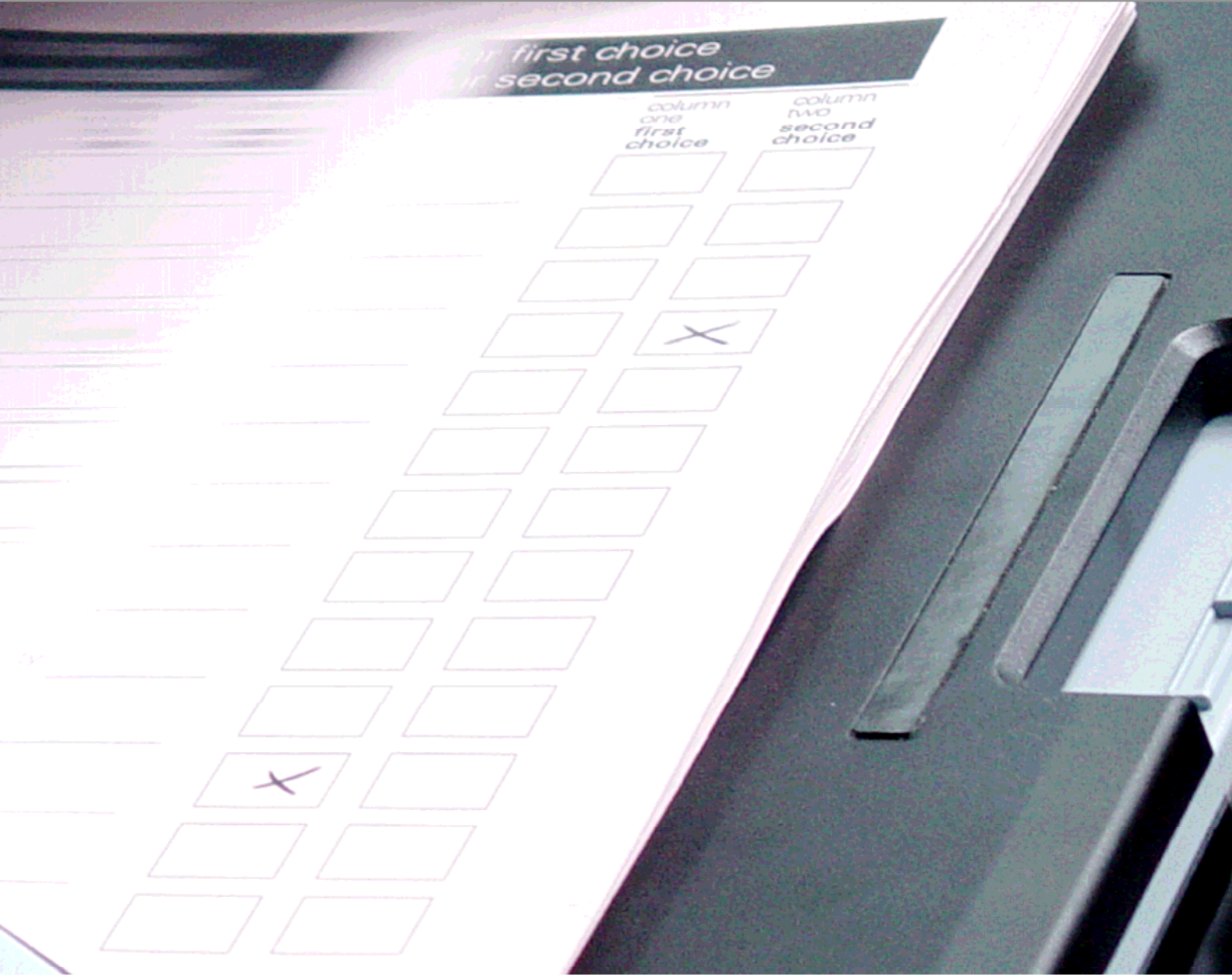


Counting the Vote
December 2007



Counting the Vote

Report of the London Assembly's Elections Review Committee

Elections Review Committee
December 2007

Elections Review Committee Members

Brian Coleman, Chairman	Conservative
Sally Hamwee, Deputy Chair	Liberal Democrat
Len Duvall	Labour
Damian Hockney	One London
Darren Johnson	Green

Terms of Reference

To scrutinise the arrangements for the 2008 London elections in light of what has been learnt from the recent elections in Scotland, Wales and England.

Contact:

Richard Derecki, Scrutiny Team Leader
email: richard.derecki@london.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7983 4899

Dale Langford, Committee Administrator
Email: dale.langford@london.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7983 4415

Counting the Vote

1. Introduction

1.1 Following serious failures at a number of this year's English election pilots and concerns at the high number of rejected votes for the Scottish Parliamentary and local elections¹, the London Assembly agreed to establish an elections review committee. The principal aim of the committee is to scrutinise the arrangements for the 2008 London elections², with particular reference to the electronic counting of the vote.

1.2 The Greater London Authority (GLA) has changed its counting contractor from the one used in 2000 and 2004. Indra, a leading Spanish technology company, will for the first time provide the e-counting systems and services for the 2008 London elections³. It is therefore timely to review progress being made by the London Elects team that manages Indra.

1.3 The elections review committee is tasked with assessing the progress made by the Greater London returning officer (and the London Elects team) against their own stated milestones and to review the actions taken to learn the lessons of the pilot schemes and from Scotland. Our findings are largely positive. However, there are a number of areas where we believe further action is required in order to achieve the highest level of confidence in the counting process.

2. Background

2.1 On 22 May, the chairman of the elections review committee (the committee) wrote to the Greater London returning officer (GLRO) asking for information on the arrangements for the 2008 London elections in light of what had been learnt from the recent elections in Scotland, Wales and England, with particular reference to the counting of the votes:

- What arrangements have been put in place to ensure the effective delivery of the 2008 GLA elections;
- What lessons can be learnt from the recent Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and English local elections; and
- What additional arrangements will be put in place over the next 12 months to ensure the effective delivery of the 2008 GLA elections?⁴

2.2 At its 10 July meeting, the committee took evidence from the Ministry of Justice, from Bedford and Breckland councils, the GLRO and the London Elects team, and from Indra.⁵ On 10 September, the chairman of the committee accompanied the GLRO and members of the London Elects team to observe the conduct of the Oslo city and district elections where Indra provided the e-counting service.⁶

¹ Some 170,000 possible votes were not cast effectively or at all in these elections.

² There will be three Londonwide elections in 2008: for the Mayoralty, for constituency and Londonwide Assembly Members.

³ Indra is contracted by the Greater London returning officer (GLRO), the official in charge of running the election, and the London Elects team to provide an e-counting service for the 2008 Greater London elections which is compliant with the needs of the GLA election rule which the invitation to best and final offer (BAFO) issued on the 26 February 2007 sought to anticipate.

⁴ The response from the GLRO and a separate response from Indra were published on the agenda for the Committee's meeting on 10 July 2007: <http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/elect08/2007/jul10/agenda.jsp>

⁵ The transcript for this meeting is available at <http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/elect08/index.jsp>

⁶ A note of that visit is attached to this report as annex 2.

2.3 On 23 October, Ron Gould published his report into the 3 May 2007 elections in Scotland (the 'Gould report'). This independent report examined the reasons why up to 170,000 ballot papers were rejected and reviewed the steps leading up to the election. It covered a wide range of issues including legislation, roles and accountability, planning and timing, ballot papers and voting issues, public information and the count itself. Our report reflects on a number of findings relevant to the GLA 2008 elections.

2.4 On 1 November, members of the committee attended a demonstration at which they were able to observe a practice run of the scanning machines. In total 600 ballot papers were run through the scanners.

3. *What is electronic counting (e-counting)?*

3.1 Votes cast at any government election, general, regional, or local have traditionally been hand counted. The process is complex and laborious⁷.

- At the close of the polling stations each ballot box is sealed, and a statement of the number of ballot papers issued is attached.
- The boxes are then transported to counting centres, emptied and sorted before hand counting begins by volunteers.
- The number of votes recorded at the count is cross checked with the number of ballot papers issued, and any discrepancies are immediately investigated by the Returning Officer.
- For ballot papers that are not clearly marked, have indeterminate markings or may be spoilt, adjudication takes place by the returning officer in consultation with political party agents.
- Once the votes are collated the returning officer 'declares' the result of the election.

3.2 Simply put, the electronic counting of votes (e-counting) replaces counting by people by counting by machines.

- When the ballot boxes arrive at the count centres they are emptied and the ballot papers are fed into large scanners that check the authenticity of the papers, read off the votes cast and accumulate the votes electronically.
- The number of ballot papers counted through the scanners is reconciled with the numbers tagged to the box.
- If the scanners reject ballot papers because they have indeterminate markings or are spoiled then adjudication takes place by the returning officer.
- Once the votes are collated the returning officer 'declares' the result of the election.

⁷ Annex 3 shows a diagrammatical representation of the two processes.

3.3 For advocates of this system the benefits are faster count times, greater levels of accuracy (particularly where systems of proportional representation voting are used) and a reduced need for paid workers at the count centres. For opponents, e-counting is more expensive, fallible (given the reliance upon IT) and less transparent, given that observers are unable to see the mounds of counted ballot papers building up.

4. *E-counting in England and Scotland*

4.1 E-counting has been relatively widely implemented through electoral pilot schemes as well as at other elections. It has been piloted at English local government elections in 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006 and was also used under specific legislation at the 2000 and 2004 elections to the London Assembly and for the Mayor of London. Electronic counting was also used at the combined Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections in 2007.

4.2 The complexity and scale of GLA elections, using three different electoral systems and with an electorate of 5.3 million make electronic scanning and interpretation the only practicable option to deliver an accurate and efficient count. It is estimated that a manual operation could take up to three days owing to the nature of the sequential count stages.

4.3 Previous GLA experience has been largely positive, bar a small number of hiccups: for example the breakdown in communication system that prevented the visual representation of the overall progress of the count in 2004. Our predecessor committee's review of the 2004 GLA elections found that 'overall, the 2004 experience of electronic counting was immeasurably better than the 2000 election. The system had been improved, providing greater accuracy and speed.'⁸

5. *Reviewing the English pilots and Scottish elections*

5.1 The Secretary of State approved a total of five English e-counting projects in January 2007. They were:

- Bedford Borough Council
- Breckland District Council
- Dover District Council
- South Bucks District Council
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Warwick District Council undertook a joint pilot.

5.2 The committee called for evidence on the two pilots at Bedford and Breckland run by Indra. All the pilots were subject separately to evaluation by the Electoral Commission⁹.

⁸ Greater London Authority Elections, London Assembly elections review committee, December 2004, page 29

⁹ Separate evaluations on Bedford and Breckland were produced by the Electoral Commission, August 2007

Breckland

5.3 Breckland is a predominantly rural district in Norfolk, with an electorate of some 80,000. On Thursday 3 May 2007 elections were held for 36 district council wards (eight were uncontested) and 21 parish contests including parish wards (four in Dereham and four in Thetford). The ballot boxes were stored over night and taken to the count centre the following day for the count to begin at 10am. The e-counting process was abandoned after 10 hours and the declaration of 21 results, and a manual count for the remaining 28 contests took place on the following Tuesday. Of grave concern was the discovery that the result for one district ward (Dereham-Humbletoft) had been based on an incorrect number of votes (see box article).

5.4 The Breckland e-counting pilot has been the subject of an Electoral Commission report and a Breckland Overview and Scrutiny Commission inquiry¹⁰. The Electoral Commission stated that the election had been fraught with difficulties, the OSC report describes scenes of frustration and tension [that] reached crisis point', with 'slow-hand clapping' and 'a fire extinguisher being let off.'¹¹

Bedford

5.5 The borough of Bedford lies 50 miles north of London and comprises the town of Bedford, the urban area of Kempston and 42 rural parishes. The council is constituted by a directly elected Mayor and 54 councillors and elects by thirds. At the May 2007 elections the electorate of the borough was 113,903.

5.6 Following the close of the polling stations on the evening of Thursday 3 May, ballot boxes were taken to the count venue and sorted according to the election. Scanning began at 10am on Friday morning and was finished by 6.30pm. All the borough council results were declared by 8.30pm and the Mayoral result was declared at 1.30am the following day, giving a total count time of 15.5 hours against a target time for the count of four hours.

Scotland

5.7 The combined Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections were run with two different electoral systems, new style ballot papers and two different ways of marking their vote (a traditional 'x' for the parliamentary elections and numbers to rank candidates for the local government elections). More than two million votes were cast for each election and e-counting was used at 32 different count centres. The e-counting services were provided by DRS/ERBS.

5.8 These elections have been subject to separate review by the Electoral Commission, who commissioned Ron Gould to investigate the running of the elections given the high level of rejected ballot papers. For the parliamentary elections, a total of 146,099 ballot papers were rejected which represented 2.88% of the regional ballot papers, 4.075% of the constituency ballot papers and 1.83% of the local government election ballot papers. This compares to average figures for rejected ballot papers of 0.65% across the 2003 elections.

5.9 The detailed findings and recommendations are set out in 'Scottish elections 2007: The independent review of the Scottish parliamentary and local government

¹⁰ Available at <http://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.asp?CId=143&MIId=774&Ver=4>

¹¹ p55 *ibid*

elections’¹². The report’s key finding is that “the voter was treated as an after thought by virtually all other stakeholders”¹³. It states that as reforms were introduced and changes made to ballot papers, voting practices and the count process the voter was overlooked as the most important stakeholder.

6. *Key issues identified by the Elections Review Committee*

6.1 Our assessment of what went wrong at the aforementioned elections has highlighted the following key issues set out below:

- Poor ballot paper design
- Lack of preparation time
- Lack of experience in the count teams
- Poor quality ballot paper printing and handling
- Inability to manage the number of ballot papers requiring adjudication
- Lack of confidence in e-counting.

6.2 The following section sets out these issues in more detail and assesses the steps taken by the London Elects team to mitigate risks to the count process. From the evidence we have taken there are **no** indications that there were any serious failings with the e-counting scanning machines; rather the failings in the count process were largely administrative, and are largely from the printing and handling of the ballot papers.

Poor ballot paper design

6.3 According to the independent review into the Scottish Elections, the primary reason for the high level of rejected ballot papers was combining the Scottish Parliamentary ballot papers on one sheet. This led to voter confusion over how to mark a vote and how to number preferences. The report makes the recommendation that ‘the interests of voters would best be served by separate ballot papers in future elections’¹⁴. Our predecessor committee made a similar recommendation after its review of the 2004 GLA elections. For 2008, following rigorous market testing and widespread consultation, the GLA is using a separate ballot paper for each of the three contests.

We remain content with this arrangement.

Lack of preparation time and lack of experience in the count teams

6.4 The independent review into the Scottish Elections found that ‘inadequate planning for the 2007 elections has been identified as an important shortcoming. This was manifested not only in tasks being rushed, but in the real problems evidenced in delivery within the set timetable.’¹⁵ This ‘rush’ had an impact on key supply chain decisions involving outsourcing of ballot paper production and the production and assembly of postal ballot packs. Furthermore this meant that there was insufficient time to conduct adequate testing on the new systems.

6.5 This issue was picked up in our review of the pilots at Bedford and Breckland. As pilots there was very little preparation time and the user acceptance testing (UAT), the

¹² This available at the following link:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/scotelectionsreview.cfm>

¹³ Op.cit. p120

¹⁴ Op.cit p116

¹⁵ Op.cit. p31

high volume testing of the counting scanners in real time, was concluded as late as 30 April (Bedford) and 1 May (Breckland). Furthermore neither authority had prior experience of e-counting. In evidence to the elections review committee, Breckland's Returning Officer argued that the timetable for testing the count system was very tight and that 'resourcing was a key challenge for us'.¹⁶

6.6 In London, the retention of senior level elections experience within the Greater London Authority and the value of public scrutiny of previous elections means that there is a process of continued learning which has benefits in terms of project planning and in setting the contracts for the provision of e-counting services. The London Elects team is 'probably the most experienced multi-skilled elections team in Europe, with all the core members of the 2004 London Elections team returning to the 2008 project.'¹⁷

6.7 Since the appointment of Indra in March 2007, the London Elects team has set a number of contractual milestones leading up to a full user acceptance test in October 2007 when 120,000 ballot papers were run through the e-counting scanners. Further public demonstrations including to journalists and observer groups followed in November. Committee members that attended the demonstrations were 'reasonably impressed' with the progress to date.

6.8 Nevertheless there is no room for complacency. In his response to this report we would request a further update from the GLRO as to key milestones that will have to be met during the next six months. This response, which we will make public, should help promote public confidence in the vote counting process. Looking to the future we are concerned that it might not be possible to field such an experienced team next time.

Recommendation 1: We request that the GLRO consider what steps he deems are necessary to ensure qualified and experienced staff are available to evaluate the outcomes of this project following the 2008 elections and how to turn the lessons that will be learned into necessary modifications ahead of procurement for 2012.

Poor quality ballot paper printing and handling

6.9 It is clear from our review of events at Bedford and Breckland that difficulties in the printing of the ballot papers disrupted the planning process and led eventually to serious problems during the count itself.

6.10 For both Bedford and Breckland ballot papers, Print UK was contracted to provide the printing services which included postal and poll ballots together with acceptance test ballots. Indra began collaborating with the printer at the beginning of April on a number of sample ballots. As the project progressed it became clear that Print UK was unable to meet the demanding timetable of the election preparation.¹⁸ This led to the following contingency actions:

- Bedford printed user-testing ballots in-house.
- Bedford used a specialist printing company that misprinted some of the postal ballots. These were then re-printed in-house.

¹⁶ Evidence to the Elections Review Committee, 10 July.

¹⁷ Written evidence from the GLRO to the elections review committee, agenda papers, 10 July, 2007

¹⁸ Electoral pilot scheme evaluation, Bedford Borough Council, August 2007 (p12) and report prepared by Indra, committee agenda papers, 10 July.

- Technical problems meant that the printer was unable to print Breckland's ballot papers to the desired specification.
- Breckland's postal ballot papers were delivered a week later than planned.
- Indra had to take over the ballot paper printing using facilities in Spain.

6.11 All these alterations cost time and management resource and undermined the validity of the practice testing. There needs to be significant time to run the final version printed ballot papers through the scanners to allow for any last minute technical adjustments to be made to the machines. As the ballot papers kept changing in length and print quality there was insufficient time to ensure that the machines were set ready to read them following the vote. Indra argued 'the integration between ballot paper printing and the rest of the system [was] the key issue'.¹⁹

6.12 The GLRO stated: 'it is essential that the electronic counting contractors also print the ballot papers, and I think that Breckland and Bedford would agree with that as a fundamental lesson.'²⁰ Thus for the 2008 GLA elections, Indra is contracted to print and supply 12 million ballot papers (including postal votes) from its facilities in Spain.

We are content with this arrangement.

Inability to manage the number of ballot papers requiring adjudication...

6.13 As is the nature in many instances of process failure apparently unimportant individual issues combine one-a-top the other to bring confusion and ultimately breakdown. Our review has identified issues of poor ballot paper design, inadequate preparation time and printing difficulties problems as all contributing to the electoral failings at Bedford and Breckland. One apparently trivial design feature, the perforations on the counterfoils from which the ballot papers were torn, proved to be the catalyst for the abandonment of the Breckland e-count and for long delays in the Bedford count.

...at Breckland and...

6.14 Our review has found that the key problem during the Breckland count was the very large number of ballot papers that required adjudication. For example 'one box threw up 800 papers for adjudication out of some 1500 in total'²¹. The returning officer struggled to cope with the numbers of papers he had to adjudicate and felt forced to abandon the e-counting early on Friday evening. There was no contingency plan for a manual count.

6.15 The Electoral Commission identifies a number of factors that contributed to high numbers of ballot papers being passed to adjudication:

- A large number of ballot papers were not torn cleanly from their counterfoils; badly torn counterfoils caused the scanners to jam.
- Some ballot papers went into the scanners with counterfoils attached; the scanners could not read the ballot papers so they were sent to Returning Officer for adjudication.

¹⁹ Evidence to the elections review committee, 10 July

²⁰ Evidence to the elections review committee, 10 July

²¹ Op.cit p55

- The scanners failed to read marks on the ballot papers that at subsequent adjudication turned out to be validly marked crosses.
- Ballot papers from the different elections were put in the same ballot boxes but the scanners were unable to differentiate.

Breckland's Returning Officer argued that badly torn ballot papers 'caused us particular challenges' and jammed the scanners requiring these papers to be adjudicated.²²

Dereham-Humbletoft: The missing ballot papers

The district ward of Dereham-Humbletoft was declared with a turnout of 13.9 per cent. This surprised observers as being very low. When the town election in the same ward was declared with a turnout of over 35 per cent, concern grew because each elector would have been given the ballot papers for both contests and it would be very unlikely for half the electorate not to have used their district vote. Candidates and agents asked for a manual check of the vote. As an exceptional measure, the returning officer agreed. The manual check found the result for the declared ward to have been based on an incorrect number of votes; the e-count was based on 288 ballots whereas the manual count found 657. The outcome of the contest was unchanged but, as the Electoral Commission noted, 'candidates' and agents' confidence in the system diminished rapidly after this point.' The Electoral Commission believes that the reason for the size of the discrepancy was 'that a batch [of ballot papers] was missing from the scanning process'. The returning officer told us that because 'of human error they clicked the wrong one [ie button] which meant when it came through the system, what we got was an end result for us to declare, which we declared.'" For London, the London Elects team have assured the committee that the registration and verification processes are set to ensure no ballot boxes are missed, and the software will ensure that a premature verification total cannot be executed. We are content with this arrangement.

... at Bedford

6.16 As with the Breckland election, the large number of papers sent for adjudication created bottlenecks in the adjudication process and slowed the count. In particular, the way the ballot papers had been torn from their counterfoils was again an issue. The Electoral Commission report noted: 'scanning had to be stopped more than once to alter the workflow process or to adjust the system configuration'²³. In total thirty-eight per cent of Mayoral ballots, 11 per cent of borough council ballots and 22 per cent of parish council ballots were sent for adjudication (a total of 22,313 across all contests). According to the Electoral Commission report, 'Of the Mayoral ballots sent for adjudication, 50 per cent were due solely to tears and other issues rather than [indeterminate] mark[s] made by the voter'.²⁴

²² Evidence to the elections review committee, 10 July

²³ Electoral pilot scheme evaluation: Bedford Borough Council, The Electoral Commission. August 2007, p19

²⁴ *ibid*, p 17

6.17 The Deputy Returning Officer for Bedford Borough Council told the committee that ‘the [problem with the] perforations, a simple thing like that, managed to add five and a half hours, we estimate, on to the time for declaring the result in mayoral election’. He added that ‘I do not think it was an issue in relation to the software and the supplier that we had in relation to the electronic counting. It was more the printing issue. That was a primary issue we had.’

Recommendation 2: We remain concerned that the GLRO’s **business continuity plans** do not include a plan for stand-by facilities for a manual count if equipment failed. Inevitably this will be a judgement call by the GLRO and costs will be substantial if further space is rented for such a contingency. We recommend that the GLRO should set out his contingency plans for a full or partial manual count.

Lack of confidence in e-counting?

6.18 The issue of the level of confidence in e-counting was specifically addressed in Ron Gould’s report. While the e-counting services were contracted to DRS/ERBS and not to Indra, the committee believes that in terms of lessons learned and the dissemination of best practice the Scottish elections provide an important comparator for London. The electronic count and procedure related to it came under particular scrutiny following the events of 3 and 4 May 2007. The Gould report argues that many of the problems identified were directly attributable to legislative delays and **not** as such to any technical failings.

‘Such delays would ultimately influence the ballot paper design and thus the count, given the need for ballot papers to be compatible with the electronic scanners’²⁵.

‘Late decisions on ballot paper design resulted in there being inadequate time to adjust the technology to accommodate a larger size ballot paper.’

‘This indecision clearly had a knock-on effect on the planning and implementation of the count. The lack of clarity involved led to different decisions being made across 32 counting centres on the night of 3 May.’²⁶

6.19 Ron Gould shows a direct link from the legislative delays, to problems with the ballot papers, to inconsistencies in implementation of adjudication policy on the night of 3 May leading to a loss of confidence in the electronic counting system. His report states that there was a widely reported sense that the counting process was conducted ‘in a manner in which most stakeholders (save for some returning officers and DRS) were left uncertain as to how the process was being conducted. Although this was an innovative process, the media and the public felt that the process was not transparent enough.’ The report states: ‘While their perceptions were partially due to lack of familiarity they were also affected by the [lack of] information available at the count.’²⁷

6.20 Ron Gould makes a particular point with regard to ‘auto-adjudication’ for blank ballot papers. ‘While our review has seen no evidence that these ballot papers were dealt with incorrectly, the majority of stakeholders in the election were evidently not aware that this auto-adjudication was taking place and when they were subsequently

²⁵ Chapter 9 p119 op.cit.

²⁶ Chapter 8.2, page 104.

²⁷ Chapter 8.2, page 106.

informed of the issue, were uncertain about the criteria by which auto-adjudication was performed.’²⁸

Maintaining confidence in e-counting

6.21 The committee welcomes the efforts of the GLRO, the London Elects team and Indra to provide us with the fullest amount of information to allow us to assess progress towards the 2008 GLA elections. So far, the main milestones, those of ballot paper design, systems configuration and user acceptance testing have been met.

6.22 Challenges, though, still remain. In particular we believe that the following steps are needed to achieve the highest level of public confidence in the e-counting system. We are aware of the efforts that have been made to design a robust public information system that will take the voter through the complex process of voting. Making the vote counting process more readily understandable and transparent is central to public confidence in e-counting. Those who attend the counting of the votes need to have the system explained and to have access to people who can answer their questions during the count process. In particular, there should be clarity about all functions of the system and the role of the constituency returning officer’s staff in adjudicating all ballot papers on which there is any doubt either as to the voters intention or as to the admissibility of the ballot paper.

6.23 We recommend the following:

Recommendation 3: Further actions are necessary to ensure that voters do not accidentally spoil their votes by devising **clear and striking messages** in election booklets and through Polling Station signage.

Recommendation 4: We believe that elected members and candidates should, as far as is possible, be able to see the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers on screen. We therefore recommend greater publicity should be given to the agreed process for **ballot paper adjudication** to ensure the public and political parties are absolutely clear as to how this process will work during the count. For example, for GLA 2008 elections the scanners will record no vote where ballot papers are completely unmarked and these will not therefore appear on adjudication screens to be adjudicated on. This needs to be made clear to those who observe the count.

Recommendation 5: We recommend further work between the GLRO and individual constituency returning officers to ensure **consistency of the voter experience** across London and to disseminate clear information and guidance to ensure consistency of adjudication procedures.

Recommendation 6: To improve **transparency**, we recommend visual representation of mounting piles of counted votes should be in place for the 2008 GLA elections.

Recommendation 7: It is clear from our review that the pilot schemes run at Bedford and Breckland were poorly planned; timings were too tight and resource commitments inadequate. We note the Electoral Commission’s view that these failures led to ‘the deployment of underdeveloped solutions, which in some cases, were not ready to be tested in a real world environment.’²⁹ We reiterate our previous position and note that

²⁸ Chapter 8.2, page 106.

²⁹ The Electoral Commission, Summary, August 2007, p6

there should **no separate pilots in London** as it is far too late for these to be organised to take place during the 2008 GLA elections.

We look forward to the GLRO's response to our report.

Annex 1:

Visit by the Chairman of the Elections Review Committee to the Oslo, Norway for the Kommune / District elections – 10 September 2007

Process

The elections manager is responsible to a political elections committee (representing all parties on the authority) but has considerable freedom to manage and innovate.

Early voting is available - by post, in person at special polling stations, and by "home visits" for those who are housebound, in institutions, in prison etc.

The elector receives the equivalent of a 'poll card', and there are no notices in the polling station, except a 'place mat' in the booth explaining how to cast valid votes, although instructions on how to vote are also on the reverse of each ballot paper.

Voters have a choice of ballot papers - one per party. The voter selects any one of these for each contest (Kommune or District) and may indicate preference for any candidate on their selected party list so as to influence the order in which that party's seats are awarded. The voter may also write in the name of any candidate from another party's list (as a personal vote) which has the effect of reducing the power of the vote for their selected party proportionally to the number of "write-ins" they use.

Ballot papers have a barcode signifying the party to which each relates. Each ballot paper also has a unique serial number. They are not, however, treated as "controlled stationery" in the same way as at UK polling stations – the numbers are for reference only and a duplicate / photocopy would almost certainly not be rejected for that reason alone but would, at the count, be assigned a new and unique number.

At the polling station, the voter completes their ballot papers and then registers with polling station staff using photo identification, has the official mark applied to the ballot papers at this stage. The application of the official stamp at this stage validates the ballot paper and allows it to be counted. They are then posted in the appropriate ballot box.

A voter may go to a polling station other than his/her assigned station. Polling station staff have online access to the final register and check the person's entitlement to vote. They cannot, however, be certain that the voter has not voted elsewhere and so the voter's completed / stamped ballot papers are placed in an envelope which, with a statement as to the voter's identity, is placed in an outer envelope, with the statement showing through a window. These go in a separate ballot box. At the central count, officials check that the voter has not voted elsewhere and then includes the ballot papers in the count

Polling stations may have up to 6000 electors and are open from 0900 - 2000hrs. Staffing at polling stations ranges from 7 to 15 people plus the 3-person district elections committee (politicians).

Electoral system

The system used is an adaptation of the Sainte-Laguë method of PR, similar to d'Hondt but using divisors of 1.4, 3, 5, 7 etc, thus the prospects of smaller parties by accelerating the reduction in stage figures for those parties with more seats awarded at the earlier stages..

Preferential votes given by voters to candidates within the party lists influence the order in which the party's seats are awarded under its calculated allocation. A "write-in" of a candidate from another party detracts from the preferred party's allocation.

A party may embolden a number of candidates at the top of their list on the ballot paper and these people receive an automatic enhancement of 25% weighting within the party's vote, enabling the party itself to have a greater degree of control over the order of individuals' election.

Counting

Counting takes place at two levels.

At the close of poll, each polling station has its own preliminary count, producing figures for the number of ballot papers per party but not recording preferential or cross-party personal votes. These crude (party) figures are phoned through to the count centre to produce an early preliminary result which is published within a few hours of the close of poll. The ballot papers and written report (similar to our ballot paper accounts) are then conveyed to the count centre by taxi.

Here the ballot papers are scanned and results compared with the preliminary reports from the polling stations. If there is a discrepancy, boxes are re-scanned (typically once or twice) to achieve consecutive matching results. The scanning also captures preferential and cross-party personal votes. The software reads the write-in names. Doubtful papers are adjudicated and write-in names deciphered by supervisors where the system has been unable to do so.

The system calculates results using the Sainte-Laguë method and produces results, followed by a detailed report of data to polling station level.

All staff at the central count are employed by the city council (mostly their own staff), including the scanner operators, adjudicators etc. Indra staffed only the main installation and provided a scanner servicing facility.

The poll for the District elections was undertaken on the same day as the Kommune but the scanning of ballot papers did not start until the Wednesday (2nd day after the poll), with the report required to be published on the afternoon of the Thursday (3rd day after the poll).

Indra

The contract timeline was as follows:

Contract award	March
Occupation of an office in City Hall	June
Functionality test	30 July
Full-time access to the main hall where the scanning took place	10 August
Simulation (bulk testing) of process	25 August

The e-counting system more than kept pace with the supply of ballot papers received / registered from polling stations, and being processed by city council staff ready for scanning.

The scanner uptime was lower than will be expected in London solely because the arrival of ballot papers was staggered through the night, whereas London's will all be ready to start scanning at 0830hrs on the Friday.

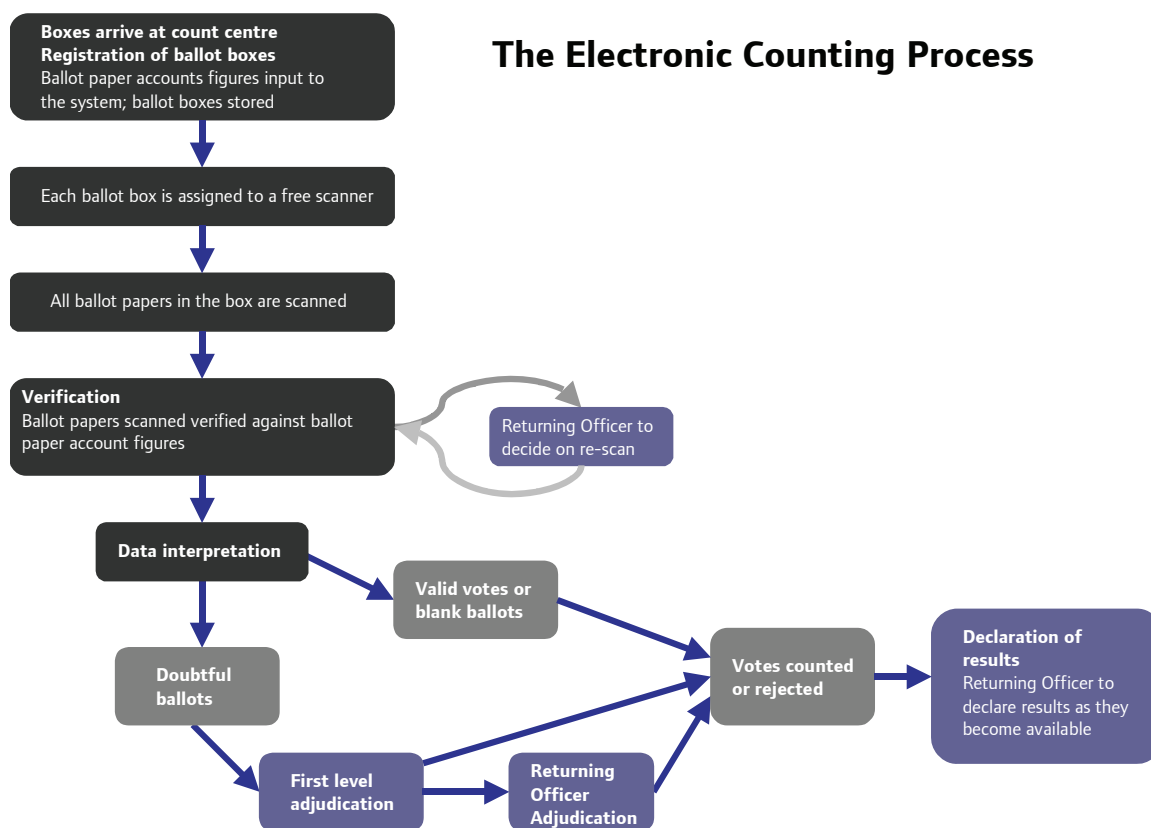
Machine jams were rare and dealt with speedily although some crumpled / damaged papers had to be fed individually. A spare scanner was held in readiness in case of a total failure.

Results

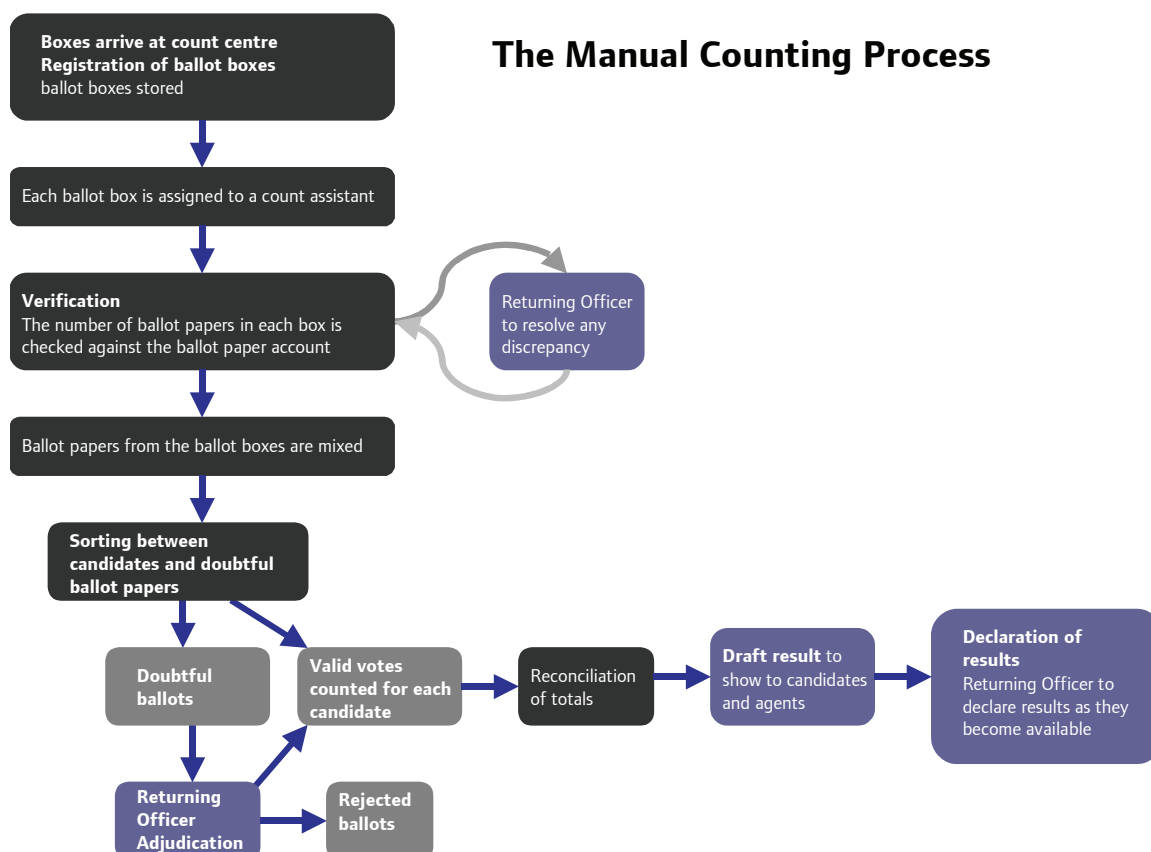
Although final results will be reported in full detail (ie including analysis of all data back to polling station level) only on the Thursday - 3 days after the poll – the candidates elected were known by mid-morning on the Tuesday.

Annex 2: Comparison of voting processes

The Electronic Counting Process



The Manual Counting Process



Annex 3 – Orders and translations

How to Order

For further information on this report or to order a copy, please contact Richard Derecki, Scrutiny Team Leader, on 020 7983 4899 or email: richard.derecki@london.gov.uk

See it for Free on our Website

You can also view a copy of the report on the GLA website:
<http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports>

Large Print, Braille or Translations

If you, or someone you know, needs a copy of this report in large print or Braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on 020 7983 4100 or email to assembly.translations@london.gov.uk.