable) pressures upon elections staff to process and check very large numbers of registration and postal vote applications within extremely short deadlines. In Ealing, 4,120 postal vote applications were received, with 1,658 being submitted within the last three days before the deadline. In addition, 5,000 registration addition, amendment and deletion forms were received, of which over 2,200 were received three days prior to the deadline. A number of local agents feedback that these statutory deadlines reduced their confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

There ~~were~~ some further criticisms that the different notice and statutory publication deadlines for the Parliamentary and Local elections led to confusion and additional work (for both elections officers and candidates and agents), as similar notices and documents were required to be published or dispatched on different dates.

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1.3 Participation

- More than 138,728 people voted in Ealing. Just over 89% of all votes were cast at 171 polling stations across the borough, and the remaining 14,171 of votes were cast by post.
- The turnout in the 2010 UK Parliamentary general election was 65.95% compared to 64.95% at the 2005 UK Parliamentary Election.
- The 2010 Borough Council Elections turnout was 62.24% compared to 37.69% at the 2006 Borough Council Elections
- 4,615 entries were added to the electoral register between 1st April and 20th April 2010
- 8% of electors (a total of 18,845 people) were registered to vote by post. 78% of postal ballot packs issued (14,478) were completed and returned to the (Acting) Returning Officer prior to the close of poll.
- 1,658 postal vote applications were received in the three days before the deadline.

1.3 Candidates and parties standing for election

- 20 candidates contested the Parliamentary elections. All 20 candidates stood on behalf of registered political parties; no candidate stood as an independent
- 235 candidates contested the Borough Council elections. 231 stood on behalf of registered political parties, 4 candidates stood as independents.

1.4 Integrity of the elections

Although not a legal requirement, the Elections team verified the personal identifiers on 100% of all postal voting statements that were received by the close of poll. In total, 307 postal votes were rejected by the RO, representing 2.12 % of those returned by the close of poll. This meant that the Acting Returning Officer was able to be as confident as reasonably possible that the people who applied for postal votes were the same as the people who actually used them.

1.5 Unprecedented circumstances

The following factors combined to put huge and unprecedented pressures upon the Returning Officer and his team:

- the Parliamentary and Borough Council elections were combined; this is a situation that has not previously occurred in London in the modern era
- a borough election turnout far higher than in recent times
- new rules enabling large numbers of potential voters to apply to be added to the register, only three days before that register had to be finalised and polling cards dispatched

In the month leading up to polling day the 6 full time core elections staff, 1 temporary officer and 1 part time DS officer, had approx 4,800 visits to the reception desk (162 on average a day), received 9,978 phone calls (498 on average a day – assisted by 2 call centre staff) and received 2,730 e-mails (91 on average a day). In addition the office handled 4,120 postal vote applications (1,658 of which were received three days prior to

the deadline) and over 5,000 registration addition, amendment and deletion forms (of which over 2,200 were received three days prior to the deadline). All enquiries, including 100s of messages left on voicemails, and e-mails, were responded to either within 24 hours or (on deadline days) on the same day.

Whilst dealing with high volumes of enquiries from the public, the team also had to manage over 250 candidates and their agents and deal with their nominations. Some 26 different ballot papers had to be designed, processed, and checked under extremely short timescales, 19,000 postal vote packs and over 400,000 poll cards the same; 171 polling stations had to be managed, including the siting and installation of 17 temporary polling stations; equipment deliveries arranged; the recruitment, allocation and training of over 700 staff; the issue and receipt of postal voting papers on differing franchises; organisation of the count; and organisation of agents meetings.

1.6 Planning for the elections

Because of the anticipated complexity of the elections, planning by the Returning Officer began in earnest in July 2009, supported by an Elections Project Board. That board met initially on a monthly basis, latterly weekly, with meetings chaired by the Returning Officer and attended by key senior staff representing Legal Services, IT, Communications, Property Ealing, Emergency Planning, and Democratic Services. The purpose of the meetings was to lead and direct the elections preparations, and to receive progress updates. The Board also provided a forum for discussion on issues of common concern. The board shared and identified good practice, dealt with practical and administrative details, and overall provided the necessary corporate and council wide leadership and support for this major project.

Much of the pre-planning involved two possible scenarios, one for a UK Parliamentary election on a date other than May 6, leaving stand alone Borough Elections, and the other for the two elections to be combined on May 6. The team ensured contractors and suppliers were prepared for either scenario, and artwork for items such as poll cards, postal voting packs, staff training materials, and recruitment correspondence were all prepared in advance to cover all eventualities. Project plans allowed for both scenarios, although in the latter stages there was necessarily some level of assumption that all elections would happen on the same day.

Once the UK Parliamentary elections were called (on the 12th April), the team was well prepared despite the challenging timetable. Within a few days following, the recruitment and selection of election staff was complete, new parliamentary boundary changes implemented, contractor and supplier specifications finalised, and key election documentation and materials prepared. Training of those staff (more than 700 in total) took place during the weeks running up to the elections themselves.

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The Returning Officer decided as early as June 2009 that the count would take place at Black Island Studios, Alliance Road, Acton. This was in anticipation that the Parliamentary and the Borough Council elections would almost certainly be held on the same day. Black Island Studios was the only single venue that the team could identify within the borough that was sufficiently large to allow for the counting of all Local and Parliamentary papers.

1.7 The poll

The hours of poll for the elections were 7am to 10pm.

A total of 171 polling stations were used, manned by over 600 staff. All polling stations, including 17 Temporary Stations (Portacabins) were 100% DDA compliant and completely accessible to all voters. Ealing Council Health and Safety Team inspected all premises to ensure these standards were met.

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Although the elections took place with no polling station incidents of note, there was increased police presence at polling station 'hot-spots' where problems had occurred in the past. Problems included "over-eager" tellers, large crowds of supporters potentially causing intimidation, and gangs of youths. Although one complaint was subsequently made about potential intimidation of voters, this was not substantiated upon investigation.

Nationally, there were reports in the press of large queues forming outside some UK polling stations particularly close to 10pm, and it was reported that some voters in queues had either been allowed to vote after the polls closed at 10pm or turned away. There were no such incidents in Ealing. All voters who arrived to vote before 10pm were able to do so, and all our polling stations closed promptly – in accordance with legal requirements - at 10pm.

Overall feedback from Polling Inspectors was also very good. However there were reports of some Presiding Officers getting confused with paperwork to be completed at the end of poll. This feedback has been taken on board by the Returning Officer and will be addressed at future staff training sessions. Presiding Officers and Polling Inspectors were asked to report on the performance of their staff, in accordance with the following performance standards:

- **Punctuality**
Clear instructions are given to all elections staff on the time they are expected to begin their duties. Late arrival at the polling station, at the count or at a postal vote issuing/opening session is therefore not acceptable.
- **Customer Care**
Electors, candidates and agents have the right to expect the highest quality of customer care when visiting the polling station or attending the count. Elections staff should ensure that they are polite at all times, wear the identity badge provided, respect the confidentiality of the poll and avoid doing anything that would make the public doubt their motives or integrity as an employee of the Returning Officer.
- **Knowledge of Procedures – Polling Station Staff**
Elections staff should ensure that they are familiar with the tasks and responsibilities of their role. Staff must make themselves available to attend a training session and must also have read the handbook at each election. Staff must be able to apply their training on polling day.
- **Efficiency – Count staff**

Staff who count ballot papers should ensure that they perform their duties efficiently and accurately.

- **Supervision of Staff (Presiding Officers and Senior Count Staff only)**
All staff in managerial roles, either in the polling station or at the count, are responsible for the conduct of the staff working at the polling station or in their count team. They are also responsible for ensuring that their staff understand and are following the correct procedure. In addition, staff in managerial roles are responsible for assessing the performance of staff allocated to them – including staff competency and abilities, and for communicating those assessments to Electoral Services.

Overall, 16 Poll Clerks were recommended to work as Presiding Officers in the future (i.e. promotion). 1 Poll Clerk and 1 Presiding Officer are under investigation for poor performance or neglect of duties. 1 member of the Count Supervisor team has been suspended from working at future counts, again for neglect of duties.

1.8 The count

The Returning Officer took the decision, early on the planning process, to divide the counts into two parts in the event of a combined poll. This involved counting the Parliamentary votes on the “evening” of Thursday 6 May 2010 and the Local votes on Friday 7 May afternoon. This decision was taken in order to best ensure that the senior elections team and other resources were not spread too thinly at the various counts. Verification of both counts had to be done at the same time, in order to ensure that votes placed in the wrong ballot boxes could be recovered and transferred to the correct count.

Black Island Studios was booked from 8.30am on Wednesday 5 May to midnight on Saturday 8 May. This allowed an extra day for contingencies.

The Hospitality and Events Team arranged all equipment needs, venue set up, refreshments and security, under strategic direction of the Returning Officer. IT needs were provided by Serco, again under direction of the Returning Officer.

Over 200 staff were employed at the counts. These included reception staff, ballot box assistants, counting assistants and supervisors.

The Thursday evening counts commenced at 10pm with the simultaneous verification of Parliamentary and Borough Council ballot papers. Although originally scheduled to be completed by 2 a.m., the verification process was not in fact completed until around 4am. The main reasons for the 2 hour delay included:

- The high than expected turnout,
- Ealing’s preferred practice of not allowing variances to be accepted at verification stage from the figures shown on ballot paper accounts,
- IT problems, resulting in significant delays in checking postal votes, and
- Unusually high numbers of postal votes handed into polling stations on polling day, or arriving in the post only on polling day. This problem was exacerbated by the IT problems. This resulted in many of the counting tables finishing

their verification count early but then having to wait for postal ballot boxes before their area verification could be completed.

Shortly after 4am on Friday 7 May, the counting of Parliamentary papers commenced. All three constituency results were announced between 7.30 and 8.30am. The table below shows the times of Parliamentary announcements across London and the bar graph shows the total papers processed against electorate and % turnout.

General Election 2010
London declaration times
as posted on Press Association website

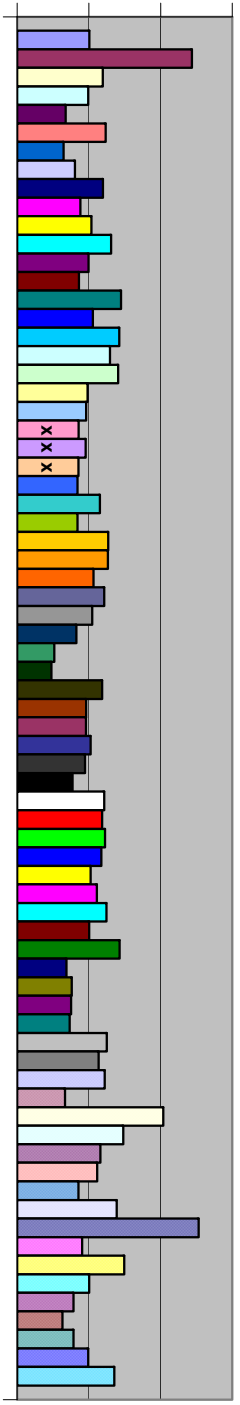
1 Putney	1:17:18
2 Battersea	1:39:36
3 Tooting	1:49:44
4 Carshalton and Wallington	4:12:08
5 Edmonton	4:17:48
6 Kensington	4:28:16
7 Sutton and Cheam	4:38:42
8 Enfield North	4:40:15
9 Cities of London and Westminster	4:43:39
10 Croydon Central	4:44:00
11 Mitcham and Morden	4:49:11
12 Wimbledon	4:50:37
13 Enfield Southgate	4:51:35
14 Bexleyheath and Crayford	4:54:39
15 Islington South and Finsbury	4:58:09
16 Westminster North	5:02:24
17 Islington North	5:10:09
18 Old Bexley and Sidcup	5:17:46
19 Romford	5:19:46
20 Orpington	5:23:55
21 Kingston and Surbiton	5:27:10
22 Hammersmith	5:29:50
23 Croydon South	5:34:59
24 Ilford North	5:37:33
25 Erith and Thamesmead	5:39:19
26 Feltham and Heston	5:40:47
27 Beckenham	5:46:04
28 Chelsea and Fulham	5:46:34
29 Twickenham	5:47:30
30 Croydon North	5:50:49
31 Richmond Park	5:57:41
32 Brentford and Isleworth	6:01:20

33	Camberwell and Peckham	6:03:37
34	Barking	6:10:00
35	Uxbridge and South Ruislip	6:11:52
36	Hornchurch and Upminster	6:18:05
37	Dagenham and Rainham	6:22:09
38	Harrow West	6:27:00
39	Hayes and Harlington	6:27:41
40	Ruislip Northwood and Pinner	6:31:12
41	Hornsey and Wood Green	6:31:30
42	Holborn and St Pancras	6:33:58
43	Bermondsey and Old Southwark	6:36:52
44	Tottenham	6:39:49
45	Chipping Barnet	6:43:27
46	Finchley and Golders Green	6:56:26
47	Harrow East	7:08:06
48	Ilford South	7:08:37
49	Chingford and Woodford Green	7:19:38
50	Eltham	7:25:33
51	Ealing North	7:26:24
52	Dulwich and West Norwood	7:30:03
53	Bromley and Chislehurst	7:37:28
54	Greenwich and Woolwich	7:41:16
55	Ealing Southall	7:43:43
56	Streatham	8:06:24
57	Hampstead and Kilburn	8:23:00
58	Leyton and Wanstead	8:23:24
59	Ealing Central and Acton	8:25:10
60	Vauxhall	8:32:21
61	Lewisham East	8:37:12
62	East Ham	9:08:27
63	West Ham	9:10:40
64	Hendon	9:14:31
65	Lewisham West and Penge	9:16:42
66	Lewisham Deptford	9:28:37
67	Walthamstow	10:36:07
68	Brent North	10:36:35
69	Poplar and Limehouse	11:05:51
70	Brent Central	11:16:29
71	Bethnal Green and Bow	12:38:56
72	Hackney North and Stoke Newington	15:06:33
73	Hackney South and Shoreditch	15:16:36

Papers per hour

15000
10000
5000
0

Constituency



- Barking
- Bexleyheath and Crayford
- Camberwell and Peckham
- Cities of London and Westminster
- Dulwich and West Norwood
- Edmonton
- Feltham and Heston
- Hammersmith
- Hendon
- Ilford South
- Lewisham Deptford
- Old Bexley and Sidcup
- Romford
- Tottenham
- West Ham
- Battersea
- Brent Central
- Carshalton and Wallington
- Croydon Central
- Ealing Central and Acton
- Eltham
- Finchley and Golders Green
- Hampstead and Kilburn
- Holborn and St Pancras
- Islington North
- Lewisham East
- Orpington
- Ruislip Northwood and Pinner
- Twickenham
- Westminster North
- Beckenham
- Brent North
- Chelsea and Fulham
- Croydon North
- Ealing North
- Enfield North
- Greenwich and Woolw
- Harrow East
- Hornchurch and Upmir
- Islington South and Fir
- Lewisham West and P
- Poplar and Limehouse
- Streatham
- Uxbridge and South Ri
- Wimbledon

The delay in verification had a knock-on effect for the timing of the results announcement. However in comparison with London using electorate and percentage return figures Ealing's overall performance reflect better when the amounts of paper having to be counted are taken into consideration, and show Ealing as counting at a roughly average speed for London.

The count of the Borough Council votes commenced at 1pm on Friday 7th May. Declaration of these results began around 7pm, with the last ward being declared at 10.05pm. The local counts were originally scheduled to be completed by 6pm, and feedback from all count participants has shown considerable frustration at the duration of these counts. The reasons for the longer-than-expected duration of the local counts included:

- The higher than expected turnout and amount of papers to be processed;
- The decision at 2pm to change counting sheets from A4 to A3, resulting in a number of journeys back to Ealing Town Hall for photo-copying;
- The slow performance of some count staff;
- Some count administration staff not being able to use Excel spreadsheets;
- Excel spreadsheets formulae not being cell protected;
- Insufficient numbers of laptops;
- An unusually large proportion of split voting by the electorate;
- Valid, but differing, practices used by each of the administration teams, in particular in relation to split votes, which had to be regulated on the night
- Lack of clarity regarding the roles of the Deputy Returning Officers, Count Supervisors, and count administration teams in the final stages of the count reconciliation;
- Over-reliance on the experience and knowledge of a small number of senior count staff, which created bottlenecks in the final stages of the count.

1.9 The count: lessons learnt

The counts were accurate and feedback indicates that the results enjoy the total confidence of all participants. However, all the counts were slow and it is the belief of the Returning Officer that they could be speeded up considerably without compromising the outcome. A comprehensive questionnaire was sent to all participants following the elections, and the Returning Officer and his team will take on board the results of that survey in determining the way forward. Although it is unlikely that there will be combined Borough and Parliamentary elections again in Ealing within the foreseeable future, a number of improvements could be implemented at future elections in any event.

Measures already agreed by the Returning Officer to speed up future counts are:

- Testing for all count staff before an offer of engagement is made
- All count administrative and supervisory staff to be competent in the use of Excel spreadsheets and laptops
- One laptop to be provided to each count supervisor at borough counts
- Fit for purpose spreadsheet formulae to be prepared in advance and used to process count results
- Meetings of the Deputy Returning Officers and count supervisors to take place in advance, to plan in detail the count administration and reconciliation processes;

- Review of, and clearer written procedures for, the roles of senior count administration staff

1.10 Agents Feedback

Surveys were sent out to all twenty-five election agents and candidates who acted as their own agent. To date (16 August 2010) 14 responses have been received (a 56% response rate), answering as follows and including all comments received:

Question 1: If you visited the elections office or met the Returning Officer and his staff, how would you regard your dealings with them?

1	Excellent	9
	Good	5
	Neither good nor poor	0
	Poor	0
	Very Poor	0

Comments

- 'The officials at every level were very courteous and helpful'
- 'It was very pleasant and very helpful explained in detail the process'
- 'Very pleasant and helpful at all times'
- 'Staff were always friendly and helpful'
- 'They were quite helpful'

Question 2: An Elections Agents meeting was held with both Parliamentary and Local Election Agents to discuss the election arrangements. How useful did you find this meeting?

2	Very Useful	5
	Useful	7
	Neither useful nor not useful	0
	Not Useful	0
	Not very useful	0
	Don't Know	2

Comments

- 'Acoustics and sound system in Nelson room always cause problems'
- 'Being a volunteer election agents I felt more confident after the meeting'

Question 3: How would you rate the service provided by the Returning Officer and his staff for the Nomination process?

3	Excellent	9
	Good	5
	Neither good nor poor	0
	Poor	0
	Very Poor	0
	Don't Know	0

Comments

'Ability to have an informal check before the formal submission saved many problems'
 'Could save a lot of paper if full packs of everything were not issued for every candidate, especially when one agent is dealing with several candidates'
 'All staff were friendly and helpful'

Question 4: What was your level of satisfaction with the postal voting process?

4	Very Satisfied	3
	Satisfied	4
	Dissatisfied	3
	Very Dissatisfied	0
	Don't Know	4

Comments

'I feel that the postal votes are open to corruption'
 'Timetable meant that the time between last registration and other stages was insufficient, e.g. availability of postal voters lists, several complaints were received that voters did not get their ballot papers before going away'
 'Sudden influx of new voters and demand for postal votes was a cause for concern'

Question 5: What was your level of satisfaction with the location of polling stations?

5	Very Satisfied	3
	Satisfied	10
	Dissatisfied	0
	Very Dissatisfied	0
	Don't Know	1

Comments

'Some political parties were approaching voters before they went in'
 'Did not have any complaints'

Question 6: Were you satisfied with the conduct of polling staff?

6	Very Satisfied	4
	Satisfied	7
	Dissatisfied	1
	Very Dissatisfied	0
	Don't Know	2

Comments

'Still had problem with tellers getting info because polling staff were taking poll cards'

'Comments from some voters who had not received their postal votes and were refused when trying to vote in person instead'

'Most of the time I was at the church Redeemer polling station on Allenby Road. I had a complaint about the Polling officer named Mrs Panesar that she is biased towards the Labour party. It was pointed out to her. Even though she was openly engaged in a chat with the voters giving impression of persuading them to vote for Labour.'

Question 7: Were you satisfied with the arrangements for the count?

7	Very Satisfied	0
	Satisfied	11
	Dissatisfied	2
	Very Dissatisfied	0
	Don't Know	1

Comments

'Confusion over parking spaces'

'Good venue'

'Horrible venue'

'Not happy with use of volunteers who weren't paid, not happy with the way mixed vote was planned and that provisions weren't in place for high turn out with a high amount of individual LE voting'

'Venue and plan were best that could be arranged to allow for combined general and local elections. The space & arrangements for vetting and for announcement of results were cramped. Absence of office facilities also caused some difficulties (copying)'

'Having a single venue was good. Although there was initial confusion among stewards about access to areas that should have been off limits to non-election staff. Sending a layout of the venue to agents beforehand might have helped'

'It can be improved'

Question 8: Were you satisfied with the conduct and organisation of the Count?

Comments

'Took too long'

'The count took much longer than predicted It took longer than should have been the case'

'Other boroughs were far more organised than Ealing'

'Too many bottlenecks in the process meant that some ward counts were excessively delayed. The absence of the usual check sheets for split votes also slowed counting and increased the likelihood of error'

'Even accepting the stated objective of ensuring an accurate count the process took far too long to complete'

'It was more time consuming than I thought the whole process could have been quicker'

'The time taken was longer than expected. Not exactly sure why. It might have been the way the split votes were counted.'

8	Very Satisfied	2
	Satisfied	5
	Dissatisfied	5
	Very Dissatisfied	1
	Don't Know	1

Question 9: Overall how would you rate the general correspondence and information sent to you by the Returning Officer during the election process?

9	Excellent	10
	Good	3
	Neither good nor poor	1
	Poor	0
	Very Poor	0
	Don't Know	0

Comments

'Excellent'

'OK, I had to collect the counting agents badges and deliver them by hand which was inconvenient. Hammersmith did this all electronically'

'I had no problems'

Question 10: How easy was it for you to contact the Returning Officer and his team?

10	Very Easy	9
	Easy	4
	Neither easy nor difficult	1
	Difficult	0
	Very Difficult	0
	Don't Know	0

Comments

'They returned my calls or emails promptly'
 'Very useful to have mobile numbers for urgent access'
 'Team was helpful'

Question 11: Did you receive prompt responses to emails, messages and questions put to the Returning Officer and his team?

11	Always	9
	Usually	5
	Sometimes	0
	Rarely	0
	Not at all	0

Comments

None

Question 12: Overall, how do you rate the quality of advice, professionalism, and helpfulness of Returning Officer staff?

12	Excellent	7
	Good	7
	Neither good nor poor	0
	Poor	0
	Very Poor	0
	Don't Know	0

Comments

None

Question 13: Please note any other comments on the 2010 election arrangements

'The only negative comments is the length of time of the count – It seemed that there was a lack of flexibility of staff helping out on other tables when they were finished'

'More attention should be given to Labour, Lib-Dem & Conservative representatives who breached rules at some polling stations by approaching voters before they went in'

'I found Ross Jackson very helpful & informative'

'Carrying out local and national elections at the same time devalues both democratic processes. Many voters told me they found it confusing'

'The voting process needs to be brought into the 21st century from the 19th! E.g. all votes to be recorded electronically and internet voting facilitated'

'I was satisfied. I do not see anything else to do'

'More forward planning at the count. Ealing is always lagging behind other boroughs, and the fact that a box was discovered at last minute dispels the fact that it takes longer because it is being done right'

'Counts would probably be more efficient if the three parliamentary constituencies were kept separate, and RO duties delegated accordingly. Better ways of validating and cross-checking total votes cast should be investigated e.g. the check sheets for split votes'

' 1. Try harder to reduce paper usage 2. The delay at the count caused by changing from A4 to A3 size tally sheets seemed to result from responding to comments from one agent in isolation, rather than a result of a joint consultation and without consideration of, or explanation of, the delay this would introduced. 3. Checking and verification seems to create a bottleneck with too few staff involved and too much manual calculation. Use of some quick data entry clerks and an excel spreadsheet would probably speed things along. 4. At previous counts the vote tally sheet (used for recording split votes) matched the layout (& size) of the actual ballot papers which made it quicker for the counters & easier for the observers to verify the marking up of split votes. 5. It might be helpful to issue general announcements at different stages regarding the progress of the count as it is conducted. If some explanation was given on the night about what was happening at any given point by the RO then this might eliminate some of the frustration that follows from not knowing what is supposed to be going on, especially in a big hall when it seem a lot of people were not gainfully employed at different time. The count can be a great rumour mill at times.'

'Parking arrangements could have been improved and better explained. The lack of directions for the parking on Friday afternoon led to having penalty tickets for the B&Q car park. They were refunded for those who paid but created a hassle. In future if there will be different car parking then directions for that site should be issued as well.'

1.11 Customer Survey

A random sample of electors were asked to give their opinions on the conduct of elections and electoral registration in Ealing. The responses to some of the key questions were as follows:

1a If you got your form from Ealing Council, did you find the instructions on the form clear & simple to complete?

V Clear	Clear	Unclear	V Unclear	Don't Know
78	66	2	1	4

13. How far was the polling station from your home by foot?

5-10 mins	10-20 mins	20-30 mins	Not in walking distance
123	30	1	0

14. How accessible did you find your polling station?

V Accessible	Accessible	Difficult to access	V Difficult to access
108	40	2	0

15. Overall, how satisfied were you with the assistance provided by staff at the polling station?

V Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	V Dissatisfied
78	57	12	2	0

23. If you contacted the Ealing Electoral Services team, please rate the quality of service you received?

Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	V Poor
14	32	8	3	1

1.12 Internal Staff Survey

All staff working on the 2010 elections were asked to give their opinions on the preparation and conduct of elections in Ealing. The response was as follows:

A. Polling Station Staff

Polling station staff were asked to rate the following items on a scale of Excellent to Very Poor:

- Handbook & other documentation
- Training
- The polling station and its facilities
- The polling equipment
- The accuracy of the electoral register
- Support from and interaction with the Electoral Services Office
- The payment process

They responded as follows:

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
Excellent	127	151	86	77	118	107	155
Good	184	156	143	191	183	170	148
Okay	20	23	78	51	25	47	18
Poor	1	2	20	9	2	3	4

Very Poor	2	0	1	0	0	0	2
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B. Count Staff

Count staff were asked to rate the following items on a scale of Excellent to Very Poor:

- a) Count instructions & briefing
- b) Facilities at the count
- c) Count equipment
- d) Organisation of the count
- e) Support from and interaction with the Electoral Services office
- f) The payment process

They responded as follows:

	a	b	c	d	e	f
Excellent	74	63	56	60	71	89
Good	88	74	87	72	76	78
Okay	23	41	46	37	35	19
Poor	10	16	5	19	8	4
Very Poor	0	1	1	6	0	5

C. Staff on other duties

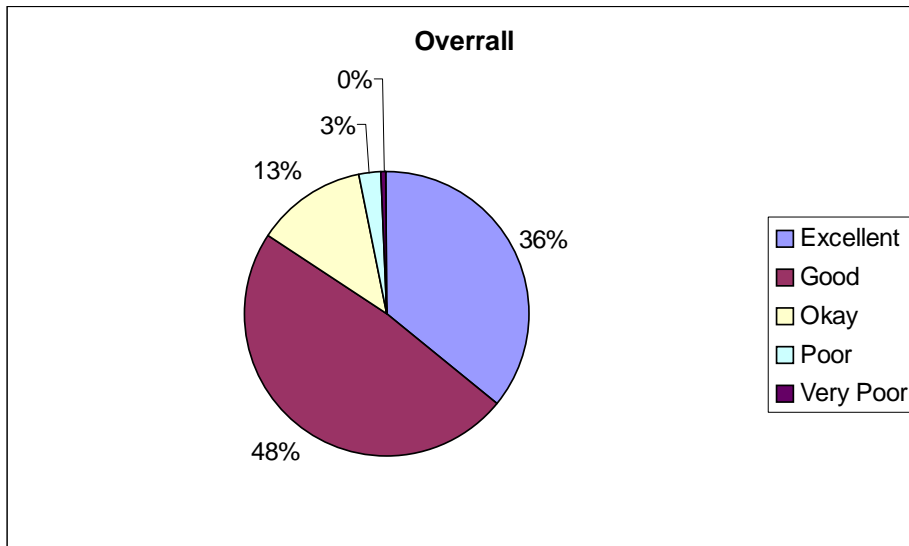
Staff performing other elections duties, such as postal vote opening, were asked to rate the following items on a scale of Excellent to Very Poor:

- a) Any training instructions you received?
- b) Any equipment you used
- c) Support from and interaction with the Electoral Services office
- d) The payment process

	a	b	c	d
Excellent	28	18	33	28
Good	30	36	24	24
Okay	4	4	3	5
Poor	0	0	0	0
Very Poor	0	0	0	0

D. Overall

Overall, the number of Excellent to Very Poor responses was as follows:



2 Legal Implications

These are set out within the body of the report.

3 Financial Implications

A decision was made by the Returning Officer at an early stage in the planning process that the size and complexity of the combined elections were such that a number of measures would have to be put in place that would involve expenditure potentially above and beyond that either recoverable from the Ministry of Justice or allowed for within the regular Elections team budget. The most significant decision in this regard was the decision to hold the elections counts at Black Island Studios, which involved additional expenditure of more than £140,000. Second in terms of size were the exceptional IT costs (almost £70,000), incurred by reason of the systems required to support the new legal requirements for postal voting. The combination of these and other exceptional items of expenditure resulted in the combined elections costing close to £1,000,000. At the time of writing, officers have funded from within Election Services budget, or recovered from the Ministry of Justice.

4. Background papers

None

Finance & Corporate Resources

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Date : 08 October 2010

Dear Ms Thomas,

2010 Elections in London Working Group

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Elections Review Working Group. We hope that the following observations will be of use to the Group in considering how the 2012 GLA elections should be administered.

Background

As has been identified by the Electoral Commission, the elections on Thursday 6 May 2010 caused a number of administrative challenges. However, despite such pressures, feedback has shown that the election was conducted to a high standard in Enfield, and steps have already been taken to make appropriate improvements to systems and procedures to take account of the lessons learnt.

For information, 186 candidates stood for election to the London Borough of Enfield and 28 for election to Parliament with overall turnouts of 64.51% and 66.92% respectively.

One of the key successes of the election was the close liaison between the Returning Officer and the election agents, which commenced six months before the election. The fact that the agents had been involved at a very early stage in the planning of the election meant that any challenges caused by the combination of the polls were kept to an absolute minimum.

Timetables

The combination of the Council and Parliamentary elections presented a number of administrative issues, which necessitated careful planning and coordination. The shortness of the Parliamentary election timetable (17 working days from the dissolution of Parliament to polling day) was a particular challenge for both candidates and administrators as was the closeness of the electoral registration deadline to polling day (11 working days).

Tuesday 20 April 2010 was a particular pinch point in that the deadlines for the receipt of nominations as Parliamentary candidates (4:00pm), for new applications to vote by post (5:00pm), for applications for amendments to existing absent votes (5:00pm) and for applications to register to vote (midnight) all fell on that day. This put pressure on the Electoral Services Team.

Confirmations of voter registration were delivered to every household in January 2010, which had the effect of limiting the numbers of “late” registrations received in the immediate run up to the elections. In addition, the Council ran a high profile advertising campaign in the months before the election to encourage registration.

However, despite this, in excess of 3,000 additional applications were received and processed by the Electoral Services Team immediately prior to the registration deadline together with in excess of 1,000 duplicate registration applications.

Polling stations

Although busy throughout polling day, polling stations coped well with the complexity of the ballot and there were no reported incidents of queuing or delays in issuing ballot papers as apparently occurred elsewhere in the UK. Polling station staff were specifically trained to manage the implications of the different franchises and the challenges faced in explaining the process to voters, e.g. that they had up to three votes on the local ballot paper but only one on the Parliamentary.

However, had there been an influx of electors late in the day, the staff were under strict instructions to only allow those who had been issued with their ballot papers by the 10:00pm deadline to vote, as required by law. That will continue to be the instruction up to and until the legislation is changed.

Concern was expressed by some candidates and electors as to the conduct of tellers and party supporters at certain polling stations, and the police were required to attend to deal with specific issues. Although discussed with election agents prior to polling day, there is clearly a need to re-visit this issue in the run up to the next elections in order to ensure that the conduct of tellers and party supporters is acceptable.

Postal voting

25,252 postal ballot papers were issued at the Council elections and 23,951 at the Parliamentary. 18,751 postal votes were counted at the Council elections, 18,265 at the Parliamentary.

There were no apparent major issues with the performance of Royal Mail at these elections.

The count

The counting of the votes was, for the first time, undertaken at the Lee Valley Athletics Centre. The space available enabled both the Parliamentary and Council counts to be undertaken simultaneously.

The combination of the counts caused administrative challenges, not least the need to employ in excess of 400 staff to work through the early hours. However, there were significant advantages to undertaking the process in one venue and at one session, not least in respect of ensuring the security of the ballot papers.

According to the Press Association, Edmonton was the fifth result to be announced in London, Enfield North the eighth and Enfield Southgate the fourteenth. Enfield was the first London Borough to complete its local election counts.

The count was interrupted by a fire alarm, which was caused by an automatic detector being set off in the kitchen area. Although allowed for in the count contingency plan, and although there was never any danger to the integrity of the counting process, it was clear that key staff needed to be made more aware of the procedures necessary to maintain a transparently secure environment.

Following the election, the election agents were invited to comment on the administration of the count. They identified that the distance between the adjudication and declaration areas caused them some difficulty and that count attendees would have welcomed improved refreshment facilities.

However, it was generally agreed that the venue was first class, that the combination of the counts was appropriate and managed well and that the grass skirt method of counting the Council election results was an improvement on the tally sheet method previously employed.

Lessons for the GLA

1. Ensure that any communication strategy clearly addresses the complexities of the process in order to make it clear to the electorate what will be expected of them when voting, thus alleviating potential delays at polling stations.
2. Ensure that active steps are taken to make candidates and agents aware of their responsibilities in respect of any involvement in the handling of registration and postal voting applications (so as to ensure that they are received by Electoral Registration Officers in a timely and correct fashion) and in communicating how the voting process works to the electorate (to avoid misinformation and confusion).
3. Ensure that a comprehensive training strategy, particularly for polling station staff, is designed and resources provided to deliver quality training.

4. Allocate sufficient resources to allow Returning Officers to staff their polling stations correctly, and to have the ballot papers counted as quickly and efficiently as possible.
5. Encourage Returning Officers to test their contingency arrangements in advance of the election.
6. Encourage the Greater London Returning Officer to continue to work closely with Constituency and Borough Returning Officers, London Chief Executives and the London Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators in planning for the 2012 elections, particularly in respect of the management and delivery of the counts.

Conclusion

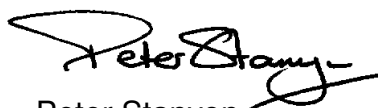
The elections in May 2010 were some of the most complex ever run in the UK, and despite certain reports to the contrary, were generally delivered to a very high standard across London.

The Elections Review Working Group will no doubt consider the Electoral Commission's "Report on the administration of the 2010 UK general election" and "Review of problems at polling stations at the close of poll on 6 May 2010".

However, we would also urge the Working Group to read the Association of Electoral Administrators' post election report "Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK" alongside the Electoral Commission's reports, as it provides the insight of electoral administrators into the issues faced in May.

I trust that the Working Group will find the content of this response useful. Should you or they wish to discuss any of the issues raised further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Stanyon
Head of Electoral and Democratic Services

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22 OCT 2010
SECRETARIAT

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Mark Roberts
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21 October 2010

Dear Mr Roberts

2010 Elections in London Working Group

I am responding to your letters of 24th September 2010 addressed both to myself and the Interim Head of Electoral and Member Services. I welcome the opportunity to advise the GLA's Working Group of the steps I have taken since the elections on 6th May to address the issues that arose in Hackney and in other authorities both within London and in other parts of the country.

Rather than attending a meeting at your offices, I hope the information provided below will be of assistance to you.

Immediately after the elections I conducted an investigation into the issue of electors being unable to vote in order to inform the Electoral Commission's interim report published on 19th May. However, I concluded that a more detailed review specific to Hackney was needed both to identify issues that had occurred and to assist and inform planning for future elections. I therefore commissioned an independent report which was prepared by the lead UK elections consultant at SOLACE Enterprises. His conclusions have informed the project plan which was prepared and is now in the process of being implemented.

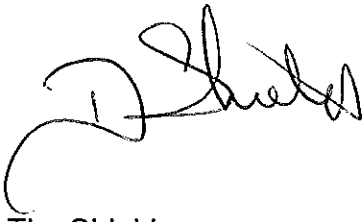
The matters that the Working Group is particularly interested in have in Hackney been dealt with in some detail in a public forum by the Governance & Resources Scrutiny Commission. The Commission considered the matter on 14th June, 12th July and 6th September including hearing evidence from key stakeholders. I gave evidence on 14th June, and on 12th July the Regional Director for the Electoral Commission gave their perspective. On 6th September the Commission heard from candidates and agents and considered the post election review project plan. It will consider a final report on 9th November. I have *attached* the relevant

minutes of these meetings which cover in some detail the Working Group's key issues. They can also be found at:

<http://mginternet.hackney.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=120&Year=2010>

As regards the 2012 GLA elections implementation of Hackney's post election review project plan should ensure that all the issues relating to the conduct of the poll have been addressed. These issues have been discussed in detail and in public ensuring an open, transparent and accountable approach. I hope that this will be of assistance to the working group in considering the matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Shields', written in a cursive style.

Tim Shields
Chief Executive
London Borough of Hackney



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Designation Election Services
Manager

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Date: 02 November 2010

Mr M. Roberts
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Dear Mark,

2010 Elections in London Working Group

In response to your letter of the 24 September fortunately we had no major issues here in Havering however I would make the following points regarding lessons learned from the organisation and running of the combined Parliamentary/Local elections in May. I must point out however that these are my own views as an Electoral Administrator with 28 years experience and are not necessarily shared by other Officers and Members of Havering Council.

Funding

As I understand it you are intending moving to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) now the Cabinet Office (CO) style of funding i.e. you intend giving a budget to each Authority/Constituency within which costs are expected to be contained.

Whilst I am sure every electoral administrator will make every endeavour to keep within the budget (there was an under-spend at the Euro elections) I feel strongly that national or GLA elections should not be subsidised by Local Government. It has its own budget pressures and the full properly incurred costs of running these elections should be reimbursed.

I am aware that you intend allowing for two poll clerks at each polling station. As there are three ballot papers and the necessity to try to ensure ballot papers are placed in the ballot box unfolded this is the minimum number of poll clerks. It would be preferable if a third was allowable at larger multiple polling stations perhaps on a part-time basis during the busy late afternoon and evening. I made my Parliamentary budget go further by appointing part time poll clerks from 3pm to 10pm and it worked very well.

'The Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers' Charges) Order 2010 (SI 2010 No 830)' was not made until the 15 March.

This was far too late and goes against the advice that came out of the 'Gould report' following the Scottish elections that no legislative changes should be made affecting the election in the preceding 6 months.

We really need to know what budget has been allocated to us much earlier to allow better planning.

.....continued over

Eleven day registration deadline

I feel the Electoral Commission advertising campaign concentrated too much on the deadline registration date of 20 April, the main thrust of their campaign should have been much earlier. The eleven day registration deadline does not allow us enough time to carry out adequate integrity checks. Indeed there are still allegations being made that certain M.P.s were elected because of fraudulent registrations.

Please concentrate any advertising especially links to social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter etc in March, so that we are not swamped by last minute registrations as we were at the PE/Local elections.

We and most Electoral offices had real difficulties keeping up with the avalanche of late registrations and postal vote applications, indeed I am aware that many Managers and some of their staff stayed overnight in their offices virtually the whole of that last week.

GLA elections 2008

I would take this opportunity to mention some lessons we can learn from the 2008 GLA count. At Excel the food provided for staff was totally inadequate, our staff had made an early start and met the coach at Havering Town Hall to travel to Excel, they were promised breakfast which disappointingly turned out to be coffee and pastries and there was not sufficient to go around. Indeed when I arrived the coffee had already run out. Staff require a more substantial breakfast and lunch both preferably hot. The food provided in the afternoon/evening could be sandwiches/snacks as if the count finishes early staff can take them away to eat.

Staff adjudicating ballot papers could not reject them but passed them to the Returning Officer queue, where Deputy Returning Officers either allowed or rejected or skipped them.

It would be preferable if the DRO's could reject or allow the votes but where the decision is more difficult pass to a queue for Returning Officer decision. This could be called up when the Returning Officer is ready to make an initial decision and if necessary go through them again in conjunction with Candidates/Agents. This would more closely follow the procedure at a manual Count.

Yours sincerely



Sandra Cottle
Election Services Manager

RECEIVED
12/10/10
SECRETARIAT

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11 October 2010

Dear Ms Thomas,

Re: 2010 Elections in London Working Group

Thank you for your invitation to give some feedback on our experiences at the May 2010 elections. I hope that the planning for the 2012 elections will benefit from the lessons learned from this year.

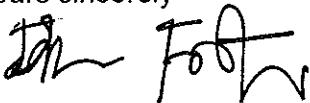
I have set out my comments based on the questions in your letter.

- **Reflections on the day:** Overall, polling day on 6 May 2010 went well. We did have an issue with some voters unfortunately not being able to vote after 10pm which I shall cover below. That issue aside the day was busy but there were no particular problems. The Polling Station Inspectors and Presiding Officers were confident in what they were doing and coped very well with the combined poll and different franchises in operation.
- **Particular issues:** At St. John's Highbury Vale School in Highbury West Ward/Islington North Constituency we had a problem with queues building up very late in the day which regrettably led to an estimated 36 potential electors being unable to cast their vote. Whilst the allocation of electors was well within The Electoral Commission's 2005 recommendations, that particular station experienced a late surge which did result in some people not being able to vote. There were two polling clerks and a presiding officer appointed at each of the stations in the polling place. Unfortunately we were not alerted to the seriousness of the problem until 9.45pm when it was too late for any contingencies to be enacted. We did however ensure that the law was adhered to and no ballot papers were issued after 10pm. The council wrote to the people effected by this issue.
- **Voter Registration:** The elections this year were the first opportunity for the 11 day registration deadline to be tested at a general election. We had a record number of people registering in the last month before the election, adding 5,542 electors to our register. Whilst this is an excellent way of ensuring as many people are registered as possible there are implications for resources in the electoral services office. Administrators are clearly very busy with organising the election at this stage in the process and some of the usual checks on integrity are particularly stretched at this point.
- **Count:** The Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2009 created the requirement for

Returning Officers to take reasonable steps to begin counting votes within four hours of the close of a poll at the parliamentary election. With the combination of polls this meant all ballot papers from both elections had to be verified first. This was a challenge but we did commence the counting of votes before 2am. The counts proceeded well and without incident of note. It should be considered in the planning of 2012 elections how the verification and counts of other ballots on the same day would be addressed if the GLA ballot papers are to be counted electronically.

- It is also worth pointing out that dealing with the increasing number of postal voters is becoming an election within an election and is very resource intensive. Therefore, time must be built into the system to allow final checking of postal votes prior to the commencement of the count.
- Lessons for 2012 GLA elections: You will be aware that the funding regime in place on 6 May 2010 assumed only 1.8 poll clerks per polling station and I am therefore very pleased to hear that the Greater London Returning Officer is currently considering funding on the basis of two polling clerks per station for the 2012 elections.
- I would suggest that with the probability of more elections being combined over the next few years particularly with the likely introduction of new elections (for Council Tax rises, elected Mayor referendums, an elected House of Lords, a possible general election prior to 2015, elected Police Commissioners, etc) the impact on polling stations should not be underestimated. There are serious issues of voter education and awareness to be addressed. If they are not we could have a scenario where queuing becomes the norm whilst polling staff explain the different elections and voting systems in operation to voters. As a minimum the GLA should ensure there is pictorial guidance in each polling station, explaining the different ballot papers and voting systems being used.
- To help in the proper planning of elections a commitment to the principle in the Gould Report into the elections in Scotland in 2007 that no new legislation should be introduced within six months of an election should be supported.
- If the elections in 2012 are combined with others under a different franchise the impact on register checking at polling stations and voter confusion generally should feature prominently in any risk register.

Yours sincerely



John Foster CBE
Chief Executive

Dear Camelia

In response to Mark Roberts' letter of 24 September, here are some thoughts in relation to the various topics on which you have requested views.

Election Day

Overall, here in Kingston, the Election Day went fairly well. It was obviously a particularly busy day but we didn't experience any issues or problems out of the ordinary.

Casting of Votes

No particular problems. We certainly didn't experience the difficulties that occurred elsewhere with queues at polling stations late in the day.

Voter Registration

The minus eleven day deadline for rolling registration and postal voting is clearly a critical day and Authorities need to ensure that they have adequate resources available to deal with both those processes. Here in Kingston, staff were working well into the early hours of the morning ensuring that all rolling registration applications and postal vote applications were dealt with. Having a specific time deadline (eg. 6:00 pm) might also be helpful.

Some problems did arise from information provided by the Electoral Commission which resulted in British Citizens living overseas completing the wrong form to register as an Overseas Elector. In many cases, because of the time factor, it wasn't possible to get the correct forms completed and returned in time which, inevitably, led to a number of people not being able to vote on the day.

Count

The last minute change to legislation requiring Returning Officers to commence the Count within four hours of the close of poll was unhelpful and, clearly, closed down options for individual Returning Officers. In Kingston we decided to do the verification process for both the Parliamentary and Local Elections on the day and then move straight into the Parliamentary Count, returning on the Friday afternoon to do the Local Election Count. This posed some logistical issues in terms of overnight security etc. but did at least mean that key staff got some sleep between the two processes and were not faced with, potentially, a 24 hour plus working day.

All the work required to verify signatures and dates of birth of postal voters who return their postal votes on polling day did result in delays in the Count process. For logistical reasons we had to undertake that postal vote verification process at a different venue to where the Count was held which

built in a further delay. The issue was also compounded by having a split Parliamentary Constituency with the neighbouring borough of Richmond.

Lessons for the 2010 GLA Elections

The experience of the 2010 combined Election in terms of staffing numbers in polling stations is helpful and we will need to replicate that staffing level in 2012 when, whilst there hopefully won't be a combined Election to contend with, there will still be three ballot papers.

Early agreement/publication of fees and charges for the Election, together with the avoidance of any last minute changes in the rules, would be highly desirable.

Hopefully the foregoing is helpful. Please let me know if you need anything further.

Andrew Bessant.

Andrew Bessant
Returning Officer/Acting Returning Officer
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames



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2 November 2010

Your ref: SD7067

Dear Ms Thomas

2010 Elections in London Working Group

As requested in Mark Robert's letter of the 24 April 2010 I am providing information about our experience during the elections on the 6 May 2010 on behalf of the Barry Quirk, the Returning Officer for the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL).

LBL administered a parliamentary election covering three parliamentary constituencies; local government elections , covering 18 multi-member wards of three seats each; and a mayoral election. This was the first such combination of elections to be held within LBL with only three other local authorities across the country administering such an election.

This represented a huge logistical exercise with planning commencing during the annual canvass in 2009. Printing contracts, count venue, staffing availability and polling station bookings were all completed before Christmas 2009. Planning was complicated by the fact that the date of the parliamentary election was uncertain which lead to issues about whether poll cards and postal votes should be issued on a combined basis.

This was also the first parliamentary election at which all the legislative changes introduced by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 were used.

A full report, "Review of the Parliamentary, Mayoral and Local election in May 2010", was compiled by Officers of LBL independent of the team involved in the election. This was presented to our Elections Committee on the 18 October. A copy of the report is attached.

Whilst full details are given in the report it is worth highlighting the key learning points that I believe are relevant to the GLA elections to be held in 2012.

Reflections on How the election day went

Given the background and complexity of the elections coupled with the very high turnout election day was extremely busy, however one of the key observations was that the core elections team , who had been working 60 /70 hour weeks ahead of election day, were still under considerable pressure as a result of

- (a) an unprecedented number of phone calls even though we had anticipated this by the provision of a dedicated call centre
- (b) exception processing on the day with the reissues of postal votes in respect of lost and spoilt papers and emergency proxy voters

In the main the experience of stakeholders on the day was mainly a good one even if polling stations were busy. Staff at polling stations were under some pressure as voters had to deal with three different ballot papers using three different voting methodologies. This undoubtedly caused voter confusion and led to slower throughput in the polling stations. The issue of different numbering for different ballot papers and recording them on corresponding number lists also slowed the process down. This had been anticipated by us as we staffed all but six of our polling stations with a PO and three poll clerks. We only had six polling stations with an electorate footfall of over 2000 and none over the guidance limits set by the Electoral Commission.

The key learning points for us are that:

- 1) Voter education on the three types of voting methodology is critical as evidenced by the number of spoilt Mayoral ballot papers
- 2) We should review the appointment of polling staff to ensure that they have the necessary aptitude. We also believe that there should be wider council engagement in elections over the critical periods.

Any issues that may have occurred with ensuring that all who wanted to cast their vote were able to do so

We had detailed planning meetings with the police and developed a contingency plan with them as we anticipated that we could have queues at polling stations at close of poll. This did happen at one polling station where the contingency plan was put into operation whereby all electors in the queue were brought into the polling station by 10pm and issued with their ballot papers.

Any issues that may have occurred with voter registration

The confluence of events leading up to the so called "Super Tuesday" on April 20 with cut off of registration, postal votes and parliamentary nominations again put considerable pressure on the core elections team. In the 5 working days before April 20 LBL received 658 postal vote applications, 3193 voter registrations, 1074 amendments and processed 299 deletions. All these were dealt with by the cut off date. It should be noted that whilst cut off for postal votes is 5pm on the 20 April, cut off for registrations is midnight.

Our concern, given the volumes being processed, was with maintenance of integrity in this pressurised period. No allegations of fraud or malpractice have been received subsequently.

The registration issue was driven by interest in the parliamentary election and should be noted should the GLA election ever be combined with national elections.

Any issues that may have occurred with the count

The count venue was Sedgehill school, the biggest single venue in the borough. However to accommodate all those legally entitled to be at the verification, over 1000 counting agents, candidates and their guests, the maximum number of counters we could accommodate was 150. Given the number of ballot papers and verifications we had always made it clear that we would not finish verification until after 2a.m.. However in the light of the

late inclusion of a clause in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act (CRAG) requiring Returning Officers to take reasonable steps to finish verification and begin the count before 02.00hrs, a further review of the process was undertaken.

Changing arrangements at this late stage was regarded as unfeasible and expensive. Planning for the count commenced back in November with the police being heavily involved as well as the provision of uninterruptable power supplies as part of our contingency plan. Splitting the count would have involved the use of other schools at very short notice and it was not practicable to split the core elections team. Our primary focus was to obtain an accurate result that would withstand scrutiny and key to this was the integrity of the verification process.

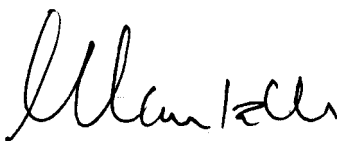
Any lessons you believe the GLA should learn in time for the 2012 elections

The GLA count commences the following day and the plan is to hold it at Excel. Once the ballot boxes are received locally, ballot paper accounts need to be agreed, unused ballot papers checked and postal votes handed in at polling stations processed. It is unlikely that ballot boxes will leave LBL much before Midnight. Access to Excel at between 01.00 and 02.00 in the early hours of Friday morning was an issue at the last GLA election. Even if the core team get away in time to follow the boxes up they will not be in situ at a local hotel much before 2a.m at the very earliest. A contingency also needs to be in place to cover closure of the Blackwall Tunnel.

Whilst the following issues have been mentioned before, it is worth recording them for review ahead of the 2012 GLA elections based on our experience of the 2008 elections.

- 1) Ballot paper allocations – the decision to produce only 75% of required ballot papers was diluted by the need to provide 100% + for postal votes. This led to a dilution of available ballot papers to 68%. With splits, there was some nervousness about the adequacy of these arrangements.
- 2) The ineffectiveness of the seals on the ballot boxes has been well documented
- 3) The quality of notices and materials supplied in the sundries boxes was well below our normal standards and calls into question the practice of going with the cheapest provider on a central procurement basis.
- 4) As mentioned above, voter education as to completion of the three types of ballot paper is critical
- 5) More direct linkage between electoral management systems and the GLA's appointed ballot paper and electronic counting supplier (IntElect) to prevent manual keying and rekeying of data.
- 6) Server capacity at the count did not seem to be adequate and failure to explain the zero balance operation in conjunction with clearance of anomalies caused unnecessary delay

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Constable
Electoral Services Manager

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	Review of the Parliamentary, Mayoral and Local election in May 2010	
Key Decision	No	Item No. 6
Ward	All	
Contributors	Director of Programme Management	
Class	Part 1	Date: 18 October 2010

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with a review of the administration of the Parliamentary, Local Government and Mayoral elections, held on 6 May 2010 within the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to note the report, the learning points set out in this document and the conclusions in paragraph 15.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Elections Committee received a report on 28 January 2010 (appendix A) setting out the preparations for the May 2010 elections. This report reviews the implementation of those preparations and notes the lessons learnt.
- 3.2 On 6 May 2010, LBL administered a Parliamentary, Local Government and Mayoral election. This was the first such combination of elections to be held within Lewisham and only three other local authorities within the country administered such a combination (appendix B).
- 3.3 The turnout across all elections improved, with the Parliamentary election representing a 13.5 per cent increase from 2005.¹
- 3.4 Owing to different franchises, there was a total electorate of 202,006 for the Parliamentary election and 184,255 potential voters in the Mayoral and Local Government elections. Out of these, a total of 128,704 ballots were issued and received in the Parliamentary election, 111,832 in the Mayoral and 110,182 in the Local Government election. This resulted in a total of 350,718 ballot papers that needed to be verified and counted.

¹ This is based upon Lewisham electors only and excludes new voters from Bromley as part of the Lewisham West and Penge constituency.

- 3.5 A total of 269 candidates stood across all three elections, with 19 standing in the Parliamentary election, 7 in the Mayoral and 243 in the Local Government.

Election	Electorate	Ballots Issued	Valid Ballots (Spoilt Ballots)	Turnout (%)
Parliamentary	202,006	128,704	127,967 (735)	63.7
Mayoral	184,255	111,832	107,569 (4,263)	60.7
Local Government	184,255	110,182	109,386 (796)	59.8

4. Legislative Framework

4.1 The legislative framework surrounding the conduct of the elections in May is complex and varied. The primary acts that set out the regulations governing national and local elections are the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 and the RPA 2000. These have subsequently been amended by further statutes

4.2 The majority of regulations are set out in the RPAs but additional legislation governs other aspects of the Mayoral, Local and Parliamentary elections. These include various regulations relating to the count methodology and the statutory timetables for the elections. The Association of Electoral Administrators noted that:

“Over 25 separate pieces of primary and secondary legislation (some of which have been amended on several occasions) governed the administration of the elections that took place across the UK in May 2010.”²

4.3 In undertaking the elections, Lewisham complied fully with all statutory requirements. This included the implementation of new regulations not previously applied at a Parliamentary election, including those set out in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA), the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 and the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 that was given royal assent in April 2010.

4.4. While Lewisham complied with all regulations, the introduction of new legislation placed additional burdens upon staff to ensure compliance without a relative increase in additional resources from central government. The introduction of exception processes such as the provision of poll cards to anonymous electors, emergency proxy voting and reissue of lost or spoilt postal votes all applied pressure on the limited resources of the trained Electoral Services team.

Learning Point:

The Council should lobby central government to simplify and streamline the legislative framework surrounding elections administration

² Association of Electoral Administrators., Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK. 2010. p. 11

5. Timetables

- 5.1 On April 6 2010 the Prime Minister announced that the UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) would be held on May 6. This initiated a tight timeframe within which Lewisham was required to administer three elections. The table below sets out the statutory timetable for the 2010 elections.

Election Timetable

Activity	Parliamentary	Local & Mayoral Elections
Notice of Election	14 April	29 March
Nominations Open	15 April	30 March
Close of Nominations	20 April	8 April
Nominations Published	20 April	12 April
Deadline to register to vote at election	20 April	20 April
Deadline to make new applications for postal votes	20 April (17:00)	20 April (17:00)
Deadline for appointing counting agents and polling agents	4 May	28 April
Deadline for the reissue of lost or undelivered postal votes	6 May (17:00)	6 May (17:00)
Polling Day	6 May (07:00-22:00)	6 May (07:00-22:00)
Verification and Count	6 May (22:00 onward)	6 May (22:00 onward)

- 5.2 Lewisham conducted the election within this statutory timetable. However, certain aspects of the timeframe placed increased pressure on the Electoral Services Team.
- 5.3 **11 Day Registration Deadline**
- 5.4 Under the EAA the voting registration deadline was extended from 2 months to 11 days prior to an election. This resulted in the deadlines for voter registration, postal vote applications, the publication of polling stations' locations, the publication of the notice of poll and the close of Parliamentary nominations and their publication falling on 20 April.
- 5.5 In the five working days prior to April 20, Lewisham received a total of 658 postal vote applications, 3193 voter registrations, 1074 register amendments and 299 register deletions.
- 5.6 Once the deadline passed, voter registrations received were then processed before the second run of poll cards and postal vote data were sent to the printers. This happened while the ballot paper proofs were being checked. This combination of activity within a short period of time put pressure on the resources of the Electoral Services Team. The statutory notices, such as the statement of person nominated, notice of poll and situation of polling stations

were all prepared beforehand, but there was still a need for them to be published.

5.7 In the case of postal votes the 11 day registration deadline put particular pressure on ensuring the quick registration of late applicants and the issue of their ballots in order to provide the greatest possible time for its return. This was exacerbated in the case of those Lewisham electors abroad.

5.8 ***Poll Card Distribution***

5.9 It is a statutory requirement that polling cards are distributed to all Lewisham electors as soon as practicable after publication of the Notice of Election.

5.10 Lewisham originally planned to distribute combined Parliamentary, Local and Mayoral poll cards, in order to reduce mailings and potential voter confusion. However, at the time of the Notice of Election for the Local and Mayoral election, the UKPGE had not yet been called. In the light of national guidance³ and statutory requirements, Lewisham decided to issue two sets of poll cards, rather than a combined issue.

5.11 ***Counting Agent Deadline***

5.12 The deadline for the submission of counting agents to oversee the count was the 4 May 2010. The number of people legally entitled to be at the verification and count was in excess of 1000. The requirement to add additional agents two working days prior to the count meant there was minimal time in which to distribute any count tickets and ensure a secure count.

5.13 ***Deadline for the re-issue of lost or undelivered Postal Votes***

5.14 Until 17:00 on polling day there was a requirement to re-issue a replacement postal ballot in the case of loss or non-delivery. This presented a challenge to the Electoral Services Team and polling staff owing to the resources needed to re-issue ballots and the lack of clarity regarding the definition of 'lost' or 'undelivered' within the legislation.

5.15 ***Pressures on Printing***

5.16 The requirement of Returning Officers to receive, proof, print and distribute mayoral booklets ahead of postal votes being sent out put increased pressure on the printers. Due to the volume of orders from multiple authorities, the Electoral Services Team needed to reserve a printing position in November. If the proofs for any purpose required amending, the job in question would need to be rescheduled, placing it at the end of the queue.

5.17 ***Nominations Process***

5.18 From the 29 March (publication of the Notice of Election) to the 8 April (Close of Nominations) the Electoral Services Team handled 7 Mayoral and 243

³ Issues for consideration in connection with a potential combined UK Parliamentary general and local government election in England on 6 May 2010.
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0017/87110/Issues-paper-on-combined-FINAL.pdf

Council nominations. In the Parliamentary process, 19 nominations were received between the Notice of Election on the 13 April to the Close of Nominations on the 20 April. The Close of Nominations also coincided with the voter registration cut off on the 20 April putting additional pressure on the Electoral Services Team.

Candidate Nominations

Election	Nominations Received
Parliamentary	19
Mayoral	7
Local Government	243

6. Electoral Integrity

6.1 At the centre of any election is confidence in its integrity and security. In ensuring that confidence remains in the administration of elections locally, Lewisham have reviewed previous elections in the Borough. Whether they be Parliamentary, European, GLA or Mayor or Local Government elections none have demonstrated any concern about systematic fraud or malpractice. Despite this Lewisham has continued to strengthen its electoral integrity arrangements.

6.2 *Police*

6.3 A key part of maintaining security and integrity is the Borough's relationship with the Metropolitan Police in Lewisham. In preparation for the election extensive negotiations had taken place with the single point of contact (SPOC) from the police and the Borough Commander in order to identify security and fraud risks.

6.4 A comprehensive integrity plan and risk assessment was undertaken that set out potential risks: the owner, the likelihood and impact of the risk, the action to mitigate or detect the risk and the action to be taken in the event of its occurrence.

6.5 While many of the risks did not materialise, planning worked to mitigate potential difficulties where they could have arisen. A key issue for the election team and the police was the security to be provided at the close of poll, where the increase in voters meant a greater likelihood of disorder. In preparation the police agreed to provide extra coverage at this time and where a queue had built up at one station they provided timely support to the PO.

6.6 *Agents and Candidates*

6.7 In order to ensure all Agents and Candidates were aware of the measures and procedures in place to ensure the election's integrity, Electoral Commission Guidance covering areas such as the secrecy of the ballot and the practice for dealing with postal votes and tellers was issued to all Candidates and Agents as part of the nominations process.

6.8 Further emphasis was placed on the integrity of the election in formal meetings with Agents and Candidates and the Electoral Commission A3 guidance sheets in respect of tellers, were placed outside polling stations.

6.9 **Registers**

6.10 A critical element to the integrity of an election is the accuracy of the registers. As the process of registration is through self-declaration, with EROs possessing little powers of investigation, those checks and balances that exist are important to prevent and detect fraud.

6.11 A critical check and instrument by which an accurate register is maintained is the annual canvass. In addition to the canvass, Lewisham acted in accordance with the Electoral Commission best practice guidance for major elections in sending out confirmation letters to all households in February confirming who is registered, and by what method they have chosen to vote i.e. at the polling station, by post or by proxy.

6.12 **Cross Boundary Work**

6.13 Three wards from the London Borough of Bromley were included as part of the newly formed Lewisham West and Penge constituency. The preparatory work carried out between Bromley and Lewisham and the continued liaison throughout the period ensured that on election day no major issues arose as a result of the constituency boundaries crossing the two authorities.

7. **Call Centre**

7.1 In the run up to the election, Lewisham administered a call centre to handle questions on the election process from members of the public. While there was no process by which to monitor the volume of calls it was reported from staff that the call centre was well utilised throughout the period.

7.2 On election day the call centre function was transferred to the Electoral Services Team. The volume of calls that the team received on polling day put additional pressure on their normal election day administrative roles.

Learning Point:

Continue the operation of the call centre for future elections, extending it to include election day. Mechanisms should also be introduced to monitor and record calls.

8. **Postal Voting Arrangements**

8.1 A total of 23,526 electors were issued a postal vote for the May 2010 elections. This included 3164 postal voters in Bromley and the 658 who registered in the five working days leading up to the application deadline. In Lewisham the number of overall postal voters in 2010 represented a 23.5 per cent increase from 2009⁴ and required a concentrated set of resources to

⁴ based upon 17,621 electors registered for a postal vote on 1 Dec 2009.

distribute, replace, open and verify postal votes. The administration of this work has led to the process becoming a distinct project within itself.

8.2

	Parliamentary	Local	Mayoral
Postal Votes Issued	23526	21766	21766
Postal Votes Received	16810	17203	17203

8.3 ***Postal Vote Issuing***

8.4 In planning for the postal vote issue, Lewisham decided to implement a combined issue of ballot papers into one mailing. This was in order to minimise the cost of multiple distributions, avoid any voter confusion from two sets of mailing and reduce the chances of a mismatch between ballot paper numbers and electors details.

8.5 Each ballot pack mailed included a sheet setting out the postal voting instructions, a postal vote statement (PVS), a return envelope and three colour coded ballot papers for each election.

8.6 The distribution took place from the Town Hall Civic Suite over two days⁵ and involved 12 teams of 5 assistants. This was overseen by experienced staff from the Elections' Team. The process involved careful checks in order to ensure that ballot paper numbers corresponded to electors' details prior to mailing.⁶

8.7 ***PVI Verification and Checking Process***

8.8 Once ballot papers were returned to the Town Hall or collected from polling stations on election day, work commenced to verify their authenticity through the postal vote identifiers (PVI) on the PVS.

8.9 This verification of PVI was conducted in four stages. This included the initial verification and check, the scanning of the postal voting statement (PVS), ballot paper opening and the final adjudication.⁷

8.10 ***Pre-Polling Day PVI Verification***

8.11 There were a series of postal vote opening sessions prior to polling day. All those postal ballot papers verified were then separated into their respective ward, constituency or borough election. This reduced the number of postal vote ballot boxes at the count.

8.12 ***Polling Day PVI Verification***

8.13 As a result of the time constraints applied on the issue and receipt of postal votes through the 11 day deadline, it was expected that many postal votes would be handed in at polling stations. In order to reduce the impact upon the

⁵ Friday 23 April and Monday 26 April

⁶ Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Issue Instructions (appendix d)

⁷ Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Opening Process (appendix e)

count through potentially verifying a large number of PVIs at the close of the poll, the 18 polling station inspectors – one for each ward – collected postal votes at intervals on polling day so that PVIs could be verified at the Town Hall throughout the day.

- 8.14 The last collection of postal votes from polling stations was at 16:00. There was a need to stop the processing of postal votes at this time in order to make arrangements to move the verification computers from the Town Hall and set up the Remote Postal Vote checking ICT at the count venue.
- 8.15 As a result of testing the technology it was known that it would take an hour to download data from the main networked system and import it into the remote system. In addition, arrangements to check postal votes handed in at Bromley stations meant further data imports.
- 8.16 Once the data download was complete it then had to be exported to two stand alone laptops and taken along with two scanners and two printers to the count to be set up. This process was completed by 19:00.
- 8.17 This process had been tested thoroughly on two occasions prior to election day. However, at the commencement of the checking of postal votes at the count venue it was discovered that the data files were corrupted and the underlying postal vote application images could not be accessed.
- 8.18 As part of the contingency planning for the election the software providers had been put on call. As a result a long exchange was entered into with the software provider as to the cause of the corruption.
- 8.19 Whilst there was a manual back up facility, there was a need to get the checking system working in order to maintain a 100 per cent check of PVIs. Elections staff carried out two visits back to the Town Hall to re export and import data with the system finally working by 02.30. Postal Vote checking was completed by 05:00. The issue was found to be a corrupt file path to the underlying scanned postal vote application images, and was only resolved by the software provider dialling into the system and fixing it directly.
- 8.20 The impact upon the count verification process was negligible and while current legislation only required that 20 per cent of PVIs be verified, Lewisham achieved 100 per cent verification, including those postal votes from Bromley polling stations. However it tied up two senior members of the Elections' Team for a considerable time when they could have been utilised elsewhere.

Learning Point:

Revisit arrangements for the relocation of postal vote checking ICT, including the practicalities of checking all PVIs at the Town Hall. Where ICT has to be relocated at a critical stage of an election ensure that adequate testing is undertaken and technical support is available.

9. Polling Day

9.1 *Ballot Boxes*

9.2 In order to reduce the time spent sorting ballot papers at the count, 3 ballot boxes, one per poll, were issued to polling stations. In order to facilitate this, 400 new large size ballot boxes were purchased. The higher turnout and the size of the ballot papers used in the local government election, (with between 13-15 candidates per ward) led to 20 polling stations having a second local election ballot box issued.

9.3 At the count 411 ballot boxes were required to be verified. This included 32 postal vote ballot boxes containing sealed wallets from each daily opening. The ballot box number also comprised those returned from Lewisham polling stations (327) together with those from Bromley that were required to be verified in respect of Lewisham West and Penge (48 from polling stations and 4 postal vote boxes).

9.4 Arrangements were made, which ensured that the 24 Bromley ward boxes were returned in time for their local count on Friday. However, Lewisham had to verify all the boxes in the first instance.

9.5 Polling Stations

9.6 The location of polling stations are reviewed every year, with Lewisham having performed a full review of all polling stations in 2008. Under current legislation there is a requirement for all polling stations to be reviewed every four years.

9.7 There were a total of 109 polling stations used in Lewisham and 24 in the Bromley controlled area of the Lewisham West and Penge constituency. Polling stations were open from 07:00 to 22:00 and staffed by 3 Polling Clerks (PC) and 1 Presiding Officer (PO) each. In addition 1 Visiting Officer was assigned per ward to oversee all polling stations.

9.8 All staff who worked at polling stations were required to undertake training before they could commence any duties on polling day. The PowerPoint presentation given by the Head of Law to all polling station staff is appended to this report (appendix C).

9.9 While not ideal, Lewisham was required to use portakabins for 6 out of the 109 polling stations owing to unsuitable alternative facilities. However, this was down from the last election where 10 portakabins were used.

9.10 The increased turnout was confirmed by many POs and PCs reporting continuous activity at their respective polling stations. In some cases this led to a build up of voters and queues forming. In the majority of instances this was resolved quickly. While high demand had been anticipated a number of factors contributed to the process of voting taking longer than usual.

9.11 This included polling staff being required to work with three corresponding number lists (CNL). This involved staff writing the ballot number on a separate list, which had to be kept in the same order as the ballot paper. This

requirement to manage corresponding number lists rather than write electors number on a counterfoil slowed down the voting process.

- 9.12 POs and PCs additionally reported a certain level of confusion amongst some voters both with the candidate list and the three different voting methodologies. Some POs and PCs reported time spent responding to voters queries as to why the party leaders were not represented on the ballot paper and having to explain how to put their mark on the ballot paper.
- 9.13 Some more experienced POs who had worked on previous elections where turnout had not been as high, had difficulty adapting to the increased demand placed upon them.
- 9.14 In the one polling station where a queue was expected at the close of the poll, contingency plans were put into operation. This resulted in all electors in the queue being brought into the station before 22:00 and issued with their ballot papers. Subsequently the polling station doors were locked at 22:00 with all electors in the station being able to vote. More information is available through the interim report of polling station queues published by the Electoral Commission.⁸
- 9.15 The capacity to resolve increased demand on the day is limited once ballot paper numbers have been assigned to a polling station and the register produced. While there is the potential to split stations and add more POs and PCs, funding restrictions limit the feasibility of this option. The Ministry of Justice provide funding for 1.8 PCs per station, which in May equated to 196.2 PCs for the whole of the Borough. In Lewisham, to ensure there was sufficient capacity for the scale of election, 3 PCs were employed per station, totalling 327 PCs overall.
- 9.16 Staffing at Polling stations was in line with Electoral Commission Guidelines. No polling station had more than 2,500 voters in person allocated to them and there were only six with over 2,000.

Learning Point:

Work should be undertaken to review staffing arrangements for polling stations and examine the selection criteria used for POs and PCs.

10. The Count

10.1 *The Venue*

10.2 The count took place at Sedgehill School within Bellingham ward. The location and arrangements for the count venue are of great importance to the efficient and effective implementation of the count.

10.3 The planning for the count commenced in November 2009 with a number of factors constraining where the count could be held. The combination of 3 major elections, an expected increase in turnout, along with the additional 48

⁸ 2010 UK Parliamentary General Election: Interim Report: Review of problems at polling stations at close of polls on 6 May 2010
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf

ballot boxes from Bromley, all required an area large enough to accommodate an adequate number of counters, electoral team staff and observers.

- 10.4 The Borough was also constrained by its limited choice of appropriate venues. While the 2009 European election count was held within the Town Hall, the increased scale of the May 2010 elections meant this was not feasible. In addition, a decision was made not to split the count across two venues to ensure that the core expertise of the Electoral Services Team was not spread too thin. This resulted in the decision to host the count at Sedgehill School as the biggest single venue available within the Borough.
- 10.5 The early preparations allowed both the Electoral Services Team and school enough time to plan for polling day. Under current legislation there is no requirement for schools to agree to host an election count (aside from a mayoral election) and therefore it is important that where a school is requested for a count it feels it has sufficient time to prepare.
- 10.6 Initial preparations for the venue included ensuring that there were uninterruptible power supplies and that equipment could be delivered and arranged on site.
- 10.7 In order to accommodate the count, the Electoral Services Team took control of a complete block of the school which included the school indoor sports hall and two break out rooms to accommodate count staff breaks, agents, candidates and press area for viewing TV and light refreshments.
- 10.8 To have room for all who were legally entitled to attend the count, including agents, candidates, candidates' guests, counting agents, and official observers, 150 counters was the maximum that could be accommodated within the sports hall.
- 10.9 Complaints were received about the quantity and quality of facilities at the count that were available to candidates, agents, guests and counting agents. The ladies' toilet facilities comprised just two cubicles, one of which had a door missing. There was also concern over a lack of adequate seating provision.
- 10.10 ***The Verification Process***
- 10.11 Prior to ballot papers being counted they were required to be verified.⁹ Essential to beginning the verification as quickly as possible were the arrangements to transport ballot boxes to the count venue. To achieve this early arrangements had been made with Sedgehill School, the police and the highways departments to improve the traffic flow in the vicinity of the school.
- 10.12 The arrival of POs delivering their ballot boxes was managed in the school car park with POs delivering their materials to three lorry reception areas: one for each constituency. The ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts and postal

⁹ Managing a local government election in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers – Part E – Verification and count.
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/83412/Copy-of-056-localmanual-Part-E-Final-Web.pdf

vote wallets containing envelopes were then brought into the count hall, to be stored, by a team of 22 porters.

- 10.13 The first PO arrived back from a nearby station at 22.15. It had been anticipated that POs would arrive at the count venue later than in previous elections. This was due to the paper work that needed to be completed after the close of polls as an increased turnout occupied the attention of POs throughout the day.
- 10.14 At the peak time for POs returning from ballot stations, there was a queue of POs cars waiting to be processed and whilst one ballot box arrived quite late at about 23.30 on 6 May this did not delay the overall verification process.
- 10.15 The verification process required teams of two to verify a set of ballot boxes. The process was administered efficiently with 95 per cent of boxes being verified on the first count. Where delays had occurred in the verification process this was attributed to arithmetical errors by POs.
- 10.16 As a result of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act (CRAG) coming into force in April 2010 a requirement was placed upon all ROs to take 'reasonable steps' to finish verification and begin the count before 02:00.
- 10.17 As part of the planning process, Lewisham did not expect to finish verifying all ballot papers before 02:00. However, in response to CRAG, a further review was conducted on the verification and count arrangements to examine whether the process could be quickened.
- 10.18 As part of the verification process a detailed check is undertaken on the number of ballot papers in each returned ballot box to ensure they correspond with the ballot paper account provided by Presiding Officers. This needed to be completed before the first count could begin, as it was critical to the overall accuracy of the count.
- 10.19 As a result of the limits on the number of count staff (due to the size of the venue) and the priority to maintain high standards of verification integrity, the review, as with prior reviews, concluded that despite reasonable steps to begin the count as soon as was practicable, Lewisham did not expect to complete its verification process before 02:00.
- 10.20 Lewisham completed the verification of the ballot papers at 05:30am on Friday 7 May, beginning the count at 06:00. The non-completion of the verification process by 02:00 was in line with the majority of other London authorities. As per provisions in CRAG, Lewisham reported back to the Electoral Commission within 30 days that it had not completed the verification by 02:00 and what steps had been taken to begin the count as soon as practicable.
- 10.21 ***The Count Process***
- 10.22 There was a considerable amount of time spent working to optimise the venue for the count process. The decision was made to opt for a triple horseshoe arrangement, with one team of 50 counters per constituency, making 150 in all. There was one Deputy Returning Officer with full powers and one senior accountant assigned to each team, in addition to three supervisors.

- 10.23 In line with legislation the Parliamentary count was commenced first at 06:00 on Friday 7 May. This lasted until 09:15 and was followed by the Mayoral count which started at 16:00 and finished at 20:30. The Mayoral count included a second preference count. At 21:30 the Local Government count began, this lasted until 07:00 on Saturday 8 May with the count for one ward being reconvened on Tuesday 11 May.
- 10.24 The count process varied between elections with a different voting methodology for each election. While the UKPGE was conducted under a first-past-the-post-system, the Mayoral election was carried out under a supplementary vote and the Local Government election used multi-member vote methodology. This had some impact on slowing the count.
- 10.25 In the instance of Grove Park ward, four recounts were conducted due to the small margin of victory between candidates after each count. This led to the declaration of results for the ward being announced after the fourth recount on Tuesday 11 May.
- 10.26 **Declaration of Results**
- 10.27 Following the conclusion of the count for each election the results were declared by the Returning Officer at the following times:

<i>Elections</i>	<i>Declaration Time</i>
Parliamentary Election	Friday 7 May – 09:15
Mayoral Election	Friday 7 May – 20:00
Ward	Saturday 8 May – 07:00 <i>(One ward was reconvened & counted on Tuesday 11 May)</i>

Learning Points:

Undertake a review of the potential for using shifts of counters to limit the number of continuous hours any one counter worked.
 Review the expected hours of work by core election staff prior to any election, which incorporates appropriate breaks.
 Review the count venue to explore an improved utilisation of space.
 Work should be undertaken prior to the next election to ensure that restroom facilities and seating provision is adequate for all those attending the count.

11 Work Hours

- 11.1 An important factor in the integrity of any election is the staff that administer those elections. In order to ensure that staff were equipped to manage the election they were required to undertake training. However, while staff were

well trained for the election, an element of concern is the length of continuous hours worked.

- 11.2 Over the poll and count period, two members of the Elections' Team worked over 50 hours continuously. In the 6 week period leading up to polling day the Elections' Team were on average working between 60 to 70 hour weeks. This entailed staff arriving between 07:00 and 08:00 and not leaving until between 21:00 and 22:00.
- 11.3 The pressures placed on conducting the verification and count quickly can threaten the integrity of an election if the core staff are required to work over an extended period of time.

Learning Point:

Review the work hours of elections staff to ensure that adequate resourcing is in place to avoid any compromise of electoral integrity.

12 External Validation

- 12.1 Following the introduction of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Electoral Commission introduced a set of performance standards on the performance of the Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers.¹⁰
- 12.2 These indicators measured:
- The skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer;
 - The planning processes in place for an election;
 - The training provided to all staff in administering the election;
 - The work done to maintain the integrity of an election;
 - The planning and delivering of public awareness activity;
 - The accessibility of information to electors;
 - The communication of information to candidates and agents.
- 12.3 After the presentation of evidence to the Electoral Commission they agreed with Lewisham's assessment that all indicators were being met at above the standard.

13 Internal Objectives and Success Measures

- 13.1 As part of the ARO's election plan a number of objectives and success measures were set out in order to assess the conduct of the election. These included:
- The conduct of an accurate count resistant to successful challenge;
 - The 100 per cent verification of PVIs;
 - The conduct of a lawful and transparent election;
 - The preparation of accounts in a timely manner;
 - The absence of major difficulties in the conduct of the election;
 - The absence of well founded major complaints.

¹⁰ Electoral Commission, Background to the Performance Standards.
http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/100837/Background.pdf

13.2 In reviewing these objectives and success measures it was determined that they had largely been met. This view is supported through the external recognition from the Electoral Commission as set out in section eleven.

14 Voter, candidate and agents experience of the May 2010 Election

14.1 The Parliamentary turnout of 63.7% indicates the May 2010 Elections attracted a good response from voters. Nationally, Electoral Commission work indicates that three quarters of those asked indicated that they were very or fairly satisfied with the process of voting. Satisfaction levels were higher (83%) for those over 55, compared with that of 18-34 year olds (67%).

14.2 Locally, the extension to the voting registration deadline attracted a significant number of new voters who were also able to request a postal vote. As set out earlier in this report the number of voters requesting a postal vote increased by 23.5% from 2009.

14.3 Voting at Polling Stations was largely successful with the only concern being the large numbers at one station in the Deptford Constituency. However, the queue of voters was well managed in the run up to the close of poll. Alternative arrangements whereby voters could choose a voting location suitable to them could help to improve the voter experience. However, currently voting at a local polling station is required by legislation. In addition any move would require the voter list to be available live on-line and would require a significant investment in logistics.

14.4 Feedback from candidates and agents was sought by the Electoral Services Team following the election. This indicated that the nominations process was considered to be well managed but concerns were raised about the length of the count and the suitability of the venue. Finally, an agent complained about the queues experienced at a polling station in the Deptford Constituency.

15 Conclusion

15.1 This report highlights a number of learning points arising from the conduct of the May 2010 election. Subject to the views of this Committee, this will be used by officers to generate an Action Plan for use by Election staff prior to the next major election.

15.2 Integrity is vital to any election and this review concludes that, unlike other parts of the country, no concerns have been raised of systematic fraud or malpractice and no election petition has been received. The Electoral Commission have successfully reviewed the Council's arrangements.

15.3 However, this was a highly complex task involving the management of three separate elections over a very short period of time as required by legislation. The changes being considered for fixed term Parliaments, if agreed, would mean that a similar alignment of election dates would be many years hence. Although it is clear that the election was well planned and executed, along with any task of this complexity it is clear that improvements could be made. The following paragraphs set out a summary of these areas.

15.4 The differing legislative requirements of the three elections made the administration highly complex and burdensome. It is proposed that the Council presses for greater legislative simplicity.

- 15.5 The use of the Call Centre to front enquiries was a good example of broadening support to Election staff and improving the capacity of the whole Council to support the election process.
- 15.6 Given the significant increase in postal voting this element of the election was well managed. To avoid a recurrence of the problems associated with the ICT on the evening of the count it is recommended that additional testing is undertaken and appropriate technical support available on the night.
- 15.7 The preparations for the poll foresaw a high turnout and the potential for queues. This was well managed with support from the Police. A review of the process for selecting presiding officers and poll clerks is recommended.
- 15.8 Where a count is considered to last a prolonged period of time, consideration should be given to the recruitment of a second shift of staff.
- 15.9 The Count Venue, for a number of reasons, proved unsatisfactory. Crucially, the size of the venue acted as a limitation on the number of counting staff that could be accommodated. In addition, rest rooms and seating for guests were inadequate for the numbers of people involved. It is recommended that these matters are addressed in the planning for the next election.
- 15.10 The pressure on the Electoral Services Team working hours in the run up to an election needs to be considered. The potential for flexibly using other Council staff to provide additional support in the crucial period prior to election day needs to be reconsidered.

Appendices:

- A) Elections Committee Report 28 January 2010
- B) Benchmarking Table
- C) Polling Station Staff Training Session PowerPoint
- D) Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Issue Instructions
- E) Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Opening Process

Newham had three elections on 6th May 2010: Local, Mayoral and Parliamentary.

Planning

The chief difficulty in planning for the 2010 elections was the uncertainty surrounding the date of the general election. The need to plan for local, mayoral and a possible general election made the planning process more complicated than usual. It was difficult to make decisions about the number of ballot boxes to be used, which count venue to use, how to handle polling cards and postal votes, how many staff would be required and how to train them until we were certain that the general election would take place on the same day as the local and mayoral elections. The short parliamentary timetable had a detrimental effect on our conduct of the local and mayoral elections.

Poll cards

Initially we planned to issue joint poll cards to cover all possible eventualities but following the intervention of the Ministry of Justice and the Electoral Commission we were forced to issue two poll cards, one for the local and Mayoral and one for the parliamentary election. This caused a good deal of confusion among voters and some polling staff.

Postal Votes

We opted to combine postal votes for all elections on the grounds that it would be the easiest option for the electors and would lead to fewer spoiled votes. The issue and receipt of postal votes went well. However, postal votes returned from polling stations still lead to delays with the count and absorb a disproportionate amount of resource due to the need to keep staff on duty until the early hours of the morning and to set up a postal voting opening at the count venue. We weren't affected by cross constituency postal votes in Newham but it was another burden that many authorities had to manage.

11 day registration

This was the first UK parliamentary election we had to operate the 11 day registration system. 11 day registration had a knock-on effect through out the election. Staff resources that would have previously been available as the registration was closed down in the month before the election were unavailable to us as staff had to be kept on registration work. Indeed, it was necessary to increase the resources working on registration as the deadline to register approached. The 11 day registration deadline coincides with the deadline for postal applications and on this occasion coincided with the close of parliamentary nominations. This meant that in the one night thousands of registrations had to be processed, ballot paper proofs checked and sent to printers, postal applications processed and postal data sent to printers. Many London Offices work into the early hours of the next morning to ensure that all these deadlines were adhered to.

Polling Stations

We opted to have three poll clerks at most polling stations. Polling station staff reported that the day was the busiest polling day they had ever experienced. The three ballot papers meant that there were delays issuing votes but more so in explaining to

the three voting systems to electors. Electors took considerably longer in the polling booths than usual. The 7am to 10pm polling day, dealing with confused electors and the three lots of paperwork took a toll on staff and it is likely to be more difficult to recruit quality staff for 2012 as a result.

The Count

The CRAG Act's provision that counting of votes begin within four hours of the close of poll meant that we had to begin the count on Thursday night instead of Friday as most R.O.s would have preferred.

The need to verify all of the votes before proceeding to the parliamentary count caused the most problems. In Newham's case this meant that staff were exhausted by the time we finished the verification. Despite using the Excel Centre we could not find enough staff to run a shift system and were forced to ask many staff to work through. Staff who had anticipated at least a few hours break had to begin on the Mayoral and then the local count without a break. I and several colleagues were on duty, without a break, from the opening of the poll on Thursday morning until 10pm on Friday night. Working such is not conducive to the health of election staff especially following several weeks of long hours in the run up to the election.

Lessons for 2012

- Retain the 30 day GLA election timetable.
- Count on Friday.
- Ensure that three poll clerks can be appointed per polling station.
- Provide pictorial guides on how to vote at polling stations.
- Ensure that boroughs are resourced to ensure thorough checking of ballot paper accounts.
- The electronic count supplier must liaise with all election software suppliers to ensure that all sites can supply the data required in advance of polling day.
- The GLA should get clear guidance from the Electoral Commission on who should be supplied with electoral registers to avoid the problems we had in 2008 with radio stations running competitions to fund candidate's deposits.
- Use central procurement where possible.

Paul Libreri

Head of Registration and Electoral Services

London Borough of Newham

LONDON BOROUGH OF SOUTHWARK
ELECTORAL SERVICES

**ELECTION REVIEW FOR THE
RETURNING OFFICER**

6 MAY 2010
COMBINED GENERAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

21 SEPTEMBER 2010

Executive Summary

The 2010 elections provided massive challenges to London returning officers and their teams. A general election combined with local elections has not been held in living memory and certainly not since the introduction of postal voting on demand and changes to electoral legislation contained within the 2006 Electoral Administration Act. Holding both elections on the same day had a great impact on both planning and operational workloads. It is the case that planning started early but the complexity of holding these elections simultaneously inevitably meant some errors were made and adequate provision for various processes was not always achieved.

The Returning Officer and Southwark Electoral Services delivered free and fair elections which reflected the will of the electorate. Questionnaires received from agent's feedback indicated that there were no concerns with the integrity of the poll or the counts that followed. This is the most important consideration for the Returning Officer, who has the responsibility of ensuring that the elections are run in such a way. However concerns were raised about the length of time taken to complete the counts.

It is necessary and useful for future improvement to assess the way in which the elections were delivered. The Returning Officer for Southwark commissioned this report to detail findings and make recommendations in the interest of improving future election

processes and procedures. Some of these recommendations will benefit all elections, particularly those relating to the count, while others will need to be brought into consideration when the next combined elections are held. There is a real danger that lessons learned today will be forgotten by the time that Southwark is faced with similar challenges.

The key findings from 2010 can be summarised as follows:

Legislative Environment

The legislative environment is unsuitable for both registration purposes and holding elections in the 21st century. The risks facing returning officers increase significantly with the holding of combined elections.

Management

Elections can only be held successfully with the co-operation of many different groups of people, sometimes with conflicting interests. The returning officer has the obligation to run the elections, but can only do so with the assistance of the local authority, the political parties and the electorate.

The returning officer in Southwark is fortunate in that relationships between the major stakeholders are good, so that in the main there were few problems that could not be easily resolved.

Elections are generally run by a small team of full time staff, with assistance from many temporary election staff. The increasing complexity of arrangements for running elections results in increased pressures on a limited number of people. This results in increased risks to the process. In an environment of reducing funds for the public sector, returning officers need to be able to draw on experienced and competent staff, delivering a complex event which occurs periodically.

Registration

The 11 day rule for registration created an extremely difficult situation for the electoral services team, as over 6,000 residents registered or changed their details in the period 12 to 20 April. This information had to be inputted so that data could be sent to the printers for postal votes.

The impact of the party leader debates in the run-up to the elections had a considerable impact on the number of residents who wanted to register. This included residents who were out of the country and who wanted to register as overseas electors, or who wanted to register proxy voters due to their inability to attend at the polling station. Some confusion was caused by the incorrect completion of forms downloaded from the electoral commission's website by overseas electors. This improved once their website was adjusted.

Polling Stations

The combination of polls and high turnout meant presiding officers and poll clerks were faced with greater challenges and a higher number of queries than seen before. This had a knock-on effect and meant Electoral Services staff were solely occupied in solving these queries on polling day.

Postal Votes

The number of postal votes has increased significantly since 2002 when postal voting on demand was introduced. The procedures for dealing with postal votes changed dramatically in 2006 when personal identifiers were introduced, together with the requirement to check postal vote statements. Postal voting was identified as a significant risk to the integrity of the electoral process, and as a result procedures were put in place to manage the entire process clearly and comprehensively. Personal identity checks were carried out on 100% of postal votes and all were correctly processed in time for inclusion in the parliamentary and local counts.

The Count

Count planning and processes continue to have a significant margin for improvement. These include the identification of a larger venue, use of experienced supervisors and deputy returning officers to manage teams of counting assistants, continued

improvement in the use of IT including a networked solution, increased use of electoral services core staff to troubleshoot and take the lead for key functions and use of expertise from events management to lead on logistical aspects (including venue, parking, reception, catering, equipment delivery, signage).

Combined elections

If the general elections are to be held in future every five years, the following table gives details of the expected combination of elections for the next 20 years:

	General Election	EU Parliamentary Elections	GLA and London Mayor Elections	Local Borough Elections
2010	X			X
2011	Referendum?			
2012			X	
2013		X		
2014				X
2015	X			
2016			X	
2017				
2018		X		X
2019				
2020	X		X	
2021				
2022				X
2023		X		
2024			X	
2025	X			
2026				X
2027				
2028		X	X	
2029				
2030	X			X

Dear Camelia,

I refer to Mark Roberts' letter of 24 September 2010 to Paul Martin on the above subject.

There were no issues that this authority would wish to draw to the attention of the Working Group.

Richard Shortman
Democratic Services Manager

Richard Shortman, Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Group
London Borough of Sutton, Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way, SUTTON, Surrey SM1 1EA .

Wandsworth Council

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Our ref: GKJ/GLA
Your ref:
Date 19th October 2010

Camelia Thomas
Greater London Authority
Post Point 10
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London
SE1 2AA

Dear Camelia Thomas,

2010 Elections in London Working Group

I am writing in response to your letter of 24 September 2010 requesting contributions from Borough Returning Officers regarding lessons learned from the organisation and running of the 2010 General and local elections.

The answers given to the questions you have asked were also relayed to the Electoral Commission in the feedback given after the 6 May 2010 elections, and are relevant to the information you are now seeking.

1. Reflections on how the election day went

No particular problems. Extensive planning went in to ensuring that election day went smoothly and this paid dividends. Local plans implemented as normal and contingency plans set up for change of count location if required. More than adequate allocation of ballot papers for polling stations. Two separate Corresponding Numbers Lists (white for Parliamentary and yellow for Borough Council) with no problems. Some light queuing at peak early evening periods (no different from normal). Turnout was higher with 66.42% for the Parliamentary (59.2% in 2005) and 62.72% for the Borough Council (34.1% in 2006). Few complaints. Most voters seemed to cope with the receiving two ballot papers satisfactorily.

Royal Mail performed very well and were very supportive – a long established close working relationship is in place in Wandsworth – we also took up the option of a sweep delivery after 9pm on polling day.

Wandsworth 3 parliamentary boundaries are coterminous, so there were no cross-boundary issues.

www.wandsworth.gov.uk

Chief Executive and Director of Administration: Gerald Jones

2. Any issues that may have occurred with ensuring that all who wanted to cast their vote were able to do so

There were no issues in Wandsworth relating to electors being unable to cast their vote.. Incorrect claims by The Times and on-line Daily Mail on voters being turned away at polling stations in the Battersea Constituency in Wandsworth were resoundly refuted and were in fact traced to reporters obviously using an internet site, which suggested on reading their news report that Battersea was an affected area: this was due to a punctuation error: the early story on Battersea was that the seat had changed from Labour to Conservative, but the absence of a full stop after the previous text about Stoke Newington made it appear this applied to Battersea as well!. Investigation carried out on Monday 10 May where all Presiding Officers in the Battersea Constituency were interviewed and signed a statement to the effect that no persons were turned away at 10pm or any other time and all polling stations were closed at the proper time. One of the two newspapers did apologise for their error but a similar response was not received from the other.

Returning Officers should be on their guard at future elections for incorrect media reports of this nature in view of the euphoria which surrounded the 6 May 2010 elections with electors being turned away at polling stations.

3. Any issues that may have occurred with voter registration

The high demand for late registration at the combined Parliamentary and Local elections was anticipated following its introduction in the Electoral Administration Act 2006. As the largest inner London Borough with a large young transient population, Wandsworth ensured that early planning took place to resource this anticipated demand, which included the increased number of e-mail communications to the Service. Despite this, the larger than anticipated volume of new applications received meant that even more resources had to be found at a late stage to assist with this processing alongside that of postal vote applications and a large number of Overseas electors applications, both of which also had to meet the 20 April statutory deadline.

I think the introduction of the 11 day registration deadline is set at the right time in the election timetable in order to deal with late registrations and has drastically reduced the number of names not registered on polling day. It does not however account for the large number of applications that were received: between 1 March and 20 April when approximately 6,853 new names were added, 1,585 names deleted and 147 changes made, totalling **8,585** transactions.

The Electoral Commission publicity campaign in all three areas relating to registration, postal voting and Overseas electors (although these electors are not entitled to vote at local elections) inadvertently led to an increased number of duplicate application forms being received for those already registered which wasted overstretched resources at a time where it could have been spent on processing the new applications received. The Electoral Commission voter registration application form available from the website was able to be completed on-line and then printed off, which also caused confusion to some members of the public who took them to the polling station thinking that because it had been completed by 20 April (the date and time it was completed came out on the

application form), all they had to do was turn up at the polling station with the completed application form in order for them to be able to cast their vote. This mistake deprived them of their vote. It was unfortunate that the scope for confusion was not foreseen and a clear warning printed on the form exactly what was required by when.

With introduction of Individual Electoral Registration before the next Parliamentary election, there will inevitably be more demands put on Electoral Services staff with the requirement to cross check against other data sets – namely National Insurance numbers to confirm if the application is valid – when that election takes place. This will also have an affect on all other elections thereafter. Processing individual registration applications will be an even more time-consuming job, as a drop in registration levels at the annual canvass is anticipated, which will result in even more late registrations.

4. Any issues that may have occurred with the count

The Parliamentary Election verification and count and the Borough Council Election verification were both held from 10pm on Thursday 6 May 2010. This was due to using the complete Wandsworth Town Hall complex and using various locations within it which had not used before on election night. Over 450 staff were recruited to carry out both of these exercises. All these plans worked well.

All three Parliamentary Constituencies ballot papers were verified by 12.54am and counted by 1.20am. All results were declared by 01.50am. The Borough Council count commenced at 1-30pm on Friday 7 May 2010. All 20 Ward results were declared by 5pm.

5. Any lessons you believe the GLA should learn in time for the 2012 GLA elections

a) Resources

All elections necessitate additional working hours by electoral administrators in order to achieve all the deadlines within the statutory timetable, and this has increased at elections since 2007. The May 2010 elections went beyond the normal requirements with staff working long hours – 80 plus per week – and 7 days a week continuously up to polling day. The Coalition Government must in the Political Reform proposals allow for funding the additional resources that will be required, and this must reflected for the 2012 GLA elections.

b) Absent voting

Wandsworth outsourced the printing of ballot papers (white for Parliamentary and yellow for Borough Council) and envelopes, but produced in-house the outgoing letter, 'How to vote by post' guidance and Postal vote Statements. Combined issue using C4 window outgoing envelope, two 'A' envelopes (also white for Parliamentary and yellow for Borough Council) and one 'B' return envelope. Envelopes all prepared and issued with 34,715 being sent for the Parliamentary election and 37,266 for the Borough Council elections – all worked well with no problems.

Local plans implemented as normal for the verification of Postal Vote Statements. 100% postal vote statements were checked. Pre-testing of Express system software was carried out satisfactorily and performed very well. No cross-boundary constituency issues. Opening sessions held daily from Tuesday 25 May to polling day. No apparent impact on voters regarding the use of personal identifiers.

A sensible threshold of % matching should be set, given the innate variability of human signatories and their resulting signatures. This could be 60-80%, depending on the sensitivity of scanning machine.

Common sense says that US style dates should not be rejected if the digits are merely in a different order e.g. 09/06/1981 instead of 06/09/1981 – many people use the alternative system if they have lived/travelled in America recently, as do some computer systems. All date rejections should be at the discretion of the Acting Returning Officer – we cannot accept a precise match is needed and believe many machine-rejected anomalies are acceptable despite stringent Electoral Commission advice.

For future elections Wandsworth propose to amend outgoing Postal Vote Statement to incorporate "19" in the year box to avoid the voters putting in the incorrect date – in particular those where they state the date of signing (which is not required anyway).

c) Detailed briefing sessions for political parties and independent candidates

Introduction of more detailed briefing sessions for political parties and independent candidates from late February 2010 provided a closer working relationship which assisted greatly throughout the election period.

Particular emphasis on the nomination process was made in order to make the process clearer and easier to understand, which greatly assisted new political party agents and in particular independent candidates. This proved invaluable with the informal checks that were carried out in the short timescale for receipt of nominations after the notice of election and before the deadline. The local Wandsworth code of practice regarding handling of postal vote applications and postal votes was given particular attention, as it has been since 2008. Positive feedback has been received from political parties on these issues including the new procedures put in place and the documentation provided.

d) Performance of the Electoral Commission

Core material official guidance to Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary and Returning Officer for the local was very useful including polling station handbooks and quick guides.

Late guidance regarding Labour Party/Co-operative Party emblems, although not relevant to Wandsworth, would have caused problems if candidates had stood with a joint description, something that other London Boroughs had problems with, but may be an issue at the 2012 GLA elections.

Earlier advice on the Volcanic Ash cloud would have assisted with enquiries being made from members of the public, as many were uncertain whether to change their

overseas postal voting arrangements. As the possibility of this volatile situation occurring again is still ongoing, this must be addressed earlier at the time of elections taking place in the future.

Please note that I am retiring at the end of October 2010 and if you require any further information before then let me know, or thereafter contact my Deputy, Patrick Watson.

Yours sincerely

Gerald Jones

Chief Executive and Director of Administration and Returning Officer

Distribution

Patrick Watson – Assistant Director of Administration (Support & Democratic Services)
Neil Kennett – Head of Electoral Services

Memorandum on election administration failure in Hendon constituency

During the General Election on 6th May 2010, there were considerable failings in the administration of the election. Given the narrow majority and the differential impact on Labour voters there is no doubt that the result was affected by the election administration failings.

This note is divided into three sections:

1. Polling station problems
2. Postal votes problems
3. Other issues

1. Polling stations

a) General

Many polling stations were badly organised and inadequately staffed, with staff who themselves were not adequately trained. Problems arose particularly from the early evening onwards in predominantly Labour areas, with significant queues leading to people going away without voting and at 10pm, being excluded from the right to vote. The cause of the queues was inadequate staffing levels. It seems that each polling station table had two staff, one of whom administered the General Election and one the local election. Looking at the staffing numbers it seems that whilst the overall number of staff may have approached the Electoral Commission recommendations, in practice, because of the division of labour, each election only had half the number actually required. This problem was compounded by the division between tables within polling districts between road groups, which did not reflect the likely number of voters from each road group at different times of the day or indeed at all. In some polling stations this led to very long queues at one table, with no queues at another. There was no effort by staff at the less busy tables to assist those with long queues.

Moreover, there is considerable evidence of poor advice given to voters, inadequate checking of supplementary registers, and also improper practices to discourage voters from voting.

This note will now turn to specific problems at identified polling stations.

b) Orange Hill Road, Watling Community Centre (HTD)

In previous elections there have been two or three different tables for different streets, but at this election there was just one table for all who were there to vote. The two staff at the table split the duties between the local election and the General Election, so there was only one member of staff dealing with the General Election (witness [W] 1). Between 5 and 6pm the queues were starting to build up (W2); this witness had just come out of hospital, went to vote but could not wait in the long queue due to the consequences of his hospitalisation after two operations and left because of the queue. By 7pm the queue was approximately 100-200 people and between 30 minutes to 1 hour long (W3, W4, W5, W6, W7). Approximately 15 people left the queue during this period unwilling to wait (W6). The other witnesses confirm there were people leaving the queues. By 8pm the queue had gone down to 30 minutes, but there were complaints of inefficiencies by the polling staff who were considered to be very slow (W8), and by 8.30pm the queue was starting to lengthen and by that stage was back to 50 minutes (W9), this length of queue also being witnessed by Mr Dismore, the Labour candidate, who had taken a voter on a "car call". Mr Dismore also witnessed people leaving the queue (3-4), witness 8 having confirmed a further 3 to 4 people leaving during the previous half hour. At 9.35pm the polling station staff removed the polling station signs (W10). W10 challenged the polling station staff whilst that was being done and was told "there were large queues and more people arriving would not have time to vote". The witness makes the point that the polling station was confusing to find for anyone who had not voted there before and believes there were people who did not get to vote because of the queues and the removal of the signs. W11 confirms that at 9.45pm a polling official told those in the queue that there was no guarantee that they would be able to vote. W11 was one of the last ones to vote and there were others who were excluded. The Labour number taker at the polling station (W12) reports that 4 people were turned away from the polling station actually just before close of polls at 10pm by polling station officials.

c) Algernon Road Multicultural Centre (HRC)

Witness 13 voted early, but reported that the polling station in his view was disorganised and badly run. By 8pm the queues were getting bad, which is confirmed by W14 who queued for 45 minutes from 8pm. W15 reports that she and her neighbour went to vote at 8.40pm and eventually got to vote at 9.45pm. As she left the queue was the same length and more people were arriving. W16 reports that polling station staff discouraged people from remaining in the queue from 9pm onwards, warning voters that they probably would not get to cast their vote by 10pm. This is

confirmed by witness W18 who went to the polling station at 9pm when there were about 200 people in the queue. The polling official said that there was at least half an hour wait, “they could wait if they wanted but they might want to go home”. He said that if they were still waiting at 10pm they would not be allowed to vote. W17 went to the polling station at around 9.10pm and also witnessed very long queues. It took him 30 minutes to vote. The polling official told people in the queue that they might be turned away. He saw between 5 and 6 people leave the queue in the light of what was said. W18 reports long queues of up to two hours and saw people refused ballot papers because they were recorded as postal voters, who had not received their postal votes. W19 arrived to vote at 9.30pm. The presiding officer was telling people that he could not guarantee that they could vote (“it’s the law; where you are standing the queue is about half an hour”). W19 finally got to vote at 9.58pm. The queue behind him included 15 people who were unable to vote at 10pm. There was no queue at one voting table but a big queue at the other.

W19 reports that there was a protest at 10pm by those who wished to vote. The presiding officer phoned his supervisor who then agreed that those who were in the queue should be allowed to vote. By this time more than 6 people who were in the queue had left at 10pm in the light of what was said. At 9.30pm there was a significant queue behind W19 and he believes that others left. He was firmly of the view that the presiding officer was putting people off from voting.

W20 reports that her husband went to vote at 9.15pm after work, and she went to collect him at 9.45pm, where she witnessed long queues. She arrived at 9.40pm and the polling officer was telling people who turned up at that point that there was no point in staying because they would have to leave at 10pm. During the 5 or so minutes she was waiting for her husband between 2 and 3 people left the queue.

W21 led the demonstration at 10pm, he having attended to vote at 9.45pm. At that stage he estimates the queue at between 20 and 30 people. Eventually those who were still there were allowed to vote, but by then others had left, believing that they would not ultimately be allowed to vote.

d) Trinity Church, Eversfield Gardens (HTA)

Witnesses 22 and 23 were going to vote between 9.30 and 9.45pm, but were informed by a member of the public at the polling station that “they were not letting people in” and therefore did not remain.

e) Dollis Infants School (HPD)

Queues built up throughout the day at this polling station. W23a went to vote at 7.20am. There were 15 people in the queue and she saw people leave because the queue moved very slowly. The person on the desk did not know what she was doing. One man was extremely angry as he left.

W23b voted at 8.30am, and commented that there was nothing to indicate which desk one should go to for the ballot paper as normally there would be a list of roads on the side of each desk. She suggested that it might be helpful to display the list but this was not done.

W23c went to vote at 2pm and found a very long queue for the desk serving the streets in the last one third of the alphabet. The queue was particularly long because she lived in a street beginning with "w"; many other predominantly Labour streets in this area are in the later part of the alphabet.

W24 went to vote at around 6pm and there were around 100 people in the queue for her table. Her wait was half an hour. W25 went to vote at around 7pm and waited for more than an hour in long queues. W26 and W27 also confirmed waits of around an hour, from between 7pm and 8pm. W28 went to vote at 7pm and waited for half an hour in a queue of 100 people. W29 went at 7pm and waited for one hour. She saw people with young children leave and comments that the polling station was poorly organised and the queues moved far too slowly. W30 reports that his parents waited for at least an hour having come to vote at 7.15pm. W31, who went to vote at around 7.30pm, reports 300 people in the queue and that she had to wait for about 2 hours. W32 went to vote at 7.45pm with long queues and had to wait for half an hour, commenting the queue was as long as 200 people when she left. W32a went to vote at 8pm and found very long queues. She waited for approximately half an hour and the queue was still extremely long. W33 went to vote at 8.15pm and waited in a queue of 200 people, leaving at 9.30pm, and again witnessing a long queue. W34 went to vote at 8.30pm, waited in the queue for an hour, and witnessed a long queue when she left at 9.30pm. W35 went to the polling station at 8.30pm, stayed until 9.30pm and voted, but saw at least 30 people leave because of the long queues. W36 went to vote at 9pm and just managed to vote, having queued for an hour. He believes that people were turned away. W36a arrived to vote at 9.30pm and was surprised by the police presence. She was just able to vote before 10pm and comments that quite a few people were turned away even though they had arrived well before 10pm. W36b went to vote at 9pm and found very long queues and just managed to vote at approximately 9.45pm.

W37 was one of the last able to vote just before 10pm and saw up to 20 people turned away. W38 arrived to vote between 9.30pm and 9.45pm and was turned away; W39 went to vote at 9.15pm

with her cousin and was turned away just before 10pm; W40 went to vote at 9.45pm and was turned away at 10pm. W41 confirms that there were long queues at around 9.50pm. W41a went to vote at 9.50pm and was only able to vote because his street was in the alphabetical order which meant that the queue was shorter for his polling table. A lot of people were turned away.

W41b reports that her son went to vote just before 9pm but he came back after 10pm because he was not able to vote as the queue was too long. He had previously been to the polling station at approximately 7pm and queued for 20 minutes but gave up as the queue was not moving.

W42, who was responsible for locking the school gates required the assistance of police officers at 10pm because of the disturbance caused by those who had been denied the right to vote. He estimates that between 25 and 35 were locked out without being able to vote.

It appears that there was differential queuing at this polling station too, as one of the polling station tables had far shorter queues, the longer queue being the latter third of the alphabet which includes a number of long streets with a high proportion of Labour voters.

f) Royal British Legion (HQE)

W43 reports long queues when he went to vote, and comments that this was a result of a lack of staff as only one team of three people were carrying out the election process, whereas in previous years there were at least two teams to cope with busy periods when people got home from work. He was not surprised there were problems.

g) Colin Close (HSC)

Witness 44 reports the queues for his road were unquestionably high. He said he went to vote at around 8pm and came back saying the queue was too long to wait. The family of three went to vote again at 9pm and the queue was about 30 people. It was taking 6-7 minutes to process individuals. At others desks there were no queues whatsoever and he does not understand why the other polling staff did not help those with the long queue.

h) Annunciation Church (HTB)

W45 reports long queues and comments that in the past there were always 3 desks, and he was surprised that there were only 2 on this occasion. W46 reports that his brother-in-law was turned away without voting at this polling station, at 10pm.

i) West Hendon Community Centre (HRD)

The polling card incorrectly identified the location of the polling station. The polling card arrow pointed to the Marquin Centre, rather than the Community Centre, which is where the polling station was located. W47 reports that the presiding officer told her that the same thing had happened last time and he had pointed out the error then, which had clearly not been corrected.

Moreover, there was no notice indicating the location of the polling station outside the correct location at the Community Centre.

j) Deansbrook School (HOC)

W48 complains of a 45 minute queue and reports that people on mobile phones were advising others not to turn up because of the wait. W49 reports that when she and her mother went to vote in the middle of the day there was no queue, but when her husband went at 8.15pm the queue was at least half an hour and there was a long queue behind him. W50 reports that she went to vote at about 9pm with a long, hot and uncomfortable queue. The queue was nearly an hour long. W51 reports that there were Council officials holding two black sacks and a big plastic envelope and some votes were being directed to this envelope. He is not clear what were the reasons for this and is concerned that votes may have gone missing.

k) Barnfield (HTC)

W52 reports that she went to vote at 11am and found long queues. She went again at 8pm, and waited for 45 minutes. The queue was in her estimation 200 people long and at least 30 people left without voting. W52a saw many people leave the queue. He comments the polling station was badly staffed and organised. W53 reports that he went to vote in the evening and had never experienced such a long queue with a wait of around 40 minutes. Only two officials were on duty and one had stopped for a tea break. Only two of the eight polling booths appeared to be in use. He reports that a number of people departed before 10pm because of the length of the queue. W54 reports that she started queuing at 7pm and waited one and a half hours to vote but left with queues still there.

W55 went to vote at about 7pm with a long queue, and left because of the queue which did not seem to be moving. She reports that 6 people left the queue at the same time she did without voting. She returned later in the evening and was just able to vote at 9.59pm. W56 went to vote at 7.30pm and saw long queues and people leaving because of the wait which was between a half and one hour. W57 reports that people were going home and not bothering to wait when she went to vote. It took her approximately 30 minutes in the queue and she saw at least 6 people leave. She comments that only one person was voting at a time, despite there being 6-8 booths, and the two polling staff were very slow and could not cope. W58 reports that he went to vote at around 8pm with a queue of around 30 people. He queued for over half an hour. W59 reports long queues of half an hour and comments that there were people still waiting at 10pm. The witness reports that two people were in the wrong polling station and had been there for some time before being informed (when they got to the end of the queue at 9.45pm) that they should have been elsewhere, thus losing their vote. W60 went to vote at 9.45pm but was locked out along with 6 other people at 10pm and was not allowed to vote.

l) Mill Hill East (HPC)

W61 reports that around 4pm there were long queues at one of the portacabins, but not at the other. The portacabins were allocated depending on the street in which the resident lived. W62 confirms this stating that his portacabin did not have a queue, but there was a very long queue at the other portacabin for the other streets. This was confirmed by W63. W64 reports that at 7pm the queues were extremely long, blocking the traffic and she saw 10-15 people leave rather than wait in the queue. W65 adds that when she went to vote there were none of the usual visual instructions in the polling booth as to how voters should vote and it was not clear what to do, which she believes led to spoiled ballot papers. She also reports that the resident in front of her was told his name had been removed from the register even though he had voted from the same address as he currently occupied on previous occasions.

m) Bell Lane (HQC)

W66 went to vote at 6.30pm and waited in the queue for about 1 hour. Her husband went a little later, but was not prepared to wait so long in the queue and went home without voting. W67 comments that she went to vote at 6.45pm and there was one long unnecessary queue because no official had the common sense to organise voters into the appropriate street queue, so there was

one table sitting idle, while the other had very long tailbacks. People left because they were unable to wait any longer.

W68 comments that when she and her husband went to vote at about 6pm the queue was about 20 minutes and whilst they were there the length of the queue had doubled. She comments the method of processing was lengthy and surprised at the time taken. W69 comments that he went to vote at around 7pm with a 20-minute queue. W69a reports their neighbour went to vote at 8pm and had a very long wait. If they had been any later, they may not have been permitted to vote. W70 comments that she went to vote at 8.40pm and was able to do so, but is aware of people queuing for up to two hours to vote in the evening, and is concerned that there was inadequate staff to cope with the demand.

n) Hyde (HRE)

W71 reports that a number of voters were turned away from the polling station.

o) St Augustine's Church (HSA)

W72 reports that his son and daughter were turned away from the polling station at 10pm. W73 reports that at approximately 6pm there was no queue but the staff were extremely slow in processing, and the street name on the polling card was incorrectly written causing confusion. There was also an inadequate number of polling booths, with no privacy.

p) Hendon Library (HQB)

W74 went to vote at 7.30am and comments that the polling station was "clearly already descending into shambles". He comments that part of the problem was having to obtain the ballot papers from two different officers, requiring queuing twice. W75 comments that at 7.30pm the polling station was quite busy but the queue was only 5 minutes.

q) Broadfields (HUA)

W75a reports long queues. There were no boards to say which table dealt with which street. Having been a polling clerk himself, he thought the station was run in a very unprofessional way.

The polling station map indicated the wrong location on the Council polling card, though this was correct on the Parliamentary polling card. Voters were turned away at 10pm.

r) St Peter's Church (HUC)

W76 comments that there were separate tables for the council estate and for the streets. There was a very long queue at the "flats" table, but not at the street table. The staff at the street table were not helping to deal with the queue at the other table. W77 comments that the polling station was "a shambles". W78 comments that she went to vote at 9.30pm and queued for 15 minutes and W79 comments that the queue was 20 minutes at 8.30pm.

s) Harvester car park (HOD)

W80 comments that he had received polling cards for both elections and went to vote at 8pm and at 8.30pm but the queues were too long. He went again at 10pm and was informed that his name was not on the register.

t) Station Road (HUB)

W81 comments that he went to vote late and did not encounter any problems at all in this polling station which primarily serves a Conservative area.

2. Postal votes

a) General

The order in which postal votes were dispatched inevitably meant that many did not arrive, or arrived too late. The whole purpose of the absentee ballot system is to enable people who would not be able to vote on polling day to vote at their convenience prior to the election. In Hendon many postal votes did not arrive, or arrived too late. Arrangements for substitute postal votes for those that did not arrive were also woefully inadequate. Most people were unaware that they could apply for a duplicate postal vote close to the election. Those that were aware faced a difficult and lengthy journey, especially if public transport was required, to go from one side of the borough to the other, to collect a duplicate at the most extreme east of Barnet, at the North London Business Park. Hendon constituency is at the most westerly side of the borough. Moreover, we have received

evidence of chaotic arrangements at the Electoral Services Department at the North London Business Park. Whilst local authority ballots were sent out in relatively good time, parliamentary ballots were sent out days later. On Friday morning, the Electoral Services officers had been going around the Council building asking for volunteers to hand deliver ballot papers around the borough as there had been a lot which had not been sent out, less than one week before the election.

There was evidence that there were large number of postal ballots lying around in the Department, due to volunteers being unable to find addresses. On the morning of 30th April there were approximately 2,500 unsorted ballot papers and approximately 100 Council employees were drafted in to hand deliver them, but those who were on the supplementary register had been neglected. This information has been supplied by W82, who does not wish to be named as the information has come from within the Council.

The son of W83 lives and works abroad and registered online at least a month ahead of polling day for a postal vote. He telephoned to enquire where it had been sent and was told that there was a large backlog and that "over 60,000 voting papers were caught up in the system". This was only one week before the election. The witness's son was told he might like to fly over and vote in person. Of course if he had done so, he would not have been allowed to vote, being registered for a postal vote.

W84 reports that whilst his postal vote arrived, his wife's did not. He telephoned the Council helpline with at least a week to go and was reassured that his wife's ballot paper would come. He was not advised to apply for a duplicate. He tried to call on the election day to see if she could vote but no one answered the help line. The witness's wife never got to vote.

b) Replacement ballots

Little advice was given to residents about what to do to obtain a replacement ballot paper for those who had not received them. The Labour Party were able to assist several voters by obtaining duplicates for them, at considerable inconvenience and time, having to obtain an authorisation.

W85, though, was denied a parliamentary ballot paper when a duplicate was requested on the basis that he had voted in the local elections. This was clearly wrong as his General Election ballot paper had not arrived.

Witnesses 86 and 87, a married couple, did not receive their ballot papers and went to the polling station at 2pm and were turned away and given a number to call. W87 called the number and was told that they would have to go to the North London Business Park but were not able to do so. She was told that a Council officer would call back with further advice. Around 7pm the Council called

back and asked whether they had gone to collect their ballot papers which they had not been able to do. W87 asked if they would be allowed to vote at their polling stations and was told that this would not be possible.

W88 and family went to vote as their postal votes had not arrived. They had just come off nightshift, at about 10am. They were told that they would have to go to North London Business Park to sort it out, and clearly this was not a practical proposition bearing in mind their personal circumstances and the three individuals concerned did not vote.

Witness 89 also went to the polling station at 7.30am and was not allowed to vote because she did not have a polling card even though her postal vote arrived. She was told that she would have to go to North London Business Park to get a temporary polling card or postal vote and was not able to do so, yet other people resident at the same address were able to vote. The witness had a letter confirming that she had been added to the electoral register.

W90 never received her postal vote despite daily phone calls to the office, being given the excuse that they were posted out late as “the candidates did not confirm their candidature until late and the Royal Mail promised to deliver them”. Clearly not a true account, concerning nomination of candidates. She returned from overseas to collect another postal vote from the North London Business Park, having to travel by bus. She comments that the original postal vote has still not been delivered.

W91 comments that his 87-year-old mother did not receive her postal vote even though she telephoned the Council and complained of its non-arrival for days. She complained on the morning of the election day and it was finally hand-delivered that afternoon and the messenger waited for it to be completed and took it away. The witness has doubts whether the vote was included.

No such facilities appear to have been offered to any of the others whose postal votes did not arrive.

c) Postal vote not requested

W92 had not wanted a postal vote and when he was sent a form to renew it he did not complete it, yet postal votes were sent to him anyway. He threw the ballot papers away when the postal votes arrived because he wished to vote in person, and when he went to the polling station he was refused the right to vote. He was able to retrieve the local authority ballot, but not the parliamentary ballot.

W93 and his wife were sent postal votes that they had not requested and they were not allowed to vote when they went in person to the polling station. The postal votes had arrived but they were not advised by the polling clerks that they could take them in person to the polling station so they did not vote.

W94 was told at the polling station that she was not able to vote as she was registered for a postal vote. According to the electoral register, she is not registered for a postal vote and had not applied for one. She was denied her right to vote.

d) Postal vote to wrong address

W95 registered for a postal vote and specified that he wished his votes to be sent to his work address rather than his home address because he would be away from home in the period leading up to the election. The voting papers were sent to his home address.

W96's daughter was at university in York and had registered for a postal vote to be sent there, which did not arrive in time for her to vote and send it back.

e) Local authority postal votes only

Witnesses 97 to 101 inclusive received their local authority postal ballots but not the General Election ballots to which they were entitled.

f) Damaged postal votes

W102 found her parliamentary postal vote torn when it was received from the Council. W103 had the postal vote returned back to her after she had posted it, because it was ripped in the post and it was too late to take it to the polling station. W104 received his General Election ballot paper but no envelope for returning the voting paper, which he posted back by addressing an envelope personally, and it is thus not clear whether or not his vote would have been recorded.

g) Voted with a postal vote

W104a was allowed to vote conventionally at the polling station although she was registered for a postal vote. The postal vote had not arrived. This does not appear to have been offered to others.

h) Late receipt of postal votes

Witnesses 105 and 106 applied for postal votes on 15th April, stressing that the postal votes would have to arrive by 29th April when they were going on holiday. Nothing arrived. They returned early from holiday and went straight to the polling station to find that they were not allowed to vote. The polling clerks said that as it was after 5pm he could do nothing. On returning home the husband's papers were there but the wife's were not. They were not told that they could have taken the one ballot paper to the polling station and voted.

Witnesses 107 and 108 had a similar experience, leaving for holiday on 29th April before the ballot papers arrived. They had emailed the Council on the Monday before and received by return an assurance that the ballots were being sent out on Monday and Tuesday of that week. They were not received by their departure.

Witness 109 did not receive her postal vote in time, even though the other members of the family received their postal votes in good time. W110 had to go abroad three days before the election and whilst the local government ballot papers arrived two weeks earlier, the General Election ballot paper did not arrive in time for him to vote.

A number of voters received their ballot papers extremely late, and bearing in mind the bank holiday Monday, there was a risk that the ballot papers would not be returned to the Council in time by the Post Office. W111 and W112 received their ballot papers on the Friday before the election: they had anticipated being away by then but were able to vote as they had not yet gone. A similar experience was that of witnesses 113 and 114 whose postal votes arrived on Friday 30th April and they were going away on 1st May. Witnesses 115 to 119 inclusive only received their ballot papers on Saturday 1st May, very late. W120 received hers on Tuesday 4th May. W121 and W122 received their votes on 5th May and took them to the polling station. Witness 123 received her postal vote on 6th May. These witnesses were all concerned that their postal votes may not have been received by the Council in time to count, as is the position for witness 124 whose ballot arrived two days before the election and was posted back. Witness 125 telephoned to check that her ballot paper had been received by the Council but was told that it was "not yet showing on the system".

i) Non-arrival of postal votes

Witnesses 126 to 155 inclusive did not receive their postal votes for which they were registered. Of these, witnesses 129, 131 and 146 all went to the polling station and were denied the right to vote

on the basis that they had been issued with a postal vote, even though these had not arrived. They were not given any other alternative, nor advice as to how to obtain duplicates.

Witness 147 comments that he spoke to the Electoral Registration Department at Barnet when there was an advertisement on television saying that there was still time to register; he and his wife completed and signed the forms but heard nothing further. Witness 154 comments that he and his wife (W153) sent in application forms by first class post well before the deadline. He called on Friday 30th April to find out why they had not received their postal votes. He was told the papers had been sent out earlier in the week and was told that if the postal votes had not arrived by Tuesday, then they could get duplicates from the North London Business Park. As they were flying out on holiday that day that would not have been practical and their postal votes had still not arrived.

3. Other

a) Bad advice

In the report above there are numerous references to bad/none advice from Council staff, in addition to those reported in this section.

Witness 156 did not have her polling card so went to Orange Hill polling station at around 6pm. She was told she could not vote there and that she would be telephoned to let her know where she could vote. She was called at 9.45-9.50pm and told to go to Trinity Church polling station in Eversfield Gardens. That was clearly too late for her to go anyway, but even if she had gone at that time she would not have been allowed to vote because of the existing queue there at 10pm. There was no reason why she could not have been given this information whilst at Orange Hill polling station or she could have been called earlier.

Witness 157 did not receive her polling card. She went to Deansbrook polling station because she lives close to her mother and that was where her mother voted. She was told she was not on the register and could not vote. She was sent away. She was not advised to go to the correct polling station, even though she was registered to vote at Eversfield Gardens polling station.

b) Polling cards not arrived

In addition to those previously referred to, many voters did not receive their polling cards and believed that they were not able to vote without them, and accordingly they did not vote. These include witnesses 158, 159 and 160. Witness 161 received a polling card even though he was under

age and witness 162 reports that the voter in front of him in the queue had two sets of polling cards, but did not attempt to vote twice.

c) Registration issues

Witness 163 has dual nationality and contacted Electoral Registration Office on 20th April to change his registration details. He was told that if he emailed a photocopy of his British passport that would be sufficient to prove his nationality, which he then did and he received a confirmation by a return of email that this had been received and the register would be changed. In fact, the register was not amended and despite calling the Registration Office daily to ask about his polling card his details were not changed and he was denied the vote.

W164 and 164a sent their registration forms on 17th April, being British nationals of Somali origin. They did not receive polling cards and when they went to vote they were told their names were not added to the register. Witnesses 165 and 166 received polling cards in their names at their previous address across the road, despite having re-registered at their new address. They went to vote with their polling cards and were told they were not on the register. W167 informed the Electoral Registration Office of his change of address but he remained registered at his old address and therefore did not receive his postal vote. W168 received polling cards for both elections but was told that she could not vote because her name was not on the electoral register. Witness 169 found that the Council had slightly misspelled her first name on the polling card. Her father wrote to correct the name but they still sent the polling card with the wrong name. She believed she was not therefore eligible to vote and did not do so. W169a was eighteen years of age and registered to vote by post but was given bad advice by the Electoral Registration officer, being told there was a mistake in his application and that he was not eighteen years old when he was. W169b has a letter confirming that she had been added to the electoral register as published on 1st December which would be in force for the period of the election with her elector number. She was not permitted to vote.

W169c was told that he was not registered to vote when he went to do so, yet his name clearly appears on the electoral register with his polling number. Witness 170 went twice to vote and on the third occasion at around 10pm he found that he was not allowed to vote because it was said that he was not on the electoral register, though he has a polling number on the register.

Witnesses 171 to 174 inclusive were not allowed to vote at the polling station but were given no reason why. Witness 175 was told that his name had been deleted from the register when he went

to vote at Barnfield School although he had a polling card and went with this. The same applies to W176.

W177 was also told that his name had been removed from the register, but he was nevertheless allowed by the presiding officer to cast his vote. He was given no explanation as to why his name had been removed from the register, nor whether his vote was allowed to count. He had received polling cards.

Witness 178 applied to register before the closing date but had not been registered by the Council by the time of the election.

d) Proxy votes

Witness 179 reports that her daughter attempted to vote by proxy. She lives in Bahrain but the polling card was never received for her proxy vote at her parents' home.