

Elections and Electorate Engagement

Report of the London Assembly's
Elections Investigative Committee

May 2002

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Published by the London Assembly
Greater London Authority
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Marsham Street
LONDON
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Chair's Forward



The Greater London Authority Elections of May 2000 marked a fundamental development in the structure of London government. A London Mayor, and a total of 25 Assembly Members were successfully elected to serve in a brand new Authority with a range of powers and responsibilities.

If the desire amongst the capital's population for a Mayor and Assembly was unambiguous, their presence at the ballot box, and their attention to Assembly Members in particular, was low-key. In fact, had the GLA elections met with a far more enthusiastic response, the votes might still be being counted today.

It was a success insofar as it elected a Mayor and 25 Members, however the count operation revealed substantial areas for improvement, on a fraught fourth of May.

What also emerged from that May election, and indeed the two subsequent years of the Authority's operation, was a profound need to engage the capital's population in the work of the GLA, and in the election of both its Mayor and Members.

This report is split into two sections, (Technical Issues and Electoral Engagement). These can be summarised respectively, under the objectives for a transparent and smooth electoral process and count at the GLA elections in 2004, and a substantial increase in turnout.

The Technical issues, including the hours of polling station operation, the future of electronic counting, and proposals for the Count operation itself, can in most cases afford clear guidance and recommendations. The issues surrounding Electoral Engagement however, are not so clear cut.

With a quite unique diversity, London poses challenging questions to conventional electoral practices. As such, this section of the report represents a further contribution to the debate, as opposed to a definitive answer to an age-old problem. Nevertheless, surely the most contemporary and outstanding target for engagement studies, is to address the disproportionately low number of young people and ethnic minorities turning out to vote. The Electoral Commission are also currently conducting studies into electoral engagement.

The GLA is in many ways a flagship Authority, and it is hoped that the contents of this report and the application of its recommendations, will provide a sound model in the field of electoral operation, and public engagement with the process.

Brian Coleman
Chair of the Elections Investigative Committee

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The Elections Investigative Committee

The Elections Investigative Committee was established by the London Assembly in 2001. The following membership was agreed for the year 2001/2002.

Brian Coleman (Chair)	Conservative
Toby Harris (Deputy Chair)	Labour
Sally Hamwee	Liberal Democrat
Darren Johnson	Green

The terms of reference of the Committee are set out in appendix A.

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Executive summary

The people of London elected the Mayor and London Assembly in May 2000 (hereafter referred to as the “2000 election”) who together formed the first strategic authority for the Capital in 14 years. With it came a number of new innovations, one of which was the election process itself.

For the first time, voters were faced with first and second choices for Mayor, and votes for both their own constituency Assembly Member and London Wide Members. New electronic forms of counting, provision for early voting, and an increased use of postal ballots were all innovations.

It was a significant achievement to run elections of this nature with no challenge to the process but it is hardly surprising that not everything went to plan. In view of this, the London Assembly established a scrutiny committee to consider what could be learned from the experience and applied to the next GLA elections in 2004 (hereafter referred to as the “2004 election”).

Sources of evidence

Evidence was gathered from the following sources:

- Written evidence from the Government Office for London, the Greater London Returning Officer (for the 2000 election), Constituency and Borough Returning Officers and other interested parties.
- Evidentiary hearings held on two occasions to explore issues in more depth that submitted written evidence.
- The results of surveys conducted by Government Office for London and others before, during and after the 2000 election.
- The knowledge and experience of specialist consultants appointed to assist the Assembly Scrutiny Committee in its work.
- A variety of research documents for which the references are identified within the text.

More information on the background papers used and information sought from those from whom submissions were received are shown in appendix B.

Structure of the report

This report considers the elections from two perspectives:

- Technical aspects of the conduct of the election poll.
- Seeking to gain greater electorate engagement.

The technical aspects of the conduct of the election poll

This perspective is considered in the first three parts of the report.

- In considering the **election planning and preparation process**, the Committee makes recommendations on the leadership and direction that the Greater London Returning Officer will need to give to future elections and seek greater involvement of key groups and individuals.

- Changes are recommended to the **conduct of the poll** itself, particularly in relation to pre-election mailshots, voting hours, ballot papers, early voting, postal and proxy voting, nominations and the role of polling station staff and their training.
- In relation to **counts**, the Committee examined the innovations introduced for the 2000 elections and identifies recommendations arising from this experience.

Electorate engagement

The Assembly debated the issue of electorate engagement on 9 January 2002 (the discussion paper and minutes for this debate are shown in appendix C of this report). Together with research information, the Committee considers that improving electorate engagement can be considered as having three components.

- Improving the *awareness* of the electorate.
- Creating greater *opportunities* for electorate engagement.
- Increasing the *desire* for electorate engagement.

A summary of recommendations is shown in appendix D. Some of the changes suggested in this report require changes to legislation and are listed in Appendix E.

Planning and Preparation

The 2000 elections were completely new to both voters and those organising them, and therefore represent a major challenge to everyone. With the benefit of hindsight, it should be possible to avoid some of the difficulties encountered in 2000. Key to this is the planning and preparation process.

The Committee considered two important issues that emerged in this area as it gathered evidence. These were:

- Leadership and direction
- The involvement of groups and individuals involved in the election process.

Leadership and Direction

The first election timetable was difficult. The election took place in April 2000, but the GLA Act did not receive Royal Assent until November 1999. The Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) was not formally appointed until March 2000. Work had proceeded before this time through the Government Office for London, but the delay in the appointment of such a key officer presented a major difficulty for anyone appointed to the post.

This suggests that the planning for the 2004 elections should start earlier, and in our view, a lead in time of around 2 years is required. With a lead in time of this length, it would enable the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) to take personal responsibility for all aspects of the preparation process. This is important to establish a single point for decision making, providing clarity of direction and leadership.

Following the establishment of the GLA, legislation requires the GLA Chief Executive to become the GLRO and therefore no delay is expected. However, the GLRO can choose to discharge his responsibilities in a variety of ways. It is therefore recommended that he set out an action plan early in 2002 including the allocation of roles for different members of the project team.

The role of the GLRO also requires clarification. The GLRO is responsible for aggregating the votes whilst Constituency Returning Officers (CRO) are required to gather the vote in their constituency. The GLA Act requires the Constituency Returning Officers (CRO) to “co-operate” with the GLRO. There are other specific powers in relation to the verification and counting of votes. However, the specific powers can make it difficult for the GLRO to give directions on other matters of importance e.g. How to run polling stations.

Deputies are important to ensure cover in the case of unavoidable absence, but also to take responsibility for key areas of activity. The GLRO will wish to make a decision about when deputies are required, particularly as the workload increases during the implementation phase closer to election-day. As the lead in time is recommended to be two years, the GLRO will want to consider carefully whether a deputy ought to be appointed at the outset of the preparation process as part of the project planning team.

In addition to deputies, the GLRO will wish to appoint other members of a project team. Prior to the 2000 election, GOL had access to specialist assistance. It would be sensible to make similar expertise available to the GLRO for the 2004 election. Resources will have to be made available to make this possible.

The election is a significant and complex event for London. It follows that it should be properly resourced at the outset.

Recommendations

That the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) should set out an action plan for the discharge of his responsibilities in early 2002. This should include setting out the roles of different members of his project team.

That the GLRO should appoint key members of the project planning team in early 2002 and thereafter as the need arises.

The GLRO must have the financial resources to appoint the full election team in good time for the 2004 elections, and have access to other specialist resources available to Government Office for London at the 2000 election.

Further consideration should be given to widening the GLRO's powers of direction of the Constituency Returning Officers to ensure consistency and good practice across London.

Any legislative changes arising from the above must be identified two years before the election in order to ensure amendments are drafted early enough to reach the statute books in good time.

The Involvement of Key Groups and Individuals

The Electoral Commission is the statutory body responsible for reviewing electoral law and practice, modernising the electoral process and promoting voter awareness. They will therefore wish to be involved at an early stage with any changes to legislation that might be required, and are legally bound to be consulted regarding any changes to relevant secondary legislation. The Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) should ensure that this is the case.

As indicated above, the Greater London Returning Officer is responsible for collating the votes at a London Wide Level, but there are other key groups and individuals below this level. These include:

Constituency Returning Officers – These are responsible for collating the vote at a constituency level. There are fourteen GLA constituencies which themselves cover a number of Boroughs.

Borough Returning Officers – these are responsible for the vote at a Borough level that go to make up the fourteen GLA constituencies.

Electoral Administrators – these are other officials and staff who undertake all the management and administrative duties at Borough level including setting up and staffing polling stations, distributing ballot boxes, ensuring the votes are taken to a central location, paying staff and so on.

Political Parties, candidates and agents – these will be keen to ensure that the election is conducted in a manner consistent with legal requirements for the election and that no undue advantage is given to other candidates.

The company supplying computer software required for the electronic counting of votes.

The media

Other interested organisations.

For the 2000 election, meetings were arranged for Constituency Returning Officers (CRO), initially with Government Office for London and then subsequently with the GLRO. It was intended that Constituency Returning Officers (CRO) would cascade information from those meetings to the other key organisations and individuals listed above. Despite the best efforts of all involved, this was less than effective. Comments as to why this should be the case included:

- Early use of existing election expertise and experience could have reduced problems e.g. in the preparation of the electronic counting computer contract.
- When first appointed, there was conflicting information from the GLRO and Government Office for London.
- Not inviting Borough Returning Officers fostered discontent and delays.
- The GLRO was not involved early enough with the computer supplier of electronic counting machines and software.
- Some Constituency Returning Officers did not follow the guidance of the GLRO.
- Identifying who was responsible for Constituency counts was unclear in some cases.

Recommendations

That the Electoral Commission must be consulted at all stages on changes to legislation and voter education.

That effective joint working with all relevant Returning Officers, Electoral Administrators, contractors, Political Parties, media and interested parties must start early in 2002.

That the GLRO should meet with CROs, BROs and Electoral Administrators at the earliest opportunity to prepare and establish an action plan.

The Poll

There has been increasing concern over the last few years about the turnout at both national and local elections. Changing the way the poll is conducted is one mechanism by which voter turnout can be changed (others include improving awareness of the election and the relevance of the political process to the voter's circumstances). The 2000 election not only provided the opportunity to experiment with a new type of authority, but also to investigate arrangements to make it easier for people to vote.

What follows is an examination of some of those arrangements organised under the following headings:

- Pre –election mailshots
- Voting hours.
- Ballot papers.
- Early voting.
- Postal and proxy voting.
- Nominations.
- Polling staffing and training.

Pre – election mailshots

The Committee considers that pre-election mailshots are an important mechanism by which voter awareness can be raised. Mayoral candidates were allowed to join in a single mailshot in the 2000 elections. The Committee supports the use of such mailshots for the 2004 elections, but wishes this to be extended to cover the Assembly candidates as well. This might most effectively be achieved by combining any mailshot with the normal GLRO information sent to voters on how they can cast their vote.

It was also recognised that London has some of the best marketing expertise in the UK. It is recommended that a publicity campaign, non partisan in nature should be established to remind voters of the importance of their vote in determining some important aspects of life in the Capital.

Recommendations

That the GLRO should provide the opportunity for pre-election mailshots of both the Assembly and the Mayoral candidates in order to raise voter awareness as part of his normal information to voters on the voting process.

That the GLRO should make use of the marketing expertise available in London to raise awareness amongst voters of the election.

Voting Hours

The decision to open polls from 7.00am to 10.00pm for future GLA elections has been made, and therefore no recommendations are made on this point. However, for completeness, we examined this aspect of the 2000 election.

The 2000 election experimented with earlier opening of polling stations starting at 7.00 a.m. Polling stations in ordinary Local Government Elections open at 8.00am. This was to see if an earlier opening time increased turnout.

GOL conducted a survey of those voting in the first hour of polling. 73% of those polled said that they had voted on the way to work but would have done so if the opening time was 8.00am.

The 2000 election poll closed at 9.00pm, the same as that for normal local government elections. A large majority of those surveyed said they would not vote between 9.00 – 10.00 pm.

Ballot Papers

The 2000 election used electronic counting for the first time. A number of problems emerged from this experience that are explored later in this section. One of the areas of concern was the design of the Ballot Papers produced by DRS, the company responsible for the counting machines.

We surveyed a number of those involved in the 2000 election for their views on the Ballot papers used. Our findings were:

- Voters found the design of the Ballot Paper unhelpful, particularly as they were unclear about the voting system.
- Changes to Ballot Paper design were difficult to make as the number of candidates was not known until two weeks before the election. Bringing the date for receipt of nominations and publication of the statement of persons nominated forward by a further two weeks would make final changes to the Ballot Paper possible.
- Bringing forward the printing of Ballot Papers and Nomination lists would assist in meeting a likely increase in demand for postal voting.
- Many Ballot Papers were numbered incorrectly. Many Boroughs had to check every Ballot Paper as a result.

These problems arose despite designs being approved by a GOL, SOLACE and AEA working group and testing by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, political parties and focus groups.

Recommendations

That more extensive testing should be carried out of prototype Ballot Papers.

That the date for receipt of nominations and publication of the statement of persons nominated should be brought forward. The change in timing should be in accordance with the change in the statutory deadline for the publication of the notice of election highlighted in the nominations section of this report on (page 9).

Early Voting

The term “early voting” relates to the opening of polling stations for several days before election day. At the 2000 election, polling stations were opened the Thursday, Friday and Saturday before Polling day. The objective was to give a greater opportunity for voters to vote in much the same way as early and late opening of polling stations is designed to do.

A number of problems emerged with early voting from the 2000 election. These include:

- The lateness of the legislation allowing early voting meant that innovative locations such as shopping centres were difficult to organise. Where shopping centres were used, the number of votes cast was higher.

- The lateness of the legislation also made the provision of electronic registers of electors to polling stations difficult. Electronic Registers make it easier to communicate who has voted to those with a legitimate interest in this information e.g. election agents. Software companies made efforts to provide them despite this and were appreciated by polling stations that used them.
- The number of electors determined the number of polling stations in each Borough. This is set out in Regulations. Placing a restriction on the number of polling stations gave rise to accusations of political advantage arising from the location of polling stations.
- Turnout ranged from 0.48% to 4.2%. 60,000 electors used the early voting facility or 3% of all voters. This is a disappointingly low turnout, partly as a result of poor publicity.
- Low turnout meant that the cost per vote was high.

Balanced against the problems identified above is some positive feedback. This includes:

- The majority of early voters did not have to wait and feedback was generally good from those that used the facility.
- 37% of those that voted would not have voted without the early voting facility.
- 75% would choose to vote early if offered the opportunity in future.

Recommendations

That early voting facilities ought to be made available for the 2004 election as a 2 year lead in time will assist a proper experimentation to be conducted.

That a minimum of three early voting polling stations at different locations be established in each Borough.

That polling stations should be located in places where the public often meet such as shopping centres.

That early voting stations should be open between 8.00am and 8.00pm on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday before Polling day.

Extensive public awareness campaigns must take place to advise people of the early voting facility.

That candidates and their agents should have access to either or electronic copies of the register once the early voting period has ceased but before Polling day.

Postal and Proxy voting

New legislation for the 2001 Parliamentary elections, and all subsequent elections, allowed for postal voting on request for the first time (postal voting was only allowed under specified circumstance rather than on request previously). London Boroughs that used this system at the time reported increases in postal voting from 40% to over 100%. Postal voting was the only method of voting that reported such large increases in voter participation in elections and is generally regarded as a positive result.

The facility for postal votes will be available for the 2004 GLA elections. However, there are a number of issues to be resolved associated with the use of this facility. These include:

- Processing applications for postal and proxy votes is a function carried out by Electoral Registration Offices all local authorities including London Boroughs. London Boroughs have limited funds to publicise the facility for postal or proxy votes, or receive and administer such votes. One form of assistance could be the central funding of the publicity to encourage the use of postal or proxy votes. The Electoral Commission expects (subject to funding decisions by Parliament) to undertake twice-yearly campaigns (including promotion of postal voting) which will be linked to key election dates. However, it will be important for Boroughs to liaise closely with the Commission to ensure a consistent message is delivered across London.
- There is concern over the fraudulent use of postal votes. The Electoral Commission in their review of the 2001 general election “did not find evidence to suggest unlawful use of postal votes on a significant scale”. However, London electoral administrators have reservations about 100% postal votes because of the increased risk of fraud.
- It is not clear whether Consignia (Royal Mail) can cope with the volume of mail generated by 100% postal votes. Problems were encountered during the 2000 general election. There may also be further strains on the service if Consignia are contracted to deliver official and political party literature to voters.
- As two voting papers are required for the election of the Mayor and Assembly, the issue, receipt and counting of postal votes is a complex process. Providing electronic Registers of Electors would assist Boroughs to keep a tally of those that have voted, and communicate these easily and quickly to others with a legitimate interest in this information.

Recommendations

That piloting 100% postal voting, whether on a constituency basis or for the whole of London, should not be considered for 2004.

There should be concerted action to encourage postal voting as a means to increase voter turnout. Funding for the boroughs must take account of the resource implications of increased postal voting arising from postal voting on request.

That consideration should be given to central funding of advertising and publicity for postal and proxy voting through the Electoral Commission. Boroughs should be encouraged to liaise with the GLRO and Electoral Commission to ensure that the advertising and publicity provides a consistent message across London.

That early discussion should be held with electoral software suppliers about the feasibility of electronic postal and proxy voting registers to Boroughs to assist them in keeping records of those that have voted and communicating them to others with a legitimate interest in this information.

Nominations

All those standing for public office in the UK have to either provide a deposit, or seek nominations or both before they can put themselves forward for election. This is to dissuade spurious and non serious nominations being made.

The Committee debated at some length about what level of deposit and/or nominations should be used for the 2004 election. In the event, the Committee agreed that a combination of a deposit (£10,000) and nominations (50 per Borough) would be appropriate.

Another issue was the time available between nomination and election day. The 2000 election demonstrated the difficulties of having too short a period. In particular, printing over 10m ballot papers and providing more opportunity for postal votes to be distributed and returned are considered relevant. On balance, it is recommended that the date for nominations should be brought forward by seven calendar days. An adjustment to the statutory timetable will be required.

Recommendations

Mayoral nominations should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and be accompanied by a deposit of £10,000.

Nominations for the Assembly Constituency Members should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and a deposit of £1000.

Nominations for London Wide Assembly Members (Political party list members) should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and a deposit of £5000.

That the statutory deadline for the publication of the notice of election should be brought forward to be not later than the 32nd day before the day of the election and all other deadlines days prior to the publication of the notice of poll be adjusted by 7.

Polling Station Staffing And Training

A number of issues arose during the 2000 election in relation to polling staff. Some of these are outlined below:

- Electronic counting of ballot papers meant that the papers had to be kept as flat as possible. Some authorities employed additional polling clerks to ensure that ballot papers were not folded when placed in ballot boxes. This was found to be effective. Similar arrangements might be required at the 2004 election if the same type of electronic counting is required.
- It is becoming more difficult to recruit polling staff. Many local authorities used to release staff for electoral duties without deductions of pay i.e. polling staff would be paid for their normal daily work and receive an election fee for the day. With the outsourcing and the establishment of business units for many local authority services, many staff are forced to take annual or other forms of leave for polling day. This makes election duties less attractive. It is suggested that fees be increased for the next election to restore the attractiveness of election duties.
- Some staff appeared to be unfamiliar with the new voting arrangements. Differences between Boroughs suggest differences in the quality of training. It is recommended that part of the election fees paid to Boroughs should be earmarked for training purposes.

Recommendations

That the GLRO should review GLA election fees having regard to the complexity of GLA elections and the attractiveness of election duties.

That the GLRO should develop and agree a training strategy for all staff involved in preparing and running the GLA elections, and monitor and review its implementation. Consideration should be given to providing this training centrally.

That part of the poll staff fee should include a staff- training component, and attendance at that training should be a condition on which election duties are undertaken.

Counts

As with polling arrangements, experiments were tried with the counting of votes. Principal amongst these was the use of electronic counting machines that brought new problems for those running the election. In this section, we examine some of these innovations under the following headings:

- Automated count.
- Verifications, adjudications and spoilt ballot papers.
- Recounts.
- Accuracy and transparency of the automated count.
- Venue for the coordination of results and relationships with the media.

Automated Count

Manual counting of votes cast in the GLA election is not a viable option. This is because of the complex nature of the poll. It is recommended that electronic counting arrangements, similar to those for the 2000 elections be put in place for the 2004 election.

A dress rehearsal of the count was organised by Government Office for London and DRS, the company that supplied the counting machines and software. This was useful in identifying:

- Suitable physical layouts for different parts of the count.
- Staffing the process to be followed including the adjudication of ballot papers as well as some problems identified at a local level.

However, reports from counts suggest that the electronic counting machines had a difficult time in meeting their performance requirements. The Committee heard that there were a variety of factors associated with this failure that include:

- Constituencies were not equipped with sufficient scanners or computers.
- Machines were super sensitive to smudges and fingerprints resulting in the rejection of ballot papers. Ballot papers rejected in this way had to be verified manually in a separate process.
- There was general agreement that the machines supplied were of poorer quality than those used at dress rehearsals.

Despite these shortcomings, insufficient use was made of performance clauses contained in the contract with DRS. Invoking such clauses is always difficult, and more attention may be required to ensure that any such clauses are robust and enforceable in future.

Poor management of the count itself exacerbated the difficulties associated with the electronic counting machines. In some constituencies, insufficient attention was given to the setting up of the count area. Some of the lessons from the dress rehearsal count were not taken on board at constituency level. Improved project management is therefore required for what is a complex count.

A number of witnesses and respondents pointed out that undertaking a complex count lasting around eight hours following a sixteen- hour day of polling is unsustainable. It is recommended that the count should therefore take place the day after polling day and not before 9am.

Recommendations

That as manual counting of votes at GLA elections is not a viable option because of the complexity of the voting system, a decision about automated counting for the 2004 elections needs to be made in January 2002 with a view to procurement being completed in the autumn of 2002.

That counting should not start at the close of poll and should commence the day after the election not before 9.00 a.m.

That the GLRO and the contractor engaged to supply and operate automated counting systems must give clear and unambiguous guidance to CROs and electoral administrators on the detailed arrangements for the count.

That performance clauses in the contract must for the supply of electronic counting machines and software must be clear and invoked if the contractor does not achieve the specified deliverables.

That detailed and realistic count rehearsals must be carried out for each constituency, involving Returning Officers, election agents, electoral administrators, contractors, and other interested parties. Learning points should be built back in to the final arrangements and the GLRO's guidance and directions.

Verifications, Adjudications And Spoilt Ballot Papers

There was a large volume of ballot papers requiring adjudication at the 2000 election that created a great deal of furore at the time. Political agents are an important part of this process, helping to ensure transparency. The greater the number of adjudications, the greater the opportunity for disputes to arise that in turn raises doubts about the outcome of the count. There were two principal reasons for this:

- As mentioned above, counting machines were super sensitive to smudges and finger prints that resulted in them being rejected even though they were perfectly good ballot papers in terms of indicating votes.
- A number of electors chose not to complete all parts of the ballot paper. This is acceptable practice on the part of electors. Around 300,000 voters did not complete the second preference for Mayor, 130,000 where the vote for Assembly Constituency members was left blank, and 70,000 where the London member was left blank. This leaves about 65,000 genuinely spoilt papers.

Recommendations

That Constituency Returning Officers should form specially trained teams dedicated to dealing with papers rejected by the counting machines for adjudication.

That a separate category needs to be created on the declaration of result sheets for recording blank or partially completed ballot papers to distinguish them from 'spoilt' ballot papers.

Recounts

Constituency Officers were not given clear advice from the GLRO about the level at which a recount of the vote is required. Ultimately, the final decision must be made by the Constituency Returning Officers who have access to statistics such as ballot paper accounts. The margin of error expected from electronic counting machines is also a factor and be determined in conjunction with the electronic counting machine contractor. In view of this, we recommend:

Recommendation

That the GLRO must give CROs clear and standardised advice about the recounting of ballot papers whilst recognising the responsibility of the CRO to make the decision on the day.

Accuracy And Transparency Of Automated Count

In our system of democracy, openness and transparency is one means by which all parties in an election are able to accept the outcome of an election process regardless of the outcome for them. Extraordinary efforts are therefore made to ensure that this is the case.

Both oral and written submissions from Constituency Returning Officers suggested that whilst the overall results reflected electors wishes, there were some concerns at a candidate level over the accuracy and transparency of the count. These included:

- The level of confidence in the detailed results for individual candidates was not as high as it should be because of a lack of information during the count.
- Agents need to be able to see various printouts to assure themselves that counting is proceeding properly and as envisaged during the count.
- Concerns about some aspects of the count suggest that the system may not have been sufficiently robust.

The concern about the transparency of the system needs to be considered. Confidence in the system is paramount. In particular, a new relationship of openness and information sharing between political agents and those administering the election needs to be forged. This means allowing political parties an input outside their normal sphere of influence, including:

- Decisions on equipment
- Training
- Count set up and processes

There would be a number of benefits to holding both the count, and coordination of the count, centrally. These include:

- Enabling the technical expertise of the electronic counting machine contractor to be concentrated in one venue rather than fourteen.
- Consistency in process and decision making
- The possibility of help from colleagues if a particular constituency was in some difficulty.

However, the cost implications of such an approach would have to be carefully considered.

Recommendations

That an automated count system must incorporate a process for continuous validation of the accuracy of the count.

To give everyone confidence in the election, the contract must specify the means for securing the transparency of the count system, the processes, and how the system will be expected to provide a running tally of the counts.

A new relationship needs to be formed between electoral practitioners and political parties and their agents to ensure confidence in the proposed systems.

That a single centralised venue for the counting and coordination of results from an electronic counting system should be adopted for the 2004 election subject to a suitable venue being available and it being economic to do so.

Venue for Co-Ordination of Results and media relationships

There were two issues that emerged from our evidence. These were:

- The central venue (Queen Elizabeth 11 Hall) for coordinating the results from constituency results was not entirely satisfactory. The count was spread over two floors and amongst a number of rooms. Facilities for candidates were not considered satisfactory.
- The GLRO dealt with media enquiries efficiently although the Constituency Returning Officers did not always agree with his remarks. It also meant that Constituency Returning Officers were not able to make contact with the GLRO as required.

Recommendations

That careful consideration must be given to the selection of a venue for co-ordinating the results of the elections in 2004.

That suitable arrangements should be in place to deal with the media.

Electorate Engagement

Electorate engagement involves both communicating to the electorate, and receiving information and views from the electorate. Other parts of this report deal with the election of Members to the Assembly. This section seeks to explore engagement as a pre-cursor to the election process for the Authority i.e. The Mayor and the Assembly. The Committee believes that increasing electorate engagement with the political process can be reasonably expected to result in higher turnouts at election time.

One way of structuring the debate on electorate engagement is to consider the following:

- Generating ***awareness*** of the organisation and its purpose;
- Providing the ***opportunity*** to engage;
- Creating a ***desire*** to engage.

What follows is a discussion of each of these areas. Whilst suggestions are made, there are no easy answers. As such, this section of the report seeks to contribute to the debate rather than providing definitive solutions. It also draws on the Assembly plenary debate on electorate engagement held on 9 January 2001. The discussion paper used as a basis for the plenary meeting and the minutes are attached as appendix B.

What is inescapable is that it is the responsibility of the Authority to justify its remit to Londoners through securing a sufficient number of votes to form an acceptable mandate.

Generating *awareness*

Overall Awareness of the GLA

The Government Office for London presented evidence to the Committee on its public information campaign prior to the 2000 GLA elections¹. The Campaign cost over £4m and had the following objectives:

- Inform Londoners about the role of the Mayor and Assembly;
- Alert them to the date of the election; and
- Inform them about the new voting systems and methods.

The campaign sought to deliver on its objectives through:

- Radio and T.V. and other advertising
- The distribution of approximately 6m leaflets (3.5m for household delivery, 2m from Post Office Counters and remainder through a help line) with copies available in 8 languages and 3 alternative formats for those with sight disabilities.
- 19 factsheets made widely available.
- A telephone helpline with a minicom facility.
- A website.
- Other promotional activities including postcards and washroom advertisements in 500 pubs and night clubs.
- A £100,000 support fund for third party campaigns to three organisations (Operation Black Vote, Institute of Citizenship, and Charles Bailey who produced a song and toured key areas by bus to encourage young people to vote).
- Ministerial events.

The impact of the campaign was tracked through an independent company (Continental Research). They undertook interviews before the publicity campaign started, the week before the election day and after election day. Between the start of the publicity campaign and week prior to election day, key results of those questioned in this context were:

- Voter awareness rose from 4% before the campaign to over 50%.
- Overall likelihood to vote rose from 35% to 41%.
- Likelihood to vote for 18-24 year-olds rose from 14% to 25%, and 22% to 42% for ethnic minorities.

In reviewing the effectiveness of the campaign, the Greater London Returning Officer concluded that:

- The TV, radio, press and poster campaign was “expensive and its achievements are marginal.”
- “the leaflet is a valuable source of information”
- the website was a valuable source of information with 182,000 ‘hits’ recorded and should be used again for the 2004 election.

¹ 24 October 2001 *The first Election of the Mayor and Assembly for London* by the Office of the Greater London Returning Officer

However, “only one in five thought that the Mayor and Assembly were relevant to them”. This may go some way to explaining the low turnout (34%) in the election.”

By way of comparison, a similar awareness raising campaign was conducted in Scotland prior to the election of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The key components of that campaign were:

- Creating four subtitled TV adverts
- Press and radio advertising
- Leaflets delivered to over 2m homes
- Press supplements
- Free phone helpline for more detailed information
- Ministerial participation in the launch.

Whilst the Committee has not taken a detailed qualitative evaluation of the two campaigns, their components appear to be very similar. The Scottish campaign cost £2.5m as opposed to £4m in London (this may have been due to a number of factors not least of which is lower advertising costs in Scotland).

The Scottish Office conducted research into the effectiveness of its campaign through an independent research company using focus groups². A number of conclusions were drawn, but perhaps the most startling one, standing in contrast to the views of the Greater London Returning Officer, was:

“ In terms of the overall impact, the television advertising was most effective in creating awareness of the election.”

Overall, the report suggested the Scottish campaign was effective, and the turnout of 59% lends credence to this being the case.

The Committee addressed two questions:

- Are voters any more aware of the GLA nearly two years into the life of the new Authority than they were prior to the 2000 elections? and
- What role does an educational campaign have in raising awareness further?

MORI conducted research during December 2001 based on face to face interviews with Londoners on behalf of the GLA³. This survey contains a number of results some of which are:

- In response to the question “how much, if anything, would you say you know about what the Mayor of London is doing” 30% knew nothing at all or did not know.
- In response to the question “how much, if anything, would you say you know about what the London Assembly is doing” 52% knew nothing at all or did not know
- In response to the question “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Ken Livingstone is doing in his job as Mayor of London”, 19% did not know.
- In response to the question “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the London Assembly is doing its job” 37% did not know.

² Assessment of voter education campaign for the Scottish Parliament Elections, 1999 – George Street Research

³ MORI interviewed 1,458 Londoners, in home, between 31 Oct-14 Dec 2001. Data are weighted to the known profile of the Greater London Area.

This indicates that a *significant proportion* of people did not know what the Mayor of London was doing, and the *majority* did not know what the Assembly was doing. It is hardly surprising then that many found it difficult to form an opinion on whether they were satisfied or not satisfied. Both of these results suggest that awareness of the GLA remains low.

The following conclusions may be drawn:

- Despite a publicity campaign similar in content to that undertaken in Scotland, turnout remained low at 34% for the 2000 election.
- Awareness of what the Mayor and Assembly are doing remains low nearly two years after the election.

The Committee considers that the Authority must continue to make attempts to raise the awareness of itself to the electorate. One important way of doing this is through the formal education process. The Government is incorporating lessons on citizenship into the National Curriculum next year, and the Authority should make materials available to schools.

Recommendation

Education packs for use in schools should be prepared and made available. These should contain information on both the Assembly and the Mayor and their respective functions.

Awareness of the voting systems

The 2000 election used three different voting systems:

- Second preference voting for the Mayor where electors not only identified their first choice, but their second choices as well [*“the alternate vote”*].
- “first past the post” for the election of Assembly Constituency Members – the same way that MPs are elected.
- List votes where votes were cast for a political party to top up the Assembly membership on a proportional basis [*“the additional member system”*].

With the exception of the “first past the post” system, the other systems were new to the electorate (although a form of proportional representation had been used in the European Elections a year earlier).

Anecdotal evidence raised at the Assembly plenary meeting on 9 January 2002 suggested that some people were put off from voting because of the complexity of the voting system. The elderly are traditionally keen to vote, but there are reports of them being unable to understand how to vote. Other reports tell of mosques being inundated with requests for help, particularly from those for whom English is not their first language.

A report by the Constitution Unit of University College London considered the awareness of the voting system through a random telephone survey of residents aged 18 or over in London⁴. The some key results of the survey were:

- 20% reported that the ballot papers were difficult to complete, but 57% said it was easy.

⁴ Ben Seyd Senior Research Fellow, Constitutional Unit, School of Public Policy University of London June 2001

- 23% of those questioned did not know how easy or difficult it was to complete the ballot paper
- There was little understanding of the electoral system used to allocate seats to the London Assembly. 29% said it was easy to understand and 39% said that it was difficult.
- 22% of those that voted found the ballot paper difficult. However, 22% of abstainers also found it difficult.

One conclusion of the Constitution Unit report is:

“There is, however, little evidence that the perceived difficulty of the electoral process had much impact on people’s propensity to vote.”

The report goes on to say:

“Once again, it appears to be a simple failure of the electoral process to make any impression on Londoners that lies at the heart of the low turnout in the first Mayoral election.”

Whilst this may be true, a lack of understanding of the voting system raises a barrier to people voting. Removing this barrier will not of itself encourage people to vote. However, the Committee considers that voter education will reduce the significance of the barrier on elector decision to vote or not to vote. The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to take action to increase voter awareness of the voting system itself and to do this jointly with the Electoral Commission. Proposals could include delivery of explanatory leaflets with polling cards, and asking the media to report on how the poll will be conducted during election programmes.

If there is confusion about the voting system, polling staff should be trained to advise voters on their voting options during the elections. The role of polling station staff and their training has been considered in section 2 of this report (“The Poll”).

With the exception of the European Elections held in 1999, voters had never before been presented with party options on a ballot paper. There is some evidence of the electorate being unclear about how to use second preference vote for both the Mayor and the list vote for the Assembly. It is recognised that in part this is the responsibility of political parties. Each party will make its own decision as to whether they wish to encourage people to use their second preference or list votes in a particular way. However, they should also recognise that without such guidance, voters may simply choose not to vote, or spoil ballot papers that are not subsequently counted.

Recommendations

The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to work with the Electoral Commission to develop specific proposals on voter education on the voting system.

Political parties should consider how they can advise electors on the significance of second preference votes for the Mayor, and list votes for the Assembly.

The Electoral Commission is asked to raise this issue in their regular liaison with political parties.

Raising awareness through the media

The Assembly was divided about the role of the media in engaging with the electorate. On the one hand, the media was not seen as a way to raise engagement with the electorate. On the other, media coverage raises voter awareness and may result in higher voter turnouts.

The Committee considered two important questions. First, where do people get *most of their information* on politics and current issues, and secondly, what are the most *trusted sources* of information.

The Electoral Commission undertook research (with MORI) following the 2001 General Election from which some important messages about the role of the media generally can be considered. The Commission found the following immediately after the 2001 General Election:

Sources of information	Most information	Most trusted
TV including satellite TV	48	49
Daily Newspapers	28	12
Sunday Newspapers	5	3
Radio	10	12
Leaflets through the door	2	2
Friends	1	1
Family	2	3
Work colleagues	1	1
The internet	1	1
Magazines	*	*
Local newspapers	0	0
Nowhere/none	0	9
Other	1	1
Don't know	1	6

Source: MORI/Electoral Commission

Base: 1,801 UK Adults aged 18+, 9-15 May 2001

TV including satellite TV are not only the most important sources of information, they are also the most trusted. In contrast, non-media sources of information (i.e. leaflets, friends, family, work colleagues, the Internet) score very low on both points. If the MORI results shown above can be said to be generally applicable, the media is important to electorate engagement as it is the prime source of trusted information.

The Committee did not hold an evidentiary session specifically on the media, but several witnesses made comments in relation to media coverage. These included:

- Much of the press was accused of treating the Mayoral election as a party political event with coverage awarded on the basis of past electoral success. The coverage of the Assembly elections was said to be partial and unsatisfactory. The BBC was said to have based their decision on allowing a party political broadcast “on the basis that they could not tell how well supported we were.” (Ram Gidoomal CBE, Leader, Christian Peoples Alliance).

- The GLRO (Mr Hughes) himself felt that “the relationships with the media had been good and in some ways the GLRO had been perhaps too accommodating.” Given the low turnout despite good press coverage, “the May 2000 election illustrated that the press had little influence.”
- The GLRO also suggested that media coverage provided a pressure to declare the result earlier (6.30am the day after the poll). “Mr Hughes regretted that in an attempt to be accommodating to the media, expectations had been raised beyond the realistic projections arrived at following the dress rehearsals [of the count].”

The Committee came to the view that Assembly media was good before and during the elections, but has since fallen away although local newspapers continue to provide coverage.

The media are particularly important to the Assembly. The power of the Assembly is directly derived from the electoral mandate gained from the election process. The ability to influence government and their agencies, the voluntary and commercial sectors is based on this mandate. Without a clear majority of electors choosing to vote, this mandate is eroded. This report has already considered some methods by which this can be improved. The Electoral Commission is also undertaking research in this area and its findings will be important.

Equally, if the Assembly is to be effective, it must have mechanisms, by which it communicates and gains support for the resolutions it passes. The Committee welcomes the appointment of the Assembly Head of Media Relations and recognises the improvement in the media profile of the Assembly following his appointment. He is asked to continue to do so. Some suggestions include the preparation of media packs explaining the roles and functions of the Authority to journalists and holding receptions to which the media are invited to meet Assembly Members directly.

One means by which media attention could be increased is to highlight those areas of controversy and disagreement between political parties. The Assembly has taken the view that scrutiny reports are strengthened when they are supported across party lines. Without this consensus, there would be no productive output from scrutinies other than a simple rehearsal of party policy. It is also recognised that consensus runs the risk of weakening reports to only those areas for which agreement can be obtained. On balance, the Committee suggests that Assembly Members consider the need for consensus for each scrutiny review on its own merits when agreeing scrutiny reports.

Recommendations

That the Assembly Head of Media Relations continues to improve the media profile of the Assembly.

That Assembly Members consider the need to obtain consensus on the merits of each scrutiny report.

Voter Turnout

The Committee recognises that reduction in voter turnout is not just a problem in the UK but in many countries across Europe. However, the level of turnout in the UK is much lower even in

those countries where turnout is falling.⁵ Whilst this is true, the Committee considers that the need to encourage people to vote remains.

It is unclear whether people are making a positive statement by not voting. The Authority is unlikely to reverse the national trend by its actions alone.

The Electoral Commission is undertaking a wide-ranging programme of research directed at understanding the causes of low turnout and identifying possible solutions. The results of this research programme will be used to inform the development of a coherent strategy for tackling low turnout. Together with the Government, the Electoral Commission is supporting the piloting of innovations in electoral practice, including all postal votes, telephone voting and e-voting. All pilots will be fully evaluated. In addition, the Commission has embarked upon a series of policy reviews, a number of which are expected to recommend changes in law or practice which are designed to make the process of voting easier and more accessible. The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to take the results of this research into account when developing his project plan for the 2004 elections.

The Commission also has a duty to carry out advertising and promotional work directed at encouraging voter registration and participation; it currently anticipates running twice yearly advertising campaigns linked to election dates in the spring and the annual canvass in the autumn. The Autumn 2001 campaign was targeted at young people and ethnic minority communities, and involved posters on public transport and advertisements on local radio. London was a particular focus for the campaign. However, the Director of Policy at the Commission has acknowledged that it is for politicians and others (including the media) to tackle some of the wider issues identified by MORI (disengagement from politics, disillusionment with the parties, disappointment in the campaign, and a feeling that it was all a forgone conclusion). The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to consider whether additional funding through the GLA could supplement and enhance the advertising campaign in London.

Recommendations

The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to take the results of Electoral Commission research programme into account when developing the project plan for the 2004 GLA elections.

The Greater London Returning Officer consider the scope for additional funding through the GLA to supplement and enhance the Electoral Commission advertising campaign when allocating his budget.

⁵ For further information, please see Committee of the Regions publication: "Voter turnout at regional and local elections in the European Union, 1990-1999".

Providing the *opportunity* to engage

This report considers providing the opportunity to engage in two parts:

- a) To provide opportunities to engage in the day to day work of the Mayor and the Assembly and playing a part in their decision making. It is a reasonable assumption that this will generate engagement with the work of the Authority and therefore an increased willingness to participate in the electoral process.
- b) To increase the opportunity to vote in an election by reducing the barriers (real or perceived) to cast their vote.

Participating in the day to day work of the Authority

Many people find approaching their local authority to be a daunting prospect despite many attempts to change this perception. Approaching a London wide organisation such as the GLA must be even more difficult.

The Authority currently provides an opportunity to engage through a number of practical arrangements:

- People may write to both the Mayor and their Assembly Members.
- They can contact the authority as a whole and the public liaison unit is responsible for co-ordinating and recording a response.
- Most meetings of the Assembly and Functional Bodies are open for attendance by the Public.
- As set out in the GLA Act, a People's Question Time is held twice a year at which members of the public can ask questions of the Assembly and the Mayor. A State of London Debate following publication of the Mayor's Annual Report is also held once a year.
- The Mayor is required to consult with the public on his various Strategies.
- When undertaking Scrutiny Reviews, the Assembly seeks the views of key organisations and individuals concerned with the subject of the review.

All of these are commendable, but there are some areas that the Committee considers should be explored in more detail. These are:

- Assembly Members spend time in their constituencies to varying degrees but all receive constituency letters. The Committee recognised that media coverage at a constituency level was greater than across London as a whole. The electorate are interested in their local representatives and local newspapers are willing to cover their activities and views. There is a case therefore for increasing the support to Assembly Members in their constituency-based work.
- The Assembly is recommended to make arrangements to encourage greater public participation in scrutiny reviews. There are a number of safeguards that need to be built into this process to ensure that the system is not abused e.g. the Assembly does not just hear the loudest voices in London.
- Increasingly, people are happy to be consulted through phones, text messages and e-mail. Better use should be made of these alternative consultation mechanisms. The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that alternative methods of consultation are used effectively in scrutiny reviews.

- The traditional local authority style of scrutiny committees discourages active engagement in debates by the public. Many find the formal nature intimidating and this may discourage public involvement. Arranging meetings in different venues, changing seating arrangements and evidence taking can all help to mitigate the formality of proceedings. The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that opportunities for different styles of meetings are used in scrutiny reviews in the coming 12 months and assess the impact on active involvement that they bring.

Increasing the opportunity to vote

The technical review part of this report has already considered some of the means by which voters can have a greater opportunity to vote. Early voting (i.e. where polling stations are open several days before the final polling day), changes to polling hours and the location of polling stations have all be considered.

There are also experiments to provide other mechanisms by which votes may be cast. Of all the methods adopted, postal voting has produced the greatest increase in turnout, but London Boroughs have complained that they have insufficient resources available to deal with an increase in this form of voting.

The Committee was of the view that reducing barriers to voting will not of itself increase turnout significantly without the other components of electorate engagement (i.e. awareness and a desire to vote) being in place. However, making it harder for people to vote will affect the personal decision of an individual as to whether to vote or not. In view of that, the Greater London Returning Officer is asked to consider carefully the results of experiments with voting practice in formulating his plans for the 2004 elections and beyond.

Recommendations

The Assembly is asked to consider whether greater resources should be made available for Assembly Members to undertake constituency work.

That the planning stage of each scrutiny review should consider the opportunities for greater public participation.

The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that each scrutiny review encourages participation via all methods of communication possible.

The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that opportunities for different styles of meetings are used in scrutiny reviews in the coming 12 months, and assess the impact on active involvement that they bring.

That the Greater London Returning Officer ensures that the results of voting experiments in the May 2002 London Borough elections are taken into account in the organisation of future GLA elections.

Creating a *desire* to engage

In many ways, generating a desire to engage is a matter for political parties. As noted above, the Electoral Commission recognises the difficulties of increasing voter turnout in the face of public opinion about politicians generally.

There are three conditions that must be fulfilled if the Authority is to create the desire to engage:

- Improve things that Londoners think are the worst aspects of living in London.
and
- Ensure that voters know that the Authority can improve things for their benefit.
and
- Political parties offer perceived choice about what actions should be taken.

If these conditions are met then voting for the GLA will be a positive thing to do.

Voting by target groups

Reference has been made to a number of issues relating to the black and ethnic minority electorate throughout this report. The publicity campaign before the 2000 election raised the expectation to vote to 42% for the ethnic minority people surveyed.

All groups represented on the Assembly recognise the need to pay attention to the needs of black and ethnic minority and other groups who traditionally have not voted in elections. Each Group has its own policies and procedures to increase the representation of these communities within their parties. Whether these are the appropriate mechanisms are for others to evaluate.

In terms of engagement with the ethnic minority vote, the Assembly does not have representation in proportion to the ethnic minority population in London. A view expressed at the Assembly Plenary Meeting on 9 January was that without the hope of representation from those that come from these minorities, and an impact on issues that affect them, engagement is unlikely to improve.

Most political parties have recognised the need to put forward candidates that are more representative of the diverse communities they serve. It is not for the Assembly to advise political parties on this point, but simply add its voice in support of these important initiatives and the objectives they seek to achieve.

The Committee recognises the need to consider issues around electorate engagement in relation to ethnic minority communities in more detail than they did in this Scrutiny. The Committee therefore encourages the Mayor and Assembly together with others to consider this to a much greater degree, and make their conclusions widely known. In the run up to the 2004 GLA Election, the Committee believes that the GLRO and Electoral Commission should work closely with organisations that seek to engage with ethnic minorities and young people.

Increasing the desire to vote

The GLA is a strategic authority and as such can be seen to be further away from the everyday

lives of people than their local borough council or Government. However, changing the way the Assembly carries out its scrutiny work provides the opportunity to demonstrate its relevance more effectively. The following changes are recommended:

- a) The Assembly needs to be much more timely in its response to the activities and initiatives of the Mayor, Government or other agencies. In some cases, the scrutiny process adopted by the Assembly makes a timely response more difficult to achieve. The Director of Secretariat is proposing changes to the way in which Committees organise their work to make a more timely response possible. The Committee strongly backs this move.
- b) The Assembly would be more effective if it engaged with other agencies in London to a greater degree than at present. Relationships need to be developed with London Boroughs and Councillors in particular. There is also an opportunity to create synergy between the functional bodies over which the Assembly has a direct impact. The Assembly is therefore asked to consider these relationships in all its scrutiny reviews. Officers supporting the scrutiny work of the Assembly should make adequate provision within their project plans.

Recommendations

That the Mayor and Assembly work together to examine the particular needs of groups, including black and ethnic minority communities and young people in order to encourage them to participate in the political process.

That in the run up to the 2004 GLA Election, the GLRO and Electoral Commission should work closely with organisations that seek to engage with ethnic minorities and young people.

That the Assembly uses the new Committee structure to respond in a more timely fashion to the concerns of Londoners as they arise.

That the Assembly makes greater efforts to develop relationships with other agencies in London in the conduct of its work.

That the Assembly encourages others to investigate the specific needs of minority communities and young people and make this more widely available.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, there are no easy answers. Both national and local government in the UK has been searching for ways in which to involve people in their work. The suggestions made in this section are a first step towards increasing involvement with the people of London. However, the Assembly has shown a determination to learn and adapt its role in less than two years of its life. The Committee hopes to contribute to this continual learning through its recommendations.

Short term action points arising

The Committee makes the following recommendations as actions that can be delivered in the short term:

Recommendations

That the GLA provide a programme of educational opportunities including educational material and visits by students.

The Assembly should establish mechanisms to ensure that the electorate is informed of the achievements of both the Assembly and the Mayor. Any mechanism chosen should ensure that the Authority's work should be shown to be relevant to Londoners' concerns and to be making a difference. One mechanism by which this can be achieved is the publication of an annual report.

The Committee recognises that it is up to the Political Parties, and in their interests, to encourage the electors to exercise their votes.

By taking the actions identified above, the Authority and Political Parties will have taken a step forward in three ways:

- Preparing the electors of tomorrow to exercise their voting rights and responsibilities;
- Ensuring that the current electorate understand what the Authority can achieve and
- Motivating Political Parties to play their part in encouraging the participation of the electorate.

Appendix A : Terms of Reference

Terms of reference for this scrutiny

To review the planning and conduct of the 4th May elections and identify improvements for future events, including -

- the planning and preparation process and the timing of the appointment of the GLRO and his support team
- voter education in advance of election day
- pre-election mail-shots (content and distribution)
- elector support at the polling stations
- location and management of the declarations of results
- the operation and staffing of the counting machines
- the incidence of ballot papers that were/could not be counted electronically
- numbers of spoiled ballot papers and reasons designated as 'spoiled'
- early voting arrangements

Appendix B – Background documents, questionnaire and those that responded

Background Documents

Written submissions in response to GLA questionnaire

Reports of:

- Early Voting Surveys
- The Greater London Returning Officer
- Hammersmith and Fulham Count Rehearsal
- Meetings with County Council, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliamentary Representatives
- Telephone Interviews

Minutes of Evidentiary Hearings

The Greater London Authority Act 1999

The Greater London Authority Elections (No.2) Rules 2000

Documents/papers produced by:

- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
- Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
- The Electoral Commission
- Electoral Reform Society
- International Foundation for Election Systems
- Philip Cowley, John Curtice, Stephen Lochore and Ben Syed

QUESTIONNAIRE

GLA ELECTIONS - 4 MAY 2000

We will be particularly interested in your comments under the following headings, but we also invite you to raise any other issues that fall within the Committee's remit and which you consider significant.

You may have greater interest in one section or another (*either* election management and operation *or* electorate engagement) so please focus your comments on the area or aspect of most relevance to your own involvement.

Please -

- 1) present your information in bullet-point format**
- 2) identify the basis for your views and any supporting evidence and**
- 3) if possible, identify any solution you consider appropriate.**

Please bear in mind that -

- a) the Committee can only recommend improvements and cannot impose them, and**
- b) even with broad consensus, changes requiring primary legislation inevitably face a longer process than those requiring secondary legislation, and the latter in turn may take longer than those within the existing authority of the Secretary of State or the GLRO.**

Election management and operation

1. The planning process - adequacy and effectiveness of arrangements between GOL/CROs and within Constituencies/Boroughs
2. Preparations - adequacy and effectiveness of preparations before polling day, e.g. involvement of CROs in design/development/testing/training on electronic counting arrangements, liaison between the suppliers of the machines and the CROs, effectiveness of count staff training, realism of tests of equipment, ballot paper allocations to Boroughs
3. Consistent application of rules/guidance by GLRO/CROs/BROs
4. Early/postal voting arrangements - practicalities of the new arrangements, location of early voting polling stations, days/hours of opening, cost of early voting in the context of electors using the facility, possible improvements
5. Operations on polling day
 - at polling stations (e.g. staffing levels, notices, ballot papers)
 - voter support (e.g. at polling stations, electoral registration queries)
 - communications between GLRO/CROs/BROs
6. Electronic counting

- process
 - machines (speed, efficiency, accuracy)
 - staffing levels and training
 - spoilt votes, adjudication etc
7. Counts - other arrangements (e.g. venues, admission of agents/media)
 8. Communications between count venues and QE2 count centre
 9. Post-election documentation and other processes

Electorate engagement

10. Elections - awareness of the fact they were taking place and the date
11. Electoral systems - awareness, before polling day, of the electoral systems being used
12. Awareness of differences and roles - Mayor and London Assembly, and Constituency members and London-wide members
13. Early postal voting arrangements - awareness of the opportunity to vote early in person or by post, or to vote by proxy, and the level of take up in each case
14. Booklet delivered to every household - content, timing, delivery, effectiveness
15. Media advertising (TV, radio, press and posters) - cost effectiveness, value, alternatives
16. Design of ballot paper
17. Advice on how to vote (e.g. pre-election advertising, notices in polling station, polling station staff)
18. Using fewer than the 4 permitted votes
19. Making voting easier - and would, for example, all postal ballots, electronic voting, online/telephone voting etc encourage more electors to vote [- and what evidence exists for your view on this?]
20. Effect of rolling registration
21. Ensuring transparency of process while maintaining secrecy of ballot

Other issues

Please identify any other issue you want to raise, including your ideas for possible solutions to any problem you recognise

LIST OF WRITTEN RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name		Position	Organisation
Tony	Arbour	GLA Member - South West	Greater London Authority
Richard	Barnes	GLA Member - Ealing and Hillingdon	Greater London Authority
John	Biggs	GLA Member - City and East	Greater London Authority
Angie	Bray	GLA Member - West Central	Greater London Authority
Brian	Coleman	GLA Member – Barnet & Camden	Greater London Authority
Len	Duvall	GLA Member – Greenwich and Lewisham	Greater London Authority
Roger	Evans	GLA Member – Havering and Redbridge	Greater London Authority
Sally	Hamwee	GLA Member – Londonwide	Greater London Authority
Toby	Harris	GLA Member - Brent and Harrow	Greater London Authority
Elizabeth	Howlett	GLA Member – Merton and Wandsworth	Greater London Authority
Darren	Johnson	GLA Member – Londonwide	Greater London Authority
Bob	Neill	GLA Member - Bexley and Bromley	Greater London Authority
Eric	Ollerenshaw	GLA Member – Londonwide	Greater London Authority
Andrew	Pelling	GLA Member – Croydon and Sutton	Greater London Authority
Ram	Gidoomal	Mayoral Candidate	Christian People's Alliance
Ashwin	Kumar Tanna	Mayoral Candidate	Independent
Peter	Forrest	GLA Candidate – Enfield and Haringey	The Conservative Party
Mike	Tuffrey	GLA Candidate – Londonwide	Liberal Democrats
G.	Farrant	Chief Executive	LB of Barking & Dagenham
Walter	Million	Borough Secretary	LB of Bromley
Steve	Bundred	Chief Executive	LB of Camden
David	Wechsler	Chief Executive	LB of Croydon
Gillian	Guy	Chief Executive	LB of Ealing
Peter	Stanyon	Electoral Services Manager	LB of Enfield
Max	Caller	Chief Executive	LB of Hackney
Richard	Harbord	Managing Director	LB of Hammersmith & Fulham
Gerald	Balabanoff	Borough Secretary & Solicitor to the Council	LB of Harrow
Christine	Dooley	Chief Executive	LB of Havering
Derek	Myers	Chief Executive	LB of Hounslow
Andrew	Bessant	Chief Executive	RB of Kingston Upon Thames
Michael	Bentley	Electoral Services Manager	LB of Merton
Simon	White	Chief Executive	LB of Waltham Forest
P	Rogers	Chief Executive	City of Westminster Council
Peter	Moorey		Electoral Reform Society
Ben Prof.	Seyd Dunleavy	Director of the Constitution Unit &	University College London London School of Economics
Simon	Wolley	National Co-ordinator	Operation Black Vote
Simon	Day	Commercial Director	DRS Data and Research Service Plc
Alsion	Palmer		NOP Research Group
Justin	Kings	News Editor	Capital FM
Ashok	Viswanathan		Operation Black Vote
David	Campanale	Agent	Christian People's Alliance
Kenneth	Hoole	Agent	Independent

Appendix C – Discussion paper & minutes for Assembly Meeting 9 January 2002

Subject: GLA Elections Engagement Issues

Report Number:5(ii)

Date: 9 January 2002

Report to: London Assembly

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper discusses and raises issues around public engagement in the election process. In doing so, it considers electorate engagement issues such as publicity, advertising, education and the reasons for the level of turnout achieved. Its objective is to provide the basis for a debate in the Assembly and as such provides questions that the Assembly is invited to address.

2. Awareness of the function of the GLA

- 2.1 The data presented below was part of a survey conducted after the GLA Elections in which 1,548 people were interviewed [1].

Table 1

Responses to knowledge quiz (**Bold** denotes the correct answer)

	<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
GLA will be responsible for the police	62%	20%	17%
GLA will be able to raise income tax	16%	64%	20%
Assembly has power to sack Mayor	36%	33%	31%
Can vote for same party on 1 st & 2 nd Assembly vote	45%	20%	35%

Table 2

Expectations of the Mayor and Assembly

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>No difference</u>	<u>Negative</u>
Impact of the GLA on . . .			
Traffic congestion	38%	52%	3%
Public transport	55%	38%	2%
Employment opportunities	33%	57%	3%
Quality of policing	42%	49%	3%
The say people have in how London is governed	45%	45%	6%

- 2.2 As a new institution for London, it was inevitable that the electorate would be relatively uninformed about what the new Authority was supposed to achieve. Even those close to the GLA at its birth were unclear how the Authority would operate in practice. However, it should have been possible to at least outline the responsibilities of the Authority in a way that was understandable in broad terms.
- 2.3 “London voters approached the election for the Mayor and Assembly with relatively limited knowledge of how the new institutions operated”, when compared to the government pre-election public education campaigns in Scotland and Wales [2]. In a survey after the GLA Election, more people (36%) believed, incorrectly, that the “Assembly has the power to sack the Mayor if they decide he or she is doing a bad job” than thought correctly that the Assembly had no such power (33%). [2]
- 2.4 The question now arises as to whether the electorate is any better informed some 21 months later. Some issues the Assembly might wish to consider are:
- **What efforts should be made prior to the next election in 2004 to provide more information on the functions and activities of the GLA and its constituent parts?**
 - **Is there a different level of understanding about the functions of the Mayor as compared to the Assembly and why might that be?**
 - **As a strategic Authority, is it inevitable that the GLA will be less relevant than other governmental institutions delivering services directly to Londoners?**

3. Awareness of the voting system

- 3.1 The voting system for the GLA is unlike any other in the UK, and again it is inevitable that learning would have to take place. Evidence taken by the Elections Investigative Committee suggests that not only were the electorate uncertain about the voting system, but so were some of the polling station staff. Recommendations on this point are made in the Technical Issues report elsewhere on this agenda.
- 3.2 On the other hand, other parts of the world operate voting systems that are even more complicated. Media coverage before the last election compared the voting system in Melbourne with that to be operated in London, and concluded that the Melbourne experience was far more complex.
- 3.3 In a survey after the GLA Election, over 33% of voters were unsure of how the voting system operated. This figure compares with 5% in Scotland after the devolved Parliament election in 1999, and 10% in Wales after the Assembly election. [2]
- 3.4 Issues to which the Assembly may wish to address itself to are:
- **Does the complexity of the voting system form another barrier to voters participating in the election? Were other factors more important e.g. location of polling stations or disengagement from the political process?**

- **Are the complexities of the voting system still justified in terms of providing the opportunity for representation by smaller parties and prevent one party from dominating when it does not enjoy majority support?**
- **Is it justified to make efforts to engage in more voter education before the next election and should this be publicly funded?**

4. Pre-election mail shots

- 4.1 There was a big debate over the Mayoral candidates' mailshots, with the Lords in February 2000, forcing the government to agree to fund a single all-candidate mailshot to voters through the public purse with a £10,000 contribution from each candidate.
- 4.2 A fundamental principle of all UK local government elections is that public money, either directly or in kind, must not be used to promote or express political views. Local authorities for example go to extraordinary lengths to ensure this is the case, and the Audit Commission Auditors watch closely for any breach of this principle.
- 4.3 At the same time, the House of Lords came to the view that the promotion of the London Mayoral elections was unique. They were considered more like Parliamentary elections (for which postage is paid) and as long as advantage was not gained by one or more of the candidates, information could be publicly funded to raise awareness.
- 4.4 Some issues that the Assembly may wish to consider include:
 - **Is there a case for providing information on Mayoral candidates for the next election? Is there a case for providing a similar document for the Assembly? (Both would need a new Order).**
 - **Given the turnout at the election (considered later in this paper), could the cost of such a publication be used more effectively in other ways e.g. a poster campaign?**

5. Role of the media

- 5.1 The low turnout in the 2001 General Election has been linked to the media reporting it as the most boring election they can recall.
- 5.2 In the GLA Elections the media concentrated mainly on the Mayoral contest, with little time devoted to the election of Assembly Members. Some Assembly Members have drawn attention to the Assembly, particularly in their constituency through local newspapers.
- 5.3 There are also issues around what constitutes a good media story. By and large, the media appear to be interested in bad news or in conflict. The Assembly has recognised that its scrutiny reports are strengthened through cross party consensus, but consensus and agreement rarely makes the news.

5.4 The Assembly has achieved some media coverage. This includes:

- Issues around functional bodies and the MPA in particular.
- Disagreements between the Mayor and Assembly over budget issues.
- Some Scrutiny reports.

5.5 Some issues that the Assembly might wish to consider are:

- **Has the media coverage gained by the Assembly been effective in raising awareness amongst the electorate?**
- **Is awareness that the Assembly exists sufficient for people to want to vote for its members?**
- **To what degree is the Assembly prepared to sacrifice consensus for the benefit of media coverage?**
- **Given the present balance between constituency and formal work of the Assembly in media coverage, what can be done to enhance the coverage of the latter?**

6. Turnout and Lessons from other Elections

6.1 The turnout of the GLA Elections 2000 was only 33% [BBC News, 16 May 2000]

6.2 The public has been pretty unenthusiastic about local government elections for some time. The turnout for the London Borough Elections in 1998 was 35% (elections are held every four years although this is to change). The turnout for English metropolitan councils in 1999 was 26% [6]. However, compare this to the 45% turnout in London at the height of Ken Livingstone's leadership of the GLC [6].

6.3 4 out of 10 voters did not exercise their right to vote at the General Election 2001. 6 out of 10 young people, aged 18 to 25 year olds, did not to vote in the General Election 2001. Average turnout was under 60%, the lowest figure in a general election since 1918, i.e. at the end of the first world war and before women had the franchise [4].

6.4 A recent survey reported that 82% of 18 to 22 year olds did not intend to vote at the General Election [Loughborough University, Economic and Social Research Council]. One 22 year old man said, "You might as well be voting for the wind itself. It does a lot more for people than the government ever will." [5]

6.5 MORI surveys found that there were other factors for the low turnout: apathy, disengagement from politics, disillusionment with the parties, disappointment in the campaign, and a feeling that it was all a foregone conclusion.

6.6 Some issues that the Assembly may wish to consider are:

- **Is the drop in voter turnout an inevitable process associated with a mature democracy that provides a freedom of choice as to whether to vote (some countries make voting mandatory)?**
- **One view is that by not voting, the electorate is making a positive choice. Is this view a valid interpretation of what is happening?**
- **Is it possible to reverse the national trend for reduced turnouts in London?**

7. Voting by black and ethnic minorities

7.1 In July 1996, BBC2's Black Britain commissioned a MORI poll. It found that only 16% of 18 to 25 year-old Blacks were certain to vote at the General Election. [12]

7.2 Just before the Election, a poll in Time Out found that 96% of young Blacks would vote – if they thought there was something or someone worth voting for. Young Blacks are consciously opting out of a system they believe has no place for them and nothing to offer them. [12]

7.3 Operation Black Vote is an organisation with the stated objective of addressing the "black democratic deficit" i.e. to encourage greater numbers of ethnic minority population to participate in the political process. One aspect of this is the suggestion that ethnic minority people are less likely to register to vote, although the only empirical evidence for this is from Lewisham.

7.4 Some issues that the Assembly may wish to consider are:

- **Is the lower participation by black and ethnic minority people a symptom of other problems of isolation of these groups or something separate?**
- **Should a separate and targeted effort be made to increase the level of black and ethnic minority turnout or incorporated into initiatives to encourage greater turnout generally?**

8. Improving turnout

8.1 The Electoral Commission is considering internet and telephone voting to reverse the decline in voter turnout. The Electoral Commission is also considering political advertising on radio and TV, as well as broadcasts on youth stations such as Radio 1, in an attempt to re-engage young people with democratic politics.

8.2 A survey conducted by MORI for the Commission found 66% of non-voters reporting they would have been more likely to vote at the general election if they could have done so by phone, while 51% said they would have been more likely to vote by post. Although postal voting on request was available for the General Election in 2001, the MORI survey showed that 44% of non-voters were unaware of the law change. [7].

8.3 However, the Electoral Commission's current work on increasing turnout concentrates on changes to the process of voting rather than the issues identified by Mori surveys

(i.e. apathy, disengagement from politics, disillusionment with the parties, disappointment in the campaign, a feeling that it was all a foregone conclusion).

9. Lessons from local housing votes

- 9.1 Since 1988 more than 100 housing transfer votes have taken place. These local votes are on whether tenants support the sell-off or transfer of their council homes to housing associations. The average turnout on these ballots has been 74% and in some cases turnout has exceeded 90%. Housing experts reckon that the turnout is higher on housing votes because decisions about future landlords have a more direct bearing on tenant's lives than politicians. But they also claim that the general election turnout would improve by applying voter-friendly innovations introduced in housing ballots.
- 9.2 In housing votes, polling is open for at least three weeks, voters are sent postal ballot papers, which they can return by post or drop into ballot boxes that are placed in areas tenants are most likely to use such as GP surgeries, playgroups and even local supermarkets. Philip Morgan, chief executive of the Tenants Participation Advisory Service, said: "Quite clearly when you organise a ballot around the needs of electors rather than the organisers the turnout is better. If everyone was sent a ballot paper to their home, the turnout in an election would be better." He said the challenge for politicians was to make politics more relevant to local people. "If people see something that is relevant to their lives then they are interested. The frustration is that the participation through the ballot box does not effect their lives at the moment."
- 9.3 Gerard Lemos, partner at social researchers Lemos and Crane, which specialises in housing and regeneration, said: "If you improve methods of voting the turnout would go up." He described the general election arrangements as "fantastically anachronistic" and attributed this to "deep-seated public sector lack of customer friendliness". "I would organise it in a much more user-friendly way – have ballot boxes in supermarkets, don't hold it on Thursdays." [8]
- 9.4 There are two issues that emerge;
 - a) changing the voting method can encourage participation and
 - b) "issue" based voting that has a very direct effect on people's lives is likely to produce higher turnouts.
- 9.5 Changes to the voting method is considered in the next section – changing the voting process.
- 9.6 Relevance to people's lives is a matter that will vary from issue to issue. Whether someone is to be charged for entering the congestion – charging zone is only of immediate relevance to those wishing to do so. Sometimes, issues are of relevance to an individual even though it is not immediately apparent that it is e.g. the zoning of new building developments. Other issues are transient in their nature. Yesterday's news may not be relevant today.
- 9.7 In view of the foregoing discussion, issues that the Assembly may wish to address itself to are:

- **To what degree should the Assembly consider scrutiny topics and methods of investigation that are shown to be relevant to Londoners' lives?**

10. Changing the voting process

- 10.1 The possibility of voting electronically via home internet/other connections and interactive TV is being considered. Society has moved on, people have less time, are more mobile and far less likely to live and work in the same place as they did in 1891 when the current system took root. Non-statutory polls have taken the concept of e-voting even further.
- 10.2 In February, Croydon ran a referendum on its council budget, with a choice of telephone, postal and internet voting. The vast majority (over 90%) opted for post. Close to 5% voted by phone and 3.4% - a small but significant percentage – voted on line. [9]
- 10.3 Islington ran a three week long poll for its referendum on its political management. The Electoral Reform Society helped pilot its e-voting. The e-voting had an interface with five language options. This was done to encourage hard-to-reach groups to vote, particularly ethnic minorities. Nick Easton, the head of policy at the LGA said about e-voting at general elections: "People are far more mobile and have increasing access to technology. As we conduct more of our business by web and by telephone – why not?" [9]
- 10.4 The New Deal regeneration project elections produced higher turnouts than local government polls. In Newcastle 41% of eligible people voted, in Bradford it was 43% and in the Burngreave district of Sheffield it was 52%. The difference in Burngreave was that voting papers and other material were translated into the four most common community languages and people had three weeks to return them in prepaid envelopes. [10]
- 10.5 On Saturday 8 December 2001, Waverley Borough Council held a council by- election. This is the first time in Britain a council by-election has been held on a Saturday. The voter turnout was 29.3%, i.e. over 3% higher than the average turnout for English metropolitan councils in 1999. [13]
- 10.6 The voting method is something that electoral practitioners and others have debated for some time. There is general agreement that voting methods should change, but there is also a constant concern for the security of the process i.e. that the process should be as fraud proof as is possible. Key to this concern is the ability to ensure that the person voting is on the electoral register, and that the vote is counted once. There are a small number of cases where fraud has been detected, and there was concern in London that this had happened in the General Election (although the Electoral Commission did not find evidence of this on a scale that would jeopardise the validity of the result). The knock on effect is to make the placement of ballot boxes in supermarkets without supervision a security problem (staffing ballot boxes for three weeks would have serious financial implications). Similar concerns surround electronic voting methods (i.e. that

there is a difficulty in identifying the person who has voted) and postal voting (particularly in homes in multiple occupation). Postal voting also poses problems of increased costs to the local authority (who have to fund the sending out, collection and collation of returned ballot papers).

10.7 The current system is not fraud proof, however, any replacement system is seen as an opportunity to improve security. Discussions on new methods of voting almost inevitably founder on this difficult to resolve dilemma.

- **Should further work be done on alternative methods of voting, but on the basis of retaining the current level of security of the system rather than trying to improve it?**
- **Some changes to the voting process might produce higher costs. Is the Assembly willing consider the case for the GLA meeting those higher costs?**

11. Conclusion

11.1 The GLA electorate have a limited awareness of what the GLA can do and how it is elected. The other area of concern is the general apathy towards elections in general and the need to engage the electorate. This is linked to the need to make voting as convenient as possible so as to increase the turnout.

11.2 The issues presented as options for debate demonstrate how difficult it is to change the level of involvement of people in the electoral process. Without such a debate leading to concrete changes, it is possible that the decline in voter turnout and public engagement will continue.

Background documents

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[2] Seyd B, (2001), The Greater London Authority Election, Evidence on voter understanding, London: Constitution Unit.

[3] Worcester R, Mortimore R, (2001), The 2001 British General Election: The Most Boring Election Ever? MORI Social Research Institute.

[4] The Guardian, Saturday June 9, 2001

[5] The Guardian, Monday June 4, 2001

[6] The Guardian, Tuesday June 5, 2001

[7] The Guardian, Tuesday July 24, 2001

- [8] The Guardian, Tuesday June 12, 2001
- [9] The Guardian, Wednesday May 30, 2001
- [10] The Guardian, Wednesday May 23, 2001
- [11] The Guardian, Wednesday November 15, 2000
- [12] Operation Black Vote, (2001), Into the millennium.
- [13] The Times, Monday December 10, 2001

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Extract from the Minutes – Assembly meeting 9 January 2002

APPENDIX B

Item 5(ii) – Extract from Debate on Electoral Engagement

BRIAN COLEMAN: This is the most important part of the debate that the Assembly is having this morning, the issue of democratic engagement. We are all interested in the nitty gritty, but it is the issue of democratic engagement that should take the Assembly's time and attention this morning.

Over Christmas, Chair, as I was sitting there with my mince pies, I happened to glance at a programme on Channel Four, the 100 top television moments of the year 2001. I don't know if anybody else sat through it. Well I sat through it, Chair, waiting for my two appearances on Metropol to pop up on the top 100 top -- I have to say, Chair, I waited in vain for my two appearances. I also waited in vain to see Trevor Phillips' appearance on the tribute to Dame Shirley Bassey, which was another television highlight of year 2001, well that didn't pop up either.

But what I would say is that I suspect probably more people watched Trevor on his appearance on the Shirley Bassey biography programme than heard him talk on the Week in Westminster, the other Saturday morning, on some of these issues. And yet, what he said on the Week in Westminster was a darn sight more interesting and relevant than what he said on Shirley Bassey's biography programme.

But this highlights the issue, there are dozens of press photographers, camera crews, and whatever, camped ten yards down the road waiting for some footballer to crop up at Horseferry Road Magistrates Court. I'm not sure we managed to drag in any member of Her Majesty's press to listen to this debate this morning.

There is no doubt that there are serious issues and problems around the issues of democratic engagement. The turnout at the general election in London was 55%. In the borough council elections in 1998 it was 35%. In the Mayoral and GLA elections across London it was 34%, it was actually 1% higher in my constituency at 35%. Sorry, 34% the Mayoral, 33% in the Assembly.

But figures for turnout among women, the unemployed, those aged 18 to 25, the ethnic minority groups, etc, are even lower. Now, I'm not convinced that one of the Government's answers, which seems to be to have yet more elections, is the answer. I believe we're going to have elections for membership of the House of Lords. We're possibly having more regional elections across Britain. I'm not quite sure that the answers to falling turnout and falling engagement in elections is to hold yet more elections.

Therefore, the Assembly has some serious issues to address. It's not the job of this Assembly or this Committee to deal with the general national issues of democratic engagement. We

must focus our attention on a number of issues. And the reason that we are asking the Assembly to have this debate this morning is quite simple. This isn't any old Scrutiny Committee, to coin a phrase. But, it seems to me that some of our Scrutiny Committees take the easy option, the easy way out, which is, let's hire in consultants, let's throw a large sum of money at them and let's ask them to write a report. The Committee has taken a conscious decision on the issue of democratic engagement not to do that.

We have 25 - allegedly - experienced and proficient London politicians, the cream of London political life, sitting round this table. So let's have the views and opinions of those 25, cream of London regional politicians this morning. Rather than chuck a sum of money at a consultant to tell us those things which, frankly, we all should or already do know.

There's no doubt that the Assembly has done some work on behalf of Londoners. But all of us, if we're honest, even Lynne Featherstone in an article in the *Ham and High* only last week, would say that we have steadfastly failed to enthuse or engage with London's electorate. Public attendance at our meetings is evidence of that. People's question time, the six monthly People's Question Time, seems to me to be full of the usual suspects in the audience. There's hardly been an overwhelming demand for tickets.

There are a number of issues which I hope members will address and turn their attention to this morning: education; the teaching of civic values that we do amongst our schools and young people in London; the role of the media in London, in the past elections and in future elections; the role of political parties and the whole process, particularly, in London; the different approaches to voting that we should consider or engage in; our interaction as politicians and as an Assembly with the different ethnic minorities and other communities in London. And also, I hope that members, Chair, may feel the need to deal with the role of politicians, our role as regional politicians, glorified county councillors or whatever members consider that they are.

This is purely a personal view but, sadly, politics lacks the characters these days. There's so few characters. We all watch videos of ourselves and see how we appear on television and go and tone down our performance as a result. Well, is that a factor in how politics is perceived, that we've all turned into bland "yes" men following the party line, following the party diktat?

There are no easy answers. There are no easy solutions. But, I hope, this morning that the Assembly will take time and effort to consider some of these subjects so that the Committee can go away and produce a meaningful, valuable report, which will do something to turn around that falling turnout happening across our capital city. Thank you, Chair.

ROGER EVANS: Some reference has already been made in the earlier part of this debate to the difficulty that people had in understanding the ballot papers and filling them out properly. That often led to spoilt ballot papers and also to results which may not have been their intention, although who are we to question that? People were frightened off from taking part in the election in the first place because it looked, frankly, too difficult for them to bother to do it. I feel that next time we have an election we need to make sure that people, and also returning officers, are much better educated about how they can use their ballot papers properly. Because we heard some horror stories, certainly in my constituency, about the way

that presiding officers had behaved on polling stations and the sort of things that they had told people.

For a start, we had the Mayoral vote, and there were, as my colleagues rightly pointed out, two Mayoral votes, not just one as some people were suggesting earlier. But that's an understandable mistake for people around this table to make because it is actually very difficult for people representing any political party to recommend that their supporters vote for a different political party as a second choice. Obviously, that's not something the Labour party wanted to do, it's not something that we wanted to do. But I did encounter people who, because we couldn't advise them who to vote for as a second choice, were worried that leaving that box blank or voting the same way twice would actually invalidate their first vote, and therefore didn't want to take part in the election at all because they were concerned about that.

The second vote on the Assembly was potentially even more confusing and, going back to the presiding officers issue, I know a presiding officer at one of my polling stations was telling people the important vote was for the Mayor and you could fill this other strange thing in if you actually wanted to do it. And what I would like to see is the election for the Assembly treated as seriously as the election for the Mayor. So I hope, that that comes across a lot more next time round.

But part of the difficulty is that the questions we were asking people on that second ballot paper were actually different to the questions we were asking them on the first one. It wasn't a simple matter of, "Who is your first choice and who is your second choice?", the questions were different. So the first question was, "Who do you want to represent you in your constituency?" and the second question was, "Who do you want to run the Assembly?" and in some ways that second question was more important than the first one in its final effects on the balance of the Assembly. And yet I knew a lot of people, from all political parties, who thought, based on what they were told on the Mayoral voting paper, that they couldn't vote for the same political party twice on the second ballot paper. That had the effect of exaggerating the support for smaller parties and fringe candidates on that second vote.

That, I suppose, is an argument in favour, partly, of John Biggs' slate proposal. I think it is even more of an argument in favour of educating people as to the actual questions they're being asked on the ballot paper and making sure that they know what the consequence will be of the way that they vote. There were a lot of spoilt votes on that second paper.

So, we need better education of the public in the run up to the election, better advertisements. London has some of the best advertising professionals and marketing professionals in the world and surely we can engage the creativity of some of those people to make this attractive and easy for people to understand.

On a final note about the remoteness of the count, I think it is very important that people in their constituencies feel connected to the organisation that they are voting for. I, myself, would be completely opposed to having the count centrally in London. Obviously, the opportunity for me to spend an evening or the following day with John Biggs and Lord Harris and all my colleagues around the table here is a very tempting opportunity, but I get to do it for four years, if I get elected. So, I think that I would like to spend one night with my local

colleagues who have done work for me, and the people who have worked for the other political parties locally as well. With respect, I don't think you'd have got many of the Havering Socialist Alliance members to actually come all the way down to attend a count in London. Well, there were quite a number of them at that Havering count and, although they lost their deposit, they had a right to be there when their candidate lost his deposit and to take part in the democratic process.

Likewise, I wouldn't see many of our local journalists in Essex, who were queuing up to interview winners and losers after that count, actually coming down to London to do the same thing, so we would lose that local press coverage. Most of my constituents think that we are, in fact, in Romford and in Essex, and that is the point that I am making. That, if they are to be engaged fully in this process, they need to feel they have someone local who is representing them, who is talking to their press, who is involving their workers. And I would be completely opposed to the suggestion to centralise the count in somewhere in Westminster.

DARREN JOHNSON: Roger and Brian have already pointed to the need for proper public information about the elections, particularly with a fairly complex voting system like this. We do need the information, we do need the voter education. It's interesting, if you look at this report, the levels of awareness in Scotland about the system were far higher than they were in London, and if they can do it in Scotland, we can do it in London, with our posters, with our media expertise or whatever. London, I'm sure can properly educate the voting public about the system.

I also think, in terms of increasing turnout in the long term, there are some real benefits to proportional representation. Now, it's not a panacea for everything, but people begin to feel that their vote can actually make a difference each time. It's one of the reasons why we didn't get large numbers of people voting in the last general election, because people felt the result was a foregone conclusion. With proportional representation people can feel that their vote really does make a difference. But, of course, with this system we really do get the best of both worlds because we get the individual constituency representation and we get the proportional representation, so we get the views reflected right across the capital. So I do think we get the best of both worlds, as they've had in Germany. They've had proportionality and they've had stability and they've had that constituency link, which is right and proper.

So I do think there are some real long-term advantages to proportional representation but we need to make people aware of how the system works and also make them aware of the benefits. And, we also need, as Roger said as well, to increase the profile of the Assembly in these elections. It was very much a second thought in terms of the media campaign, but also in terms of the official information, as well. The Assembly was very much an afterthought in that there was no booklet that went out advertising the Assembly members, it was only the Mayoral candidates. We need to change that next time. There needs to be a booklet that promotes the Assembly candidates, as well as the Mayoral candidates.

We also need, in the official advertising campaigns, to really get across the message that it's voting for an Assembly as well as a Mayor. Operation Black Vote was criticised by some in

the Government Office for London and criticised by Robert Hughes, the Returning Officer but think that they played an excellent role in increasing voter awareness. Their poster advertising campaign, I think, had far more impact and is far more memorable than the official campaign put out by the government.

As Brian touched on in his opening speech, we need to look at making the Assembly seem more relevant to people in London all year round, not just at election time. We have seen an attempt to make voting easier in a bid to increase turnout but we've not really seen an attempt to make voting seem more worthwhile. And we really do need to get the message across that voting is worthwhile and that we do have a role to play in London.

As this report suggests, a lot of the Assembly's profile has not been gained through its formal committee work, but rather through individual Assembly members doing constituency work, championing issues on behalf of constituents. There is important constituency work and we need to ensure, when we are timetabling our work, that we do continue to provide adequate time for individual constituency work and it's not just the formal committee work that's the be all and end all in the formal scrutiny work. So we do need to continue to ensure that we do have the time to get out and properly engage with our constituents, whether it be in a geographical constituency or on a London-wide basis.

In terms of our scrutiny process, we've gone to something fairly traditional and I think perhaps we could look at opening it out a bit more. Some local authorities when they moved over to the scrutiny system co-opted people from different organisations onto the scrutiny process. Maybe that is something that we could do, given that there are only 25 of us, that we can't possibly represent the whole diversity of London, and that there are real demands on our time. Perhaps there are things that we could do to open out and open up and engage a bit more, maybe by co-opting people on particular scrutiny committees to engage a bit more and to widen things out.

But, I do think there are things we can do, both in terms of the election campaign itself and the ongoing work of the Assembly, to try and increase turnout next time and to try and make the Assembly seem more relevant to people's lives and actually allow people to know properly how the voting system works.

GRAHAM TOPE: There is one reason why I welcome the presence of the Greens on this Assembly, and that is because I no longer have to make speeches extolling the virtues of proportional representation, which I hadn't even intended to mention until Darren provoked me. I agree with all he said there. I only want to make two points on that: one is that, actually, the system we have in London was not the one favoured by the Liberal Democrats - not least because we do want to retain a constituency link - but it's the system we have. The other point I wanted to make was that we've talked a lot already this morning, absolutely rightly, about voter education, but I think there is also an issue about politician education. The political parties, not least my own, are actually not used to fighting elections under proportional representation. I say that following on the comments made by Conservative speakers about not being able to recommend how to use the second preference vote. I agree; it's a problem for all of us. That's actually because the political parties in this country are not used to fighting - and don't know how to fight - elections under PR. On the continent, where various versions of PR are used a lot, it is the natural way of doing it because that is the way

they do things. So, there is also an issue about politician education just as much as about voter education.

To start with the mechanics, I am strongly in favour of any measures which actually do increase accessibility and ability to vote. I guess all of us must be in favour of that, so I have no problem with the various experiments that have been tried. I have views, as we will all have, on the likely success or merits or demerits of various things. I'm wholly in favour of that. I very strongly believe that we need to move our election system from the 19th century, which is basically what it still is, into the 21st century.

In the early days of talks about the forthcoming GLA elections, I remember urging Nick Raynesford, as Minister of London, actually to use the new millennium election to have electronic voting and a new system of voting. I do think we need to look strongly at ways to do that. I think it's absurd that we still vote in this country on market day, especially in a place like London. Why do we vote on Thursdays? Because it was market day a long time ago. I think we should look seriously at weekend voting. I don't argue about which day of the weekend, but I think we should look at all those measures.

But coming back to the fundamental point, Chair: I don't believe that in London, especially, there is any significant number of voters who cannot vote if they want to. And the key thing is that so many of them don't want to. Some don't want to out of apathy and disinterest, ignorance even. More than we care to recognise, don't want to vote out of antipathy. They actually are antagonised; they don't like the political process, the politicians and the political parties, and that's as serious a concern for all of us as apathy.

I wanted to put it a little bit into historical context too (since Brian kindly says that I've fought more elections than everyone else put together, that's only because I'm very old and I think it's probably an exaggeration) and, Brian, this will kill your political reputation: I did agree actually with everything that he said in his introduction, except possibly that one.

But because of great age, actually looking at the turnout in London borough elections here, we're worried, rightly, about the 33% turnout in the GLA elections. The turnouts in the London Borough elections in 1964 and 1968 was only 35%. It's not in itself a new problem. What is the problem, is actually that turnouts in London borough elections went up at each election right through to and including 1990 when it hit 48%. I think that was largely to do with people's views about the then Prime Minister and, more particularly, poll tax. And the fact, actually, that it was a very warm sunny day, and that makes a difference too. That 48% in 1990 has crashed down to the mid 30s, at best, ten years later, that, I think, is a considerable cause for concern.

It's not only in this country that election turnouts are falling. They're falling right across Europe, and I know that political colleagues on the continent are very concerned about it. But actually, looking at this fascinating book about turnouts in other continental countries in local and regional elections, there is not one country or one region where it is less than 50%. In most cases, it's over 70% and in Italy, which probably - although I agree with Brian's comments about frequent elections - has more elections than every other country put together, the turnout is usually over 80%, so clearly Italians love it.

SALLY HAMWEE: They've got the hang of it.

GRAHAM TOPE: They've got the hang of it, yes, they probably know how to do it but it's a pity they get it wrong so often! So, falling turnout and voter disillusionment are not problems unique to the UK and not problems unique to London, but I do think that we have seen, in other contexts, the GLA as an organisation that should be trying to lead the way in what we do about it, and I think that is right. None of us deludes ourselves that we alone, the GLA, can solve the problem of voter disillusionment and voter turnout, and that uniquely the GLA elections will have a dramatically higher turnout than anywhere else. That's not going to happen. And I have to say to Roger, sad though we may all feel, I don't think there's any likelihood, ever, that the Assembly is going to attract as great, let alone greater, attention and voter interest than the Mayor of London, whoever it is. It's a simple fact of the way that London government is constructed.

But there are things that the GLA, and that we, ought to be doing. Having this report and this debate is a very good start and I very much welcome that. It's a debate that doesn't need to happen just this morning, it needs to carry on, probably forever, but certainly for the next two or three years. And, I think, there are some practical things we ought to be trying to do to lead the way. I think the work of the Reaching Out Investigative Committee is actually very important. It is about engagement with communities and making the GLA relevant. I think there is important work to be done.

Equality is important. It is crucially important that we reach those sections of the London community that are under-represented, that feel themselves unrecognised, detached from politics generally and from the GLA, in particular. There is a lot of work now having to happen in schools on citizenship education. I don't know, perhaps I should, what the GLA is actually doing to engage with citizenship education in London schools, but we ought to be taking a lead on that. And I think, whatever we are doing, it's quite certainly not enough and not effective enough.

So I welcome the report strongly. I hope that this is a start and not the finish, that we build on it and that we do look seriously at how we can engage with all sections of the London community, whether they are from ethnic minorities, from other interest groups, whether they are young people not yet old enough to vote but soon will be, or whether they are simply late-middle-aged men.

ANGIE BRAY: Thank you, Chair. Brian also mentioned the role of the media and I agree that that's something that we do need to consider. I've always thought that it's a difficult one, isn't it, because it's kind of 'chicken and egg'. Does the media start carrying stories and coverage because they think that their readers are interested or do people only get interested in the whole issue of what we're doing because they read about it in the media? So, it's a difficult one. Darren, in answer to your point about the greater voter awareness in Scotland and, no doubt, greater press coverage in Scotland, don't forget that there is a difference there, which is that there is real executive power. It's a Scottish parliament; it isn't an assembly. I do think that one of the issues that we have to face is that we don't really have any great executive power at all. We have many interesting debates on a wide variety of motions during our plenary sessions and we can all make the most brilliant speeches that can be made on these subjects, but actually we end up doing absolutely nothing. We're not in a position to do anything about it. Fundamentally, one of the things that we may need to consider at some stage is whether

actually there needs to be some ... well, shall I say 'tweaking' of the balance of powers between the Mayor and the Assembly because, until we are seen to have some real clout, I don't think that we, in the eyes of the public, merit much greater coverage than we perhaps get. It's clear, isn't it, that the Mayor does get considerably more coverage than us; it's not just because he's an entertaining fellow, I think it is also because he has the power to do certain things about lives in London.

Just briefly look back at the way the media covered this in the run up to the May elections in 2000. I actually don't have any great complaints. I know that leading it always was the gladiatorial contest at the top, and the fact that Ken Livingstone became one of the most colourful candidates did help to lead the coverage. I think we rode quite nicely, actually, on those coat tails: there was considerable coverage, not just in London but in the nationals too, of the fact that London was going to get this Assembly. I think that it was pretty good and in my own case I remember when I was selected back in late October 1999, my locals jumped on pretty quickly and were keen to know about me.

I was aware that in the early months of the year 2000 we were all of us being approached by BBC South East to take part in it that programme. I think there was an interest in our roles. There were a lot of profiles of the constituencies; I know that the Evening Standard did all the constituencies, not all of them absolutely accurately! I seem to remember that Bob Neill's was described as a cliff-hanger, although in fact it was always our safest seat and I think that Toby was even predicted not to win his seat, so they can get things wrong, we know that, but there was coverage. Even the day after we must recognise that there was a lot of coverage, a lot of interest, a lot of profiles done of those people who'd won, a lot of radio and TV interest. So I don't think we can really complain about that.

What, of course, has been depressing, is that it has fallen away since then. I don't think we could have expected the nationals to be too interested in the ins and outs of GLA. Perhaps the London press could have done more about voter education but I question that, because they have to take account of whether or not they think that is actually going to interest their readers. We might insist that that doesn't matter, they should publish it anyway. Well they probably did actually, but, one newspaper does one day of coverage on how you vote. Did anybody happen to read that newspaper that day? They are not going to publish it twice. So, I think there is a problem about whether the London press are interested enough to do enough of it for our satisfaction. Certainly we have lost their attention. I think that's true since the election and I think that we have to remind ourselves that we have to make ourselves as interesting as possible in between times, to make sure that they continue to cover us.

It is important if we're going to get the coverage in 2004 that they are mindful of what we are doing now. So there were a few things that I thought of that we might want to be looking at between now and the next election. When we get our new Assembly Head of Media, I think a little programme of entertaining and briefing the editors about what we do, why we do it, and some of the more interesting things that we are doing, is something which I would expect them to take up.

We also need to think about engaging Joe Londoner in what we do in our official meetings more. I mean, I remind you all that in our standing orders there is scope for delegations. Now, obviously those will be partly party politically organised but there may be some kind of wider delegations when the Assembly as a whole wants to make a point about something that we are all agreeing on, as a London voice.

If we were to start trying to organise delegations, bringing Londoners to our meetings, there is no doubt about it, the London press at least would be obliged to take an interest in that. That is something that we haven't really done at all yet and I'm quite surprised that we have not.

Obviously we also need to check what we are doing in our constituencies, including Darren and the other members who have got 14 to busy themselves with. I know that could be very tiring, but those of us who have one constituency to look after need to be doing everything we can. I'm sure we are, so I don't want to teach people to suck eggs.

I think that another thing in the run up to the 2004 election that our new Assembly Media Chief needs to be thinking about, is producing media packs. We won't have to rely on GoL next time around, we have now got our own Assembly organisation. I think media packs, which we can provide all the relevant news outlets with, about us, profiles of each of us, our constituencies, some of the main things we will get involved in, and what we hope to be involved in, in the following years, will be useful.

I am sure that the dear old BBC South East can be prevailed on to remember their public service concept and actually produce a programme on how the GLA works and how the voting system works. It's questionable whether it is going to be the best entertainment in the world but we could ask them about doing something like that and I am sure they would.

But I just remind you of one final thing, I talk about executive power, there is one piece of executive power that we all have, of course, and that is that we can, if we are minded, overturn the Mayor's budget. Now, as it happens, that is something which is coming our way next month. So we might like to remind ourselves that that is the one time we might actually make a real difference to Londoner's lives.

LYNNE FEATHERSTONE: Media. I agree with almost everything Angie said. I think media is the key, the absolute key, but one of the problems we have had is that we as an Assembly are struggling to understand where we are going in terms of are we four political parties?

How do we get media coverage as an Assembly, how can we raise that profile? We sometimes destroy ourselves and I don't think we've done a particular good job about thinking about where we are going as an Assembly.

When we do a good piece of work which is consensual, do we give up consensus for coverage? We have to be very clear. I myself do not want to be part of an Assembly that becomes a media tart, one that will only want the row reported. No, in that sense I think it is very important that we look to how we want to represent London. Angie is right: where we stand foursquare for London, we do well. Where we are Londoners' voice, we do well and that can be expanded. But when we act as political parties squabbling, that is a different type of coverage and it does us no good as an Assembly. I would like us to do some thinking along those lines about how we can promote ourselves and I think there are a few ways. There's one in the substance of the work we do and you could use the Open Spaces coverage we got in terms of the credibility and the gravitas, if you like, of the body. You have to have some gravitas; it can't simply be seen as an argumentative political argy-bargy, which does us no credit, it really doesn't. The Mayor is our target.

I think the new press guy has got an awful lot to do. In our Scrutiny Committees we have the opportunity to engage with the public. If you're looking at 24 hour drinking sessions, which we happened to be talking about yesterday, we have to go in through things like the pubs. If we're talking about, I don't know, health, we have to go in through the gyms and the sports halls.

So we in this Assembly do not think enough about all of those issues, nor do we discuss them in a very open and relaxed way. If you look around the 25 individuals here, we all have particular roles and I think there have been a lot of petty jealousies, in the sense that people were worried about one or other person getting more coverage or less coverage and so on.

I think as the year and a half has gone on we have come to respect each other in particular roles and I think the new press guy has a lot of opportunity to try and popularise the individual roles and the people that we are as well. I think that is a job that has been virtually untouched. But without anyone leading the press operation for so long it is sometimes a miracle that the Assembly has got coverage. The people who listen to LBC are a small percentage of Londoners. But those people who do listen on a daily basis will not have failed to know that the Assembly exists, and in moving towards engaging people for the next election you have to cover that in every walk of the media. It's no use just having that particular 3% every day.

So in terms of all of those issues I think we have a lot of work to do because I think there is quite a muddle going on sometimes about where we are going.

In terms of delegation it's a fine idea, but what would you do in terms of engaging people with the Transport Policy Committee when every single group in London would want to come? How would you hold it? I think we need to look at those issues and how we could cope with that. I am just making those as very open points about some of the things we need to be looking at. It's not very easy to engage people. If you yourselves have no clear vision or objective in what you are trying to achieve, how can you expect London to?

TOBY HARRIS: I too will be boring but I will try and be brief. I have to say it is actually a rather telling statement about this Assembly that the most animated - and looks like being one of the most extended debates that we have had at all - has been about how we can promote ourselves and our images more to the people of London.

What is particularly unfortunate about that debate is that it is irrelevant to the subject which we are being asked to consider, which is about engagement with the electoral process rather than engagement with the London Assembly or engagement with the GLA in particular. Whilst we may all have an enormous interest, as we do, say, in the fluff in our navels, about our efficiency or otherwise, in promoting ourselves in the media, I have to say that I think it's irrelevant to the subject in hand.

I do think there are issues, which I think Roger touched on briefly many hours ago, about the way in which the electoral system operated and whether or not the guidance given to people is the sort which is going to make people feel they should engage with the process. It is interesting that in Scotland there was a very clear campaign run about people using their second votes in the additional members system election, with a view to creating more of a

hung Scottish parliament. Now that didn't happen and I was rather surprised that the Lib Dems or, for that matter, the Greens, didn't run with that more in the last election. But, it did indicate people could use their votes more precisely if they wanted to do so. I don't think, however, that Roger was correct in saying that there was evidence that the smaller parties benefited from the system on this occasion, because I think, and I need to refresh my memory of the voting figures again, I think actually, broadly speaking, the votes for the two major parties in percentage terms were very similar, slight variations but you would expect that, between the two sections of the Assembly ballot.

Ignoring our coverage at the moment, which I appreciate is what most people want to talk about, I think we are wrong to say that the coverage of candidates in the run up to the Assembly elections was particularly poor. Again I accept what Angie amongst others have said about that. If you, for example, consider local coverage of a local election campaign, there is very little coverage of what is going on between individual candidates in an individual ward. It is much more about the broad themes of the election and you would expect, therefore, in a London-wide election, the focus to be on the broad themes of what the various parties are saying, and in particular their Mayoral candidates. As individual egomaniacs, as we have all displayed in the last hour and a half or three hours or whatever it's been, we clearly have got to accept that that's a fact of life.

But I do think there is an issue about the trend of participation in electoral politics, which we do need to examine. It may be part of a wider sociological trend in favour of instant gratification, in that the process of voting for an assembly or for Parliament which is going to last for four years or whatever it may be, may not in fact be the way in which people wish to influence the political process. And therefore one of the things that I think we should be looking at - and I really think it is slightly tangential to this report, but it is certainly relevant for this Assembly and for the work which has been done in community engagement - is looking at how we can involve the public more directly in the work that we do. That will not be measured by how many people come to these meetings because it's only very sad individuals who come to these meetings on a regular basis. They come to one and they probably don't want to come again. It is the same with local councils, it is the same, actually, with any public body which meets in public. Only a very small proportion wish to attend.

What you do, however, want to get at, is ways in which the public can engage. Now, increasingly, people are happy to be consulted or informed through other media: through email, through text messages on phones and so on, there are all sorts of things that we ought to be examining so that we could actually engage the public on some of these issues. It's not going to be scientific but then the attendance of people at public meetings or any other form of consultation is not scientific. It is about making people feel that we are actually concerned to hear what they feel and that as politicians we will then respond to it. Now, if we don't respond to it or respond to it in a way which is dismissive, then that may well give people a reason for not voting in the next GLA elections. Similarly, if we demonstrate that we are interested in listening to what people say, we respond to it in an intelligent way, then that may also, again, give people an interest in voting in future elections.

So, I am sorry that the debate has focused primarily on whether or not we get sufficient coverage for our discussions in the media, but I do think that there are some real issues that we need to look at in terms of the way in which we engage with the public.

BOB NEILL: I deliberately didn't participate in the discussion on the first half of this report because it seemed to be the most interesting moment during the counting in Bexley and Bromley was when the media got the memorable shot of the Liberal Democrat candidate, the Labour candidate and myself stretched out asleep on the sofa outside the counting hall. And therefore I thought perhaps I wasn't the best-informed observer of all that happened in that night.

But I think the report does flag up some interesting issues that we do probably need to look at, and it deserves a degree of seriousness. I've a lot of sympathy with some of the points that we are not going to deal with these issues by looking at our own internal arrangements. There are some important things which I think we can take on board on a practical level. I think the reference, for example, to making more extensive use of the mailshot gives voters an informed choice and is the key to the whole issue, and certainly I would hope that we would see an extension of that facility to people. These are major issues, they are enormous constituencies, 400,000 odd electors and it is, I think, reasonable to expect that the Assembly should have proper means of getting information about all the candidates out there, and the same goes for Mayor.

I think maybe we should be prepared to move away from that rather fascinating ritual that we have of using the stubby pencil, which is brought out every election time to mark a bit of paper and usually breaks on you halfway through, or something of that kind. I think we should be examining - provided the technology can be got right - means of voting by machines, electronic or otherwise. It's key to make sure that the security and integrity of the system is preserved under those situations, so that the secret of the ballot is preserved and that there's an audit trail.

I suspect a lot of people nowadays are perfectly used to using things like cash dispensers and so on and would have precious little trouble in voting by some mechanistic means, which would make life a lot easier. That would speed up some of the technical issues that are referred to elsewhere in the report. We could do it in a way which wouldn't mean the Mr Mayer had to be seen going boss-eyed peering at somebody's dimpled chad. I think the technology has moved on way beyond that and we could import some up-to-the-minute technology that might overcome some of those practical issues and save us the length of time that we had last time.

The other practical point there is that, whilst there were certainly problems at local counting centres - and I think we got to the stage in Bromley where the Labour candidate and I volunteered to split the difference on the 250 votes that they couldn't find for four hours - nonetheless it's also the question of getting the communication at the centre right. When I was at the European count in 1999, there was an awful lot that went wrong at that centralised count. So that is the two sides to the issue that have to be looked at there.

The other thing I was just wanting to touch upon was this: it is the question of why people feel it is worth their while voting? That isn't going to be dealt with on the basis of what we do in terms of our internal arrangements. Yes, public education as to what we do is important

and the media coverage is important. I think there is an important point that Toby refers to about the general decline in participation in the political process. The media have a certain responsibility for that because they have played a part in breeding a rather cynical society, which tends to think that people only become involved in the political process and public affairs for personally selfish reasons, and that I don't think is the case in relation to anyone around here, and to many of the other people that we know.

So there is a role for the media in that but ultimately you can't blame the media, you can't blame the public. It is up to the politicians themselves to be seen to be relevant, and I think you can't therefore get away from the relevance of the powers of the institution. People, I think, were more aware of what was happening in Scotland and paid more interest because they did believe that the devolution that was given in Scotland actually had some clout and enabled the people they elected to deliver, in some measure. That's something that, in due course as this institution develops, I hope Government will look at.

The GLA's creation has raised enormous expectations but one of the flaws is, at the moment, the system to deliver those expectations to Londoners doesn't exist, and I hope that is something that will be looked at for the future.

These things inevitably grow, I suspect, by stages rather than all in one go, but you do have to look at that. One of the things that struck me was that people in my constituency say, "Well, what's the point of voting for something which is seen to be remote, particularly for those in outer London, and secondly, is seen to have precious little teeth?" One of the ironies was that people underestimated the power that the Mayor has and didn't realise that, in relation to planning and transport matters, there was some real clout there. But they also didn't realise that the Assembly had very little teeth as against the Mayor, and that institutional imbalance is something that may need to be looked at.

I was amused to see that more of the public think the Assembly has got power to sack the Mayor than don't. It's a very tempting line to go down, but the fact is, that indicates that they didn't understand the constitutional balance, and that creates a sense of frustration if we are not seen to deliver.

What we should say is this, there are ways in which we can improve our outreach. That can be done. I agree that I don't think that you are going to make a great impact by mass attendance at these meetings but I suspect it is not a question of sadness. Most of the people who come to these meetings are usually on the payroll of the Authority, it seems to me, in one way or another and I wonder if that is the best use of their time frankly!

But in reality we can do more I think, in being much more timely in our response. The worst thing that could happen to this Assembly is that it is seen to be an irrelevance because it can't respond swiftly to the Mayor's actions or the Governments or other agencies, health authorities in London, rail companies, unions, all that sort of activity. So it is that timeliness that we need to build into our system. It's that which will create an appreciation of people that there's actually some point. But ultimately you cannot blame the voter if they have doubts, we have to make the thing relevant for them.

So that is what I'd suggest but I couldn't help but have a final comment on the decline in participation rates of elections that Graham referred to. The decline that's referred to in

paragraph 6.2, where there is a quote pointing out the decline from about 45% in London in the 1980s. There is a health warning there, which I have got to point out, because it refers to elections in London at the height of Ken Livingstone's leadership of the GLC. Well, of course, we all know there never was an election that brought Ken Livingstone to the leadership of the GLC, as Tony and I can recall. But there again it is a quote from the Guardian, so a minor inaccuracy of that kind is understandable! So perhaps I could just flag that up to put it into context, but there has been a decline and that maybe because governments of all parties have tended to centralise more and more, and therefore the relevance of local votes has seemed to decline to people. If the Government is serious about devolution for London that has to be reflected by willing the means, and that's an argument that I think is being developed in Scotland and Wales, and that we shouldn't be afraid to address in due course.

VALERIE SHAWCROSS: I don't think I will make a speech on this because we have heard some very insightful, intelligent comments. My only comment on our debate here would be that this is precisely the sort of debate where we shouldn't be just talking amongst ourselves and be inward-looking. It is exactly the sort of debate we need to have in a context and not in a vacuum, and be outward-looking. I think the debate perhaps ought to have been about how do we engage with Londoners, talking to them about what is relevant for Londoners and their very differentiated lifestyles and cultures and communities. There is probably a limit to how much we can learn from each other.

SALLY HAMWEE: We will, I hope, have a useful set of contributions from the Assembly when it comes to debate the work of the Reaching Out Committee, where we've been hearing some quite salutary things from witnesses.

LEN DUVALL: I thought one of the most important insights into this debate this morning - apart from Toby's contribution, which I think brought us back to reality - was a degree of consensus about the institution of the Mayor and the Assembly. I think that's important because I do passionately believe this institution is important for London. The trouble is, it's not immediately in your face, but over a period of time I do believe we're making a contribution to some very significant debates and important issues for Londoners.

What I want to talk about is the next stage in this report because I think there are some practical issues that we need to continue to debate, and I think someone made the point in an earlier contribution: how do you actually get some structure into this that makes sense?

If we can say we will deal with the politics, there are some issues that I think are political with a small p about the promotion of this institution, some practical issues like engagement with young people and through schools. I think we are in a position to do some very good curriculum packs about some of the work here, and make it easy for people to use resources, high quality material, engage the teachers and maybe we can actually make a contribution to civic life here in London by producing some very high quality education materials. That is not very hard, it doesn't seem very difficult for us to achieve and in our budgets we need to actually engage with and talk to the Mayor, divert some resources and actually not do everything at once, because I think it is a process over a period of time.

Secondly, just building on the media issues, how do we relate to opinion formers, particularly new aspiring journalists? They come and go, they are not there forever and a day. It seems to me that we should be able to give some high quality material to any people we come into contact with, whether it's a leaflet, whether it's a video that says, "This is what we do and this is how it works or doesn't" that is updated, that says something about us, that we want to help people that come into contact with us do business with us in the easiest way. I do take Val's issue about how we engage and Toby's issues about reaching out and the Reaching Out Group has got probably the most important task for us to do and the politics will come into it from wherever we are.

But I would like us to actually have some practical initiatives against each of these bold sections in the report. They may well be small issues, it may say that we are going to do some work with Operation Black Vote and produce some joint publicity in the run up to our elections in terms of the black and ethnic minority communities about the way that they vote, what they're going to face in the ballot box or about how we do our work because I think there are some issues there.

I was very much taken by Graham's issue about that you can have a very inward debate and think "Oh woe is me and how depressing it is" People have got choices about voting. Can we make it easier for them? People have got choices about accessing information and I don't think we make it easy for people to get hold of what we do. I think our debates are a bit skewed, a bit inward looking. I think we are remote. I don't think it matters whether you are in outer London or on an estate in Southwark or Lambeth, you can feel equally remote if the issues that we are debating are not what you think are important to your life. There are issues around remoteness that we need to tackle, with an issue about the promotion of the institution rather than ourselves and maybe our political parties, where we can have some consensus on this.

We can make a difference and probably become that exemplar authority or reach a particular part of government that can show the way where others are losing their ways, including some of my colleagues in local government.

NICKY GAVRON: On the making it easier note, which Len just brought in, I do agree with that and with much that Graham Tope said. I would just like to add a couple of points, which are, that I think we should stress postal voting more because it does actually help people enormously particularly elderly people. Anything we can do to develop telephone and IT methods of voting I think would be very useful.

Secondly, I think that the way Assembly members behave, collectively and individually, does have a huge impact on the way people see us and, of course, on the media. I don't think that we can be a flash that sizzles in the pan just prior to elections. I don't think that's going to work. Therefore I welcome this paper. As a strategic authority, is it inevitable that the GLA will be less relevant than other government institutions delivering services directly to Londoners? Well, I don't know, do all of you think that MPs - who are of course relevant to their own communities, not to others' - have no clout, no profile, because they have no executive responsibility? We're finding our feet, but I don't think we've found a niche at all in relation to councillors and boroughs and in relation to MPs. There's a huge job to be done

in making the Authority work for London. And I agree to a certain extent, we haven't got sufficient powers. However, we have functions that the rest of the country would die for and we ought to be doing more amongst ourselves to actually use the synergy of the LDA and TfL, LFEPA and the Metropolitan Police Authority. There are lots of ways that we can be adding value to local authorities. Working with councillors, working with MPs and working across London.

Now in terms of profile, I suppose everyone has got their own anecdote but, as far as I can see, the GLA, and this counts for the Mayor as well, virtually gets no reference in national papers. It's always been the London problem. It's virtually not mentioned in national papers. We have, of course, good coverage in the Evening Standard and Metro, but a remarkable number of people don't see those, and we have very good opportunities on TV and radio, but how many people see those?

There's a lot that we could do, I think, in terms of getting through the doors. We are not communicating what we are doing, what we could be doing, in the way the boroughs do. All boroughs have very good glossy mags that go through the doors of their electorate.

The final point to make is that I'm very surprised by this debate's fatalism, by the feelings of impotence that are coming out from round the table. Not everyone said that; there have been some positive upbeat statements, but there's also been a lot of, "Well we are impotent, we can't do much" and I think that is just extraordinary. Londoners are never going to vote for an Assembly and an Authority that is already sitting here shooting itself in the foot and saying that it has no clout. It is absolutely not true and I want us to have another debate on how much influence and clout we really could have. So I look forward to that engagement debate and to our Reaching Out debate. I think we can have a very distinctive character and make a huge difference for Londoners and we'd better get on and find out how.

SAMANTHA HEATH: The bits that I wanted us to talk about, not the navel-gazing of the media because quite honestly it is our responsibility, as in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, to make our work real to people. That was the quote, wasn't it: "He suffered because he didn't make his work real". I just wanted to refer us to 9.7 where it clearly says, "Are the topics that we are discussing relevant to people?" and it isn't just that, it's also the locations. I just wanted to bring us back to Angie's point right at the beginning when we talked about delegations. I would like us in Reaching Out, to look at how we can make our work real to people because a lot of what we do is important but we haven't expressed it in a way in which it is completely understood.

I think this paper is very important and, taking on Len's point, I would like to see targets against all of the bullet points that we have here, so we can take an action point from what we have actually said today. In the next paper that we see on this, I would like to see clear actions and clear progression. Therefore, 9.7 it isn't simply the topic, it is also delegations and how we actually relate to people and the locations, it is about going out to various locations.

On para 7.4, I think Len covered that but it's just how do we bring empowerment to the very many diverse communities in London.

In 10.7 we very clearly asked the question, which I think is vaguely rhetorical, should we look at further work? I would just say clearly, “Yes”. Right at the very beginning when we first were elected, we sat around a table and someone was talking about cinemas and supermarkets and places where people go, we are not going to change the way people are right now, we need to go to them, and there may be a choice of looking into the current cathedrals of the 21st century, which are supermarkets and the like. So it’s about where we actually are going to be. That’s why I’m quite heartened by the Outer London work that’s going on and the buses going out to various communities.

The one thing that I would just like to bring us back to, right at the very beginning of our work here we invited Ford to come in and we asked them very pertinent questions and it was very, very important that we were seen to put questions to Ford, questions that Londoners asked and wanted to have answers to. Rather than discussing a motion on that given day, what we did was we asked Ford the right questions. I’m just putting it to you today, that rather than putting a motion down today about the rail strikes, rather than discussing it introvertedly here, I would like us to invite the RMT along with Connex, and actually say to them, “Excuse me, but what are we going to do for London?” Sorry Southwest Trains not Connex. I would like to do that and I am proposing it. Rather than having yet another motion, which I think may or may not be an emergency, and may or may not go anywhere, I would like to invite the various people that Londoners want answers from.

ERIC OLLERENSHAW: I am glad we are back to good old politics, Chair. I am an Assembly member who finds the system fascinating, in that I think I am now down in the history books as the only politician to win and lose an election on the same day at the same time, so I found it a really intriguing system to deal with.

But I want to first deal with - and Samantha made reference to it and Len certainly made reference to it - what the Committee has brought up under para 7.4, and that’s the failure which is right across the electoral system, of engagement and the involvement particularly of the significant ethnic minorities. Reference was made to Operation Black Vote which attempted, but obviously didn’t achieve, a great deal in terms of that turnout. It also goes back to something Nicky Gavron mentioned and Elizabeth Howlett mentioned about the voting system. How many of us stood on those polling stations? Where I was, in Northeast London, I had people coming out with the ballot in their hand, which then disallowed them the right to vote because they didn’t know what to do with it. In fact, the local mosque was inundated with people going there saying, “What do we do?” by which time they’d lost the vote. There was a feeling there of not just a need to educate the voter but to educate the actual officers who were dealing with votes, so they could make some attempt to explain to people, rather than themselves getting flustered. You’ve got to grasp that they actually hadn’t been told what to do with it.

I can remember Mary Jennings coming out and telling me she had voted for me three times, “So it’s all right, Eric” but I don’t know what she did with the vote and I didn’t enquire too much after that! On the eve of the long evening at the Walthamstow Town Hall when those ballots were going through the machines and you could actually see some of them come up, and we ended up having bets on the spread of votes. Absolutely true, six times it came up,

Eric Ollerenshaw and then a communist candidate -- six times. I know that some of the people in one of my old people's homes vote for me regularly but are official Communist party members. That is the intrigue, but what people were doing or whether they were kind of poor-sighted Conservatives I don't know, but there really does need to be not just an effort there with the voter but with the presiding officers and the staff. They've got to explain particularly to groups who feel themselves less sure than others shall we say, about what to do. There's a massive effort we've got to do there.

But the whole key thing swings round, doesn't it, to what we do. What we do here, which Nicky Gavron referred to, what we do. I'm sorry to go back to it in terms of where we began over a year ago, but when it was pointed out that we were having our meetings in a centre which would not allow Orthodox Jews to come in, when we were having our meetings in a centre which religious Muslims would find very difficult to enter, and that was raised at the first meeting and what did we do about it? We carried on meeting there for another six months.

It's what we do and how we set an example, and I know members of all parties around this table on functional bodies are making a massive attempt in terms of ethnic minority recruitment and in terms of what's happened in this building. It is what we do on those things which will encourage people to get themselves involved, and indeed, not just in casting a vote but in putting themselves forward as candidates for the major parties and taking part.

We have really got to look at how we operate. We never get out there and we're getting ourselves bound by a Mayoral agenda. This Assembly is not bound, so far as I can see, by any strictures about where it should get itself involved in, providing it affects Londoners. We've got to break the bounds of this, and what have we done -- within the very first few months, beside the political stitch-up, we -- and we entered it as well, we have set up a bureaucratic committee system, which you know Brent, Hackney, Lambeth and everybody else, and dare I say Wandsworth, and even Westminster would be perfectly happy with and we set it up. Well, perhaps it costs too much, you're right there Elizabeth. Well we set it up and we follow it slavishly. We have created that. So what a precedent we have set for getting involved and who's going to come along here and get involved because we have got to attend the Appointments Subcommittee's meeting on of this or that. It's meaningless but we have created it, we have set it up, we have perpetuated it, so we can have all these round table discussions if we want but are we actually reaching out to Londoners of every creed and colour? I would say we haven't, and we have actually created further barriers to that happening. Unless we're prepared to address that then involvement will not increase at any level, whether it be at the political level or the electoral level.

TREVOR PHILIPS: I'd like to make a few suggestions if I may, I think to be honest we talk too much and we don't do quite enough. Just going back to the first thing that Brian said, I agree with a lot of what Brian said and I agree with a great deal of what Eric's just said, but I think we should just rid ourselves of the notion that public attendance at meetings is a measure of anything. It just really is completely irrelevant. The issue about people's attendance at meetings is very simply, it's not about if we were more interesting or if they liked us more they'd come. The issue is, is it the most useful use of their time. And by and large it isn't. Because what are they going to do? What difference does it make if they are

sitting here or not? They can find out what we are doing by going on the website and so forth. I think we need to look for some other indicators and I would just like to make four practical points.

One is, I think the big hurdle is voting procedure and I think that irrespective of what the Elections Committee is doing I would very much like the Chief Executive to advise us on the issue of the phone voting, which I think is the thing that is in the next 20 years going to make the biggest difference, and that's the indications from your report. I would like to see what the possibilities of that is for this institution. I know the security issues and so forth which are involved but I think that at least we need to discuss it, because if in practise that is the sort of thing, whether it is phone or Internet or whatever it is, that will kick up turnout, and reduce the hurdle of voting, then that's what is going to make the difference.

I am very, very sceptical if I may say so, about all of the appeals to education. The worst thing I think any institution can do is go about telling people how important we are because they will know that, depending on whether we make a difference to their lives or not. Aany number of leaflets from us telling them that we matter, and the more actually we send them the more pissed off they will be, I think we need to work out what are the real hurdles. So the first thing I would suggest is that we ask for some advice, legal and technical, on the issue of phone voting.

Secondly, on ethnic minorities, my own view about this is very simple. The thing that will make a difference to ethnic minorities interest in this body is if there is more than me sitting here next time around. The point is if there are not eight black or Asian people sitting here next time, no matter how many times you tell people it is important, they will not take it seriously. Now this is something principally for political parties but I suggest that it is something that this Committee really ought to consider about how we can make it easier. For example, should we have a shadowing scheme in here for Assembly members. How many people who have ambitions get turned down by political parties when they come up for selection because they do not have experience? These are the kind of things that we can help the political parties with, so I suggest that that is something that maybe you might want to consider.

The third and fourth things concern the way we handle the scrutiny process. It struck me very forcibly last night that a relatively, in the scheme of things, trivial issue, which is, "What is the Royal Shakespeare Company going to do with £50,000,000 of lottery money?" received absolutely vast amounts of coverage on the news last night. Absolutely vast. Now why was that? Well, it wasn't just because it was a decision. I'll tell you actually why they got on television, it's because they had Sinead Cusack at the Cultural Select Committee. She did not trivialise it because I thought that actually she made a very serious contribution, but she's a star and they made it theatre. One of the things that we deliberately do not apparently do with our own scrutiny process, is develop a sense of theatre. I would just suggest that when we are thinking about sessions that we actually don't just speak about the issues and the strategies, these are all very important, but about the theatre of it. Because part of what we want to do is to give people a platform to debate. That is what will make people interested in us because we create an interesting public platform rather than yet another committee meeting.

The fourth point I just want to make, which is really to endorse what Sam said earlier on but I think is very, very important. I'm very disappointed myself, that as an Assembly we haven't

done more of what we did at the beginning with the Ford sessions. For the simple reason that we can play a role in London, which is different from that which is being played by the Mayor. The more that we want to distinguish ourselves from the Mayor, the more we need to give this Assembly a character, which brings people into it. I think Sam's proposal on the way that we might intervene on the rail strikes, is absolutely on the button. This is supposed to be a London issue, why are people going to Stephen Byers? They should be talking about it here, this is the democratic centre of London. Using what we do as the Assembly as an opportunity to provide a platform, is what is going to bring the cameras here, but what is more important is providing Londoners with the idea that we can be useful to them in their real lives and their everyday experience.

SALLY HAMWEE: Brian do you want to respond?

BRIAN COLEMAN: There have been some very thoughtful contributions from members across the political spectrum. I don't think the Committee is going to have to debate about whether or not we are in favour of PR because that's not the role I see for the Election Scrutiny Committee. I would particularly highlight just one or two points if I may, without denigrating anybody else's points. The last contribution of Trevor Philips, was extremely thoughtful, the sense of theatre. I would say to you Trevor, that you were the first Chair of this Assembly and I think you missed a trick in the early days by not giving this Assembly a greater sense of occasion and a greater sense of theatre. It's going to be very difficult for us to pick up but that is a personal thing. On phone voting, I'm tempted to say, this is not Pop Stars, we're not asking voters to phone in like Stars in their Eyes.

These are all relevant, and important points. It has been pointed out to me, and I think fits in with Nicky Gavron's point, that the greater the turnout in our election the greater the influence we may have in the future. I think that a point that members need to consider and that if we want to increase the prestige, the influence, and promote the work of this Assembly and the Mayor, then we should be working towards greater electoral turnout. Because then we can claim as an Assembly to be speaking for London as a whole.

I am grateful, Chairman, for your indulgence in allowing this debate. I look forward to the notes which the officers have taken and the Committee I'm sure, will spend much time looking at them and I look forward to a future debate on this Assembly when we produce our draft report, thank you.

Appendix D - Summary of recommendations

Leadership and Direction

That the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) should set out an action plan for the discharge of his responsibilities in early 2002. This should include setting out the roles of different members of his project team.

That the GLRO should appoint key members of the project planning team in early 2002 and thereafter as the need arises.

The GLRO must have the financial resources to appoint the full election team in good time for the 2004 elections, and have access to other specialist resources available to Government Office for London at the 2000 election.

Further consideration should be given to widening the GLRO's powers of direction of the Constituency Returning Officers to ensure consistency and good practice across London.

Any legislative changes arising from the above must be identified two years before the election in order to ensure amendments are drafted early enough to reach the statute books in good time.

The Involvement of Key Groups and Individuals

That the Electoral Commission must be consulted at all stages on changes to legislation and voter education.

That effective joint working with all relevant Returning Officers, Electoral Administrators, contractors, Political Parties, media and interested parties must start early in 2002.

That the GLRO should meet with CROs, BROs and Electoral Administrators at the earliest opportunity to prepare and establish an action plan.

Pre- election mailshots

That the GLRO should provide the opportunity for pre-election mailshots of both the Assembly and the Mayoral candidates in order to raise voter awareness as part of his normal information to voters on the voting process.

That the GLRO should make use of the marketing expertise available in London to raise awareness amongst voters of the election.

Ballot Papers

That more extensive testing should be carried out of prototype Ballot Papers.

That the date for receipt of nominations and publication of the statement of persons nominated should be brought forward. The change in timing should be in accordance with the change in the statutory deadline for the publication of the notice of election highlighted in the nominations section of this report on (page 9).

Early Voting

That early voting facilities ought to be made available for the 2004 election as a 2 year lead in time will assist a proper experimentation to be conducted.

That a minimum of three early voting polling stations at different locations be established in each Borough.

That polling stations should be located in places where the public often meet such as shopping centres.

That early voting stations should be open between 8.00am and 8.00pm on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday before Polling day.

Extensive public awareness campaigns must take place to advise people of the early voting facility.

That candidates and their agents should have access to the marked hard copies of electronic registers once the early voting period has ceased but before Polling day.

Postal and Proxy Voting

That piloting 100% postal voting, whether on a constituency basis or for the whole of London, should not be considered for 2004.

There should be concerted action to encourage postal voting as a means to increase voter turnout. Funding for the boroughs must take account of the resource implications of increased postal voting arising from postal voting on request.

That consideration should be given to central funding of advertising and publicity for postal and proxy voting through the Electoral Commission. Boroughs should be encouraged to liaise with the GLRO and Electoral Commission to ensure that the advertising and publicity provides a consistent message across London.

That early discussion should be held with electoral software suppliers about the feasibility of electronic postal and proxy voting registers to Boroughs to assist them in keeping records of those that have voted and communicating them to others with a legitimate interest in this information.

Nominations

Mayoral nominations should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and be accompanied by a deposit of £10,000.

Nominations for the Assembly Constituency Members should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and a deposit of £1000.

Nominations for London Wide Assembly Members (Political party list members) should require the support of 50 subscribers per Borough (excluding the City of London) and a deposit of £5000.

That the statutory deadline for the publication of the notice of election should be brought forward to be not later than the 32nd day before the day of the election and all other deadlines days prior to the publication of the notice of poll be adjusted by 7.

Polling Station Staff and Training

That the GLRO should review GLA election fees having regard to the complexity of GLA elections and the attractiveness of election duties.

That the GLRO should develop and agree a training strategy for all staff involved in preparing and running the GLA elections, and monitor and review its implementation. Consideration should be given to providing this training centrally.

That part of the poll staff fee should include a staff attend training component, and attendance at that training should be a condition on which election duties are undertaken.

Automated Count

That as manual counting of votes at GLA elections is not a viable option because of the complexity of the voting system, a decision about automated counting for the 2004 elections needs to be made in January 2002 with a view to procurement being completed in the autumn of 2002.

That counting should not start at the close of poll and should commence the day after the election not before 9.00 a.m.

That the GLRO and the contractor engaged to supply and operate automated counting systems must give clear and unambiguous guidance to CROs and electoral administrators on the detailed arrangements for the count.

That performance clauses in the contract must for the supply of electronic counting machines and software must be clear and invoked if the contractor does not achieve the specified deliverables.

That detailed and realistic count rehearsals must be carried out for each constituency, involving Returning Officers, election agents, electoral administrators, contractors, and other interested parties. Learning points should be built back in to the final arrangements and the GLRO's guidance and directions.

Verifications, adjudications and spoilt papers

That Constituency Returning Officers should form specially trained teams dedicated to dealing with papers rejected by the counting machines for adjudication.

That a separate category needs to be created on the declaration of result sheets for recording blank or partially completed ballot papers to distinguish them from 'spoilt' ballot papers.

Recounts

That the GLRO must give CROs clear and standardised advice about the recounting of ballot papers whilst recognising the responsibility of the CRO to make the decision on the day.

Accuracy and Transparency of the Count

That an automated count system must incorporate a process for continuous validation of the accuracy of the count.

To give everyone confidence in the election, the contract must specify the means for securing the transparency of the count system, the processes, and how the system will be expected to provide a running tally of the counts.

A new relationship needs to be formed between electoral practitioners and political parties and their agents to ensure confidence in the proposed systems.

That a single centralised venue for the counting and coordination of results from an electronic counting system should be adopted for the 2004 election subject to a suitable venue being available and it being economic to do so.

Venue for Co-Ordination of Results and media relationships

That careful consideration must be given to the selection of a venue for co-ordinating the results of the elections in 2004.

That suitable arrangements should be in place to deal with the media.

Overall Awareness of the GLA

Education packs for use in schools should be prepared and made available. These should contain information on both the Assembly and the Mayor and their respective functions.

Awareness of the voting systems

The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to work with the Electoral Commission to develop specific proposals on voter education on the voting system.

Political parties should consider how they can advise electors on the significance of second preference votes for the Mayor, and list votes for the Assembly.

The Electoral Commission is asked to raise this issue in their regular liaison with political parties.

Raising awareness through the media

That the Assembly Head of Media Relations considers how the media profile of the Assembly might be improved.

That the need to obtain consensus is considered on the merits of each scrutiny report.

Voter Turnout

The Greater London Returning Officer is asked to take the results of Electoral Commission research programme into account when developing the project plan for the 2004 GLA elections.

The Greater London Returning Office consider the scope for additional funding through the GLA to supplement and enhance the advertising campaign being undertaken by the Electoral Commission.

Participating in the day to day work of the Authority and Increasing the opportunity to vote

The Assembly is asked to consider whether greater resources should be made available for Assembly Members to undertake constituency work.

That the planning stage of each scrutiny review should consider the opportunities for greater public participation.

The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that each scrutiny review encourages participation via all methods of communication possible.

The Director of Secretariat is asked to ensure that opportunities for different styles of meetings are used in scrutiny reviews in the coming 12 months, and assess the impact on active involvement that they bring.

That the Greater London Returning Officer ensures that the results of voting experiments in the May 2002 London Borough elections are taken into account in the organisation of future GLA elections.

Increasing the desire to vote

That the Mayor and Assembly work together to examine the particular needs of groups, including black and ethnic minority communities and young people in order to encourage them to participate in the political process.

That in the run up to the 2004 GLA Election, the GLRO and Electoral Commission should work closely with organisations that seek to engage with ethnic minorities and young people.

That the Assembly uses the new Committee structure to respond in a more timely fashion to the concerns of Londoners as they arise.

That the Assembly makes greater efforts to develop relationships with other agencies in London in the conduct of its work.

That the Assembly encourages others to investigate the specific needs of minority communities and young people and make this more widely available.

Short term action points arising

That the GLA provide a programme of educational opportunities including educational material and visits by students.

The Assembly should establish mechanisms to ensure that the electorate is informed of the achievements of both the Assembly and the Mayor. Any mechanism chosen should ensure that the

Authority's work should be shown to be relevant to Londoners' concerns and to be making a difference. One mechanism by which this can be achieved is the publication of an annual report.

The Committee recognises that it is up to the Political Parties, and in their interests, to encourage the electors to exercise their votes.

Appendix E - Recommendations Requiring Legislative Change

The following would require legislative changes to be made. In the Committee's view, work to make these changes should begin in the early part of 2002 to ensure that they are in place for the 2004 election.

- The statutory timetable prior to the publication of notice or poll to be brought forward, including the date for receipt of nominations and the publication of the statement of persons nominated.
- The deposit (£10,000) and nominations (50 per Borough) for candidates.
- Early voting – application to Secretary of State to repeat early voting exercise
- Electronic voting for early voting stations
- Candidates and agents to have access, prior to the polling day, to the marked registers from the early voting phase
- Total or pilot postal ballot
- Strengthening of GLRO's Powers of Direction, e.g. in relation to staffing levels, siting of early voting stations, training requirements, etc
- *CROs' Powers of Direction to instruct London Boroughs to staff elections*
- Result sheet differentiating between blank or partially completed ballot papers and spoilt papers
- Free delivery of booklet of Mayoral candidates' election addresses or other political literature

Appendix F : The principles of Assembly Scrutiny

An aim for action

An Assembly scrutiny is not an end in itself. It aims for action to achieve improvement.

Independence

An Assembly scrutiny is conducted with objectivity; nothing should be done that could impair the independence of the process.

Holding the Mayor to account

The Assembly examines all aspects of the Mayor's strategies.

Inclusiveness

An Assembly scrutiny consults widely, having regard to issues of timeliness and cost.

Constructiveness

The Assembly conducts its scrutinies and investigations in a positive manner, recognising the need to work with stakeholders and the Mayor to achieve improvement.

Value for money

When conducting a scrutiny the Assembly is conscious of the need to spend public money effectively.

Appendix G : This Report in other formats

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