

London Assembly Police and Crime Committee – 7 February 2018

Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Policing the Tower Hamlets and Local Elections

Steve O’Connell AM (Chairman): Let us turn to the substantive business of the morning, which is to discuss with invited guests policing and other arrangements around the Tower Hamlets elections in May of this year, with the aim to give people from Tower Hamlets and London some comfort around that election in the context of the history there. Can I welcome our guests, who are Claire Bassett, who of course has been here before, Chief Executive, Electoral Commission, and Will Tuckley, an old friend and Croydon colleague of mine, Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets. Welcome, Will. Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM, Borough Commander, and Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Senior Enquiry Officer [Special Enquiry Team]. I am sure you will describe your role in more detail.

I would like to thank all the people out there who wrote to us and have done an immense amount of work around this, and I would like to particularly mention Councillor Peter Golds, who I find in the audience today, and thank him for all his work, and others including Andy Erlam [Tower Hamlets Election Petitioner] and many others. I am putting it on record to thank those good people for all the work that they have done and are doing into focusing the minds of various organisations on this very real issue.

Turning to the questions in hand, I will lead on the questions first of all, Claire, if I may, to yourself, reflecting on the Pickles report, which was in response to allegations of electoral fraud back in 2014, with the report issued and the review issued in 2015, with many recommendations. First of all, Claire, a question to you. First of all, has there been any fresh legislation and guidance following on from the Pickles report [*Securing the ballot, Report of Sir Eric Pickles’ review into electoral fraud*] that you implemented and understand?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Thank you. The first thing to say is that we very much welcomed the vast majority of what the Pickles report said. It really built on recommendations we had repeatedly made following previous elections and the really good work that the Law Commission did in 2016. The report was published in August of 2016, so it has been out there now for a fair while. We received the Government’s response to it about a year ago - in fact it was Boxing Day in 2016 - and it has been there.

If I start with perhaps the things that have changed, in particular with respect to the Electoral Commission, there were a number of the recommendations that asked for changes to our guidance. Most of those changes had already been made by the time it came out, and they were made in time for the 2017 May elections. All of those changes were in place. That included changes to our guidance which strongly encouraged Returning Officers to include additional guidance in postal packs about security, for example. We had changes to our polling station handbook, emphasising that English should be the predominant language within polling stations, and also we had done other things such as our partnership with Crimestoppers and other work around awareness. Those are all the things that we were able to do just within the power of the Electoral Commission, so amending guidance and so forth.

Disappointingly, frankly, there were a number of significant changes that were also recommended in the Pickles review that built on the Law Commission and other reports, things that basically required changes to legislation and the law and particularly primary legislation. We have not seen any of those changes. We have

had no primary legislation, so none of the changes like updating and strengthening electoral offences, changes to the process for challenging elections, for example, which there were a really high number of recommendations in the Pickles report for, and the creation of new offences. None of that has happened.

Unfortunately, as is the case with an awful lot of primary legislation at the moment, although we think it is really important, it has come up against the bulk of the Brexit legislative demands on Parliament. We are advised by Cabinet Office, who would be responsible for taking this forward, that it is not going to be possible in the near future to do any primary legislation, particularly while the Brexit changes are going through. It is reasonable to assume that a lot of those primary legislative changes that we would all very much like to see are not going to happen in the near future. We are encouraging Cabinet Office wherever possible to keep the Law Commission's really good work progressing so that at least, when an opportunity for a Bill were to arise, that might be well-progressed and able to go forth.

The Cabinet Office does recognise, however, that this is an area that does urgently need reform, not just in the context we are talking about today but much more broadly. Efficiency of Returning Officers also needs to change. Where possible, they are making changes through secondary legislation and orders. An example of that is the voter identification (ID) pilots, where individual orders have been brought forward for all but one of those now in order to do those pilots. Again, more significant changes will take primary legislation. There was a similar pilot where we piloted changes to the annual canvass in some local authorities last year and the year before. Those pilots were successful but we have had to revert to the old way of doing things because there is not an ability to do primary legislation. To answer your question, we have made some changes. We would like to see more.

Just to follow through more specifically around the Tower Hamlets preparations, one of the other recommendations was around the preparation, how we work together in doing that, and I think we have increasingly seen that improve in all of the elections since 2014. We are attending all of the planning meetings with both the Returning Officer and the police there, and we have been closely involved in that and encouraging that and pleased by a number of the changes that have been made, like count venues and that sort of thing.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): It is quite a mixed picture, in other words. The measures that were recommended that you were able to do so without any kind of legislation, you have put in place?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): That is the point you are making. There were some that required secondary legislation, and we will get on to questions around this later. Piloting is in the course of being put in place.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Just to bring that forward, the problem we have with secondary legislation, though, is that it is not the panacea that it was perhaps hoped to be by some about a year ago, in that everyone else who has primary legislation coming through has also had the same good idea that they will use secondary legislation. My understanding is that the pressure on time for secondary legislation is also extremely high now. Just as an example, things like the manifesto commitment of votes for life. That is being taken through as a Private Member's Bill.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): It is a log-jam of secondary legislation for the reasons you are saying, so there could be a wait for those as well that is required. So that we can describe this to Londoners, what proportion of Pickles' recommendations are now - only roughly - in place?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I am reluctant to put a number on it. I would say about 10% or 15% that related directly to us or to things like changes in guidance or recommendations, they have happened. I would say there is then quite a grey patch of perhaps another 20% to 30% where some change is possible. For example, we can recommend people do things, and things like the Campaign Code of Conduct, which is a recommendation we would like to see that links to all of this. That is there, but it is non-compulsory and it would need legislation to be compulsory. It not quite an 'either/or' because there are some things where it has been possible to make some progress, but not the whole progress that we would like to see.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): You mentioned - and it is going to be covered again later - English as the preferred language. I think someone had a question that it should be the language in the polling booths. You will get asked around that later. Is that one that needs legislation or one that you can just recommend as good practice, as an example?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I need to double-check. I know we have put it in our polling station handbook that English should be the language used in polling stations. If someone refused to do it and whether that is enforceable, I would need to check. We can write to you and let you know. Certainly, that is one of the ones where it is quite clear that it is in the Polling Station Handbook for Presiding Officers and they are instructed by Returning Officers to abide by the handbook.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): That is the point I am making, that some of the Pickles recommendations that may need or do need legislation you could put as recommendations --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes, and that is what we have done.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): -- so that, in the elections in May, they will be in the handbook saying - and we will pursue this later - "This is preferred".

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): A really good example of where we have done that is the additional guidance that goes out with the postal packs. We have recommended that there is an additional guidance for voters in the postal pack about handling and security of their postal vote. The reason why I keep using the "additional" word is that it cannot be in the main guidance that is prescribed, so that is a good example of a compromise where we are strongly recommending the additional bit. In an ideal world, it would be a requirement as part of the guidance.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): I was going to say about a hierarchy of preferences that you want to see when all of Pickles is implemented. Those ones that you see as the most important you are trying to put as recommendations in polling booths and in councils prior to any election, not just Tower Hamlets, but elsewhere.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Absolutely. It is worth saying at this point that one of the real challenges we face with elections and electoral law is how much of it is in primary statute, and it is hard. Even some forms that we would really like to change just for accessibility purposes are prescribed in primary legislation so we cannot change it. One of the wider reforms we would like to see is a recognition that you do not need quite so much of that prescription in primary legislation. You can have the overarching primary legislation, and then below that have statutory instruments which give you greater flexibility and allow you to take out some of the real confusion and difficulty of having so many pieces of primary legislation.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): To recap, despite the frustration, shall we say, that you have not been able to progress as quickly as possible, are you saying to us and to Londoners that you feel more reassured that some of the measures that you have been able to introduce and implement have given you more reassurance around the May elections in Tower Hamlets?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): OK. That is really good. Are there any questions on this section before I move to Peter? We are now going to talk more specifically around Tower Hamlets itself. Peter, you have some questions.

Peter Whittle AM: Hello. Can I start by asking Sue? Could you just give us a picture of the general lessons that have been learned about the events surrounding the 2014 election?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): OK. First of all, I welcome the opportunity to be here today to demonstrate that we have learned those lessons since 2014. There is a lot of organisational learning that we have been putting into our plans, certainly, in the elections that we have had in the last two years, so two general elections, a referendum, the mayoral election for London, and a by-election. We have been able to start putting those plans into process and refining them and learning from them as we have gone along, which will stand us in good stead for the election in May. I know it is different, and everybody keeps telling me the election in May will be very different, so I am always bearing that in mind.

First of all, I want to say that my main objective is to be open and transparent about how we police these elections. We were criticised quite severely from 2014 to 2015, and I want to make sure that, as far as I can for the police, the public understand what we put into place and how we are doing it. I know we are going to talk later on about some of those methods. Part of my role is to support the Returning Officer in terms of our partnership plans because it is very much a partnership between the police, the local authority and the Electoral Commission. I have a responsibility to ensure that my officers are well-trained and that they are briefed, and I will talk through some of that in a minute. Finally, what I think is really important is about improving the community confidence in policing, because I know that has had a hit. Whether it is because of, locally or centrally, how we have investigated in the past, nevertheless it has an impact on the confidence in the community. Part of my openness and transparency is to increase that community confidence and also make sure that that organisational learning is fed into our plans.

When I look at what we gave in training to our officers in 2014/15, it is very different today in the training that we are able to provide. I will give you just a flavour of the sort of training that we put in. All the officers in my borough, every single officer undergoing their performance development days throughout January to March is having this input in their training. It is a two-hour session with questions and answers, and it has been compiled based on previous learning but also with assistance from local authorities, the Electoral Commission, and we have had visitors come in during that training. Officers from Stuart's [Ryan] team have come in to talk about what officers need to do and be looking out for. What we cover in that training is the history of the elections, with an in-depth view of what happened in 2014 and the subsequent removal of Lutfur Rahman [former Mayor of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets] from office, and the impact that that had, the understanding of what policing the election looked like, their roles, their responsibilities up to the day and on the day itself, but also afterwards as well. We need to ensure that it does not just stop after the polling stations close at 10.00pm, that we continue and the officers understand that even over the next few days and the count and even into the next week, we still monitor community tensions, and any allegations are encouraged, if there are allegations, that people still come forward and report them.

The officers need to understand the pre-election purdah, what that means, because for a lot of the officers they do not understand it. We also have a lot of directions that come out from our Directorate of Media and Communications, and that will come out nearer the time about officers' responsibilities, but we do that now so that officers have that awareness, and then the in-depth information will come out from our Directorate of Media and Communications later on.

We tell the officers what to expect at the polling stations. We put in little pictures of what a polling station looks like, what it looks like on the outside, what it looks like on the inside, what the do's and don'ts are around policing, so what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do as police officers. Also, having an understanding of the sort of people that will come to a polling station: obviously your voter, but candidates might turn up or their agents might turn up, or there may be people on the outside canvassing or people collecting the exit poll information, and where they can stand and where they cannot stand. We give them some knowledge about what to expect at the polling station so that they are alive to what is an offence and what is not an offence under the Representation of the People Act (RPA) [2000].

We go through with them what election fraud and malpractice offences are and how to deal with them in advance, as well as after the election and on the day. It is important that they know how to advise people that come to them with an issue of how to report it, and the intelligence is also important to us, and also the social media. I know we might talk about that later on. Identifying what press and social media is, what it might look like, how to deal with it before, and how to feed it into our intelligence processes. Also, because we now have body-worn camera, which we did not have last year, we give the officers instructions on how to use the body-worn camera outside the polling station as well as inside, and how, for any incident they have, they must put it on - it is on standby mode, but then they put it on - so that we can record what is happening and sometimes what is not happening. In other words, just a general clip of what the officers are seeing on the day so that we can put that into their statements. At the end of their shifts, they will all do duty statements, which will be compiled, and we will have that as documentation. There is quite a lot that goes into that training.

Then, on the day, all the officers will be briefed. They will have a more in-depth briefing around maps, where the polling stations are, where the sectors are, the sergeants that are in charge of them, the inspectors that are in charge of them. They will get more information if we have intelligence about right-wing groups that we think might be coming to the borough and how to deal with them, and then of course we have a whole plan in place around how we manage not just the polling stations but generally across the borough as a public order type situation and how we would deal with it.

Then, on the day, you will also have senior leaders that will be popping in and out of the polling stations and checking that people are doing what they should be doing and testing them. At the last general election last year, I was out and about, and I quizzed the officers as to, "Do you have your little card?" They are given a card from the Electoral Commission about what all the offences are. They all pulled it out of their pockets so they could demonstrate they had it on them, and I was able to question them about their roles there to make sure that they were doing what they should be doing. We also invited our community representatives with us - so people from our Independent Advisory Group - to come out, and they even came to our briefings in the morning. We open ourselves up to the scrutiny of community representatives coming out to make sure that we are doing things as we say we are doing them.

Peter Whittle AM: Thank you. What you very comprehensively laid out there seems, though, to me to be basically a statement of what officers should be doing anyway. Do you know what I mean? What their duties are at polling stations and what-have-you. I just wondered that a lot of the problems that arose during the election - and I am thinking of May coming up - presumably were ones that were going on during a campaign.

When you are talking about the general corruption, for want of a better word, it was something that happened before you got to the polling booths. Do your officers have any training, therefore, in regard to that? I would have thought this is the crucial point.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Yes, of course. That is included within their training, what happens before and canvassing and what happened with the postal votes last time, so that they are aware of it. RPA offences are a small part of what the officers' learning is, and generally they are only made more aware of them as we come up to an election. It is not like the Theft Act or criminal damage or drugs, which they are dealing with all the time every day. We have to remind them what those specific offences are and give them bespoke training, and we do include the bit about canvassing before and postal votes and electoral fraud, but that is why we give them the history of what went on, and what the consequences of not getting it right are that we have a full investigation team now, costing a huge amount of money, reinvestigating those offences. We want them to get it right very early on, so if they are coming across people that are saying something not quite right has happened, then they are able to point them in the right direction to get them to report it early on so that we can get an investigation under way.

I have also invested in my Faith Officer, who in the last election, the general election, went around to all the different faith establishments and talked about spiritual influencing, talked about electoral fraud, and was able to give people a little bit more information about what is right and what is wrong, because a lot of the general public do not understand. What we have said is we would be happy to repeat that process with the Faith Officer leading up to this mayoral election as well.

Peter Whittle AM: Basically, you are talking about, what, a six-week period, where officers will be more aware of making --

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): They are aware from now. They have had their training from January. The training started then. The training goes from January to March because we have 14 training days, and we have 600 to 700 officers, police staff on top of that. We have to incorporate everybody into that training. It does take time. The last of our officers will be trained in March, but our detectives have a bespoke training as well because they are the ones that are going to be investigating, and they might have to realise the difference between what is an RPA offence, and therefore put it up to Stuart's [Ryan] team, and what is a local offence that may be connected to an election or it might involve a councillor or a Member of Parliament (MP) or a candidate, and therefore that is specifically investigated by some dedicated officers that we have put aside and have given additional training.

Peter Whittle AM: That was going to be my next question. How many officers are we talking about? How many officers will be working after this election?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): On the day?

Peter Whittle AM: Actually for the period of the election.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Sorry. Just so I get this right, are you talking about in the investigation or are we talking about generally overall?

Peter Whittle AM: The campaign.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): The whole thing?

Peter Whittle AM: The whole thing.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Every single one of my officers - it does fluctuate, but I have roughly 620 police officers, and that includes some of our funded officers - will get that. Every Police Community Support Officer will get that training. Every member of police staff, so front counter staff, will get that training, and we also highlight it with our intelligence staff, who are not my officers, and the MPS detention staff, who are not my officers, but who work at Tower Hamlets. They also get that training or they get a briefing into that as well.

To show you how seriously I take this, the actual day I have dedicated as what I call a 'red day' in terms of my resources, which means nobody gets that day off. The only people who can have that day off are those who have already submitted it within a period of annual leave, and we even check that so that it is not just something they have put in because they want that day off. There must be a specific reason: they have a holiday, a wedding, family. Everybody is expected to be at work that day. We are going to use every single one of our staff during the 3 May [2018] elections. In the lead-up to it, they are all trained and they will all have roles to play and know that their roles are.

Peter Whittle AM: Stuart, do you have anything to add to that?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): I get your concerns in terms of the run-up. From my view and my role, I have two hats, I suppose. The first hat the corporate piece in terms of my team investigating all electoral malpractice and fraud across London during the mayoral process this year. It is not just about Tower Hamlets; it is everybody. Obviously, for today, it is what additionally we have done around Tower Hamlets in that respect.

Some of the stuff you are talking about in terms of preparation and recognising the risks before we even hit that six-week period has already started. One of the things we are looking at is in terms of social media. We are just working out the parameters of what a social media scandal would be around key words, key sites, in terms of trying to capture some of the information in terms of --

Peter Whittle AM: I know you cannot give me the actual words or whatever, but what are you looking for, therefore, on social media? What specific --

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Looking back from the previous experiences in terms of the historical piece, in terms of --

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Peter, we are covering that. We have some questions on that later, so, if you do not mind, hold that thought, possibly, because that is going to be --

Peter Whittle AM: I will just finish off. I have one more, in that case. Sorry about that. We will think about that later. What is your general level of confidence in what we can expect in May this year? Are you quite confident that a fair, thorough election is going to be delivered this time?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Definitely. From policing, that is our intention: to provide a fair, open, transparent election. That is what our intention would be, and that is what we are working towards. We use the lessons learned all the time, and including the five elections that we have had in the last couple of years, to build on that so that we make sure that it is as independent and fair as it possibly can be. We know that there could be issues because we understand the history, and learning the history enables you to plan for the future.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I would echo that thought. Obviously, as the Returning Officer, conducting a fair and appropriate election is an absolute core concern for me. I have to do everything I can to ensure that that is the case. Particularly, as the Committee has emphasised, learning from the past is absolutely vital in that context.

Of course, Tower Hamlets is a constantly changing place. We have the fastest-growing population in the country. We have huge churn in that population. There are no grounds whatsoever for any degree of complacency in terms of how deeply embedded understanding of the electoral process and what is right and what is wrong is. Sue is right; we are going to be challenged. We have already been challenged in the lead-up to this election, and that is going to be constant all the way through. Do I expect it to be entirely smooth and without incident? No, I do not. The issue is, are our plans appropriate and adequate to be able to cope with events? That is what we have been testing on each of the elections certainly that I have been responsible for in Tower Hamlets, but I and colleagues appreciate that the mayoral and local elections are of a different intensity, perhaps, than some of the other elections that we have experienced in the borough.

Peter Whittle AM: One more question to finish. How big is your electorate?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): The current register is just over 190,000, which is the highest it has been in recent times. It is a considerable electorate. The borough has just topped 300,000 people. It is not quite as large as Croydon or one or two other boroughs, but it is growing rapidly. It is a serious and significant electorate.

Peter Whittle AM: Thank you very much.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): We will be exploring the measures that the Council is going to put in place a little bit later.

Unmesh Desai AM: A couple of questions to you, Sue. I am glad we have talked about body-worn video cameras. I was going to ask you that later on, but I might as well raise it now. I welcome what you have said about the use of body-worn video inside and outside polling stations, and I think so far the rollout all over London has been a success from what I gather. Do you envisage any problems with using the cameras inside the polling stations? I do not, but I just have to put this to you formally.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): We have given the officers some guidance on that. Clearly, if they are going in to use the facilities, like to go to the toilet or make a cup of tea or something like that, they would not put it on, but if they are called by the Presiding Officer in there that there is a problem, we are asking them to go in with it on standby and then hit the button if they think there is something happening that they need to record. What we do not want them to record are individuals who are in there casting their vote, because there is obviously secrecy around that and they should not be filmed. Just so that people understand, when something is on standby, it rotates. I think it is about ten seconds, but it is on a loop. It just rotates. It is not recording. It only records if the officer presses it and notes it down. If it is on standby, that is nothing to worry about because it will just be on a loop and it will keep wiping itself out. We have given them the guidance that if they think something is happening, then use it, because it might be used as evidence. They might have to record it. Outside, as well, if there are issues or problems, they should always have it on standby and then press record if they see something of note.

Unmesh Desai AM: Will you be receiving extra resources compared to other boroughs? Do you think you will need more officers? Will you need more help from outside the borough?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): There are a couple of cases where we think we will need some assistance from outside the borough, just for roving patrols. For instance, if Britain First turned up, we may need some support from outside the borough to deal with that because our officers are in and around polling stations and some of them have specific responsibilities for that day. We have asked for it to be put into the Gold Plan for public order for the whole of London to consider some additional resources. Because the count will be on Newham, there will be officers from Newham policing outside the count there, and they will all be briefed. What we have said is, if we use any officers that are not Tower Hamlets, they will get a briefing.

Unmesh Desai AM: Certainly using ExCel is 100 times better than the Troxy. I do not know if colleagues have been inside the Troxy, but the 2014 election count was held there, in what is really a very small arena, with all the inevitable pressures on staff. Anyway, that is all water under the bridge, as I say.

Will, can I ask you a couple of questions? In some boroughs, they have codes of conduct between the various parties. I know these codes are not enforceable, and we know how seriously some parties not represented in this chamber take codes of conduct. Do you envisage doing something like that in Tower Hamlets? Sadly, I do have to agree with you; I do not think things will run that smoothly.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I do. There was, though, a protocol in 2014, as I understand it. I obviously was not there in 2014.

Unmesh Desai AM: It was not worth the paper it was signed on.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): There was a protocol that was discussed with and circulated to the political parties taking part in the election in 2014. Clearly, as I understand it, some parties agreed to sign up to that. Some did not. Of course, as we know afterwards, practice did not perhaps match up to the assumptions that were set out in the protocol. Nevertheless, clearly political parties are a core part of our democracy, a core part of the process around the elections, have a very significant role to play, and I would hope that they would agree a protocol. Having reviewed recently the content of the previous protocol, I thought it was broadly directed in the right areas. The issue is compliance.

Unmesh Desai AM: Just going through the process and marking it certainly helps. The other thing I want to ask you is on the issues about public confidence and then restoring faith in democratic processes. Are you planning any sort of publicity campaign around do's and don'ts through the various council outlets now?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, we are. As I said earlier, particularly in a borough with quite a high population turnover, it is really, really important that people understand the process that we are going into in terms of the mayoral and local elections. We want that to have maximum impact, so we are timing it to coincide with the work that is being done by the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office at a national level. My understanding is that that kicks off in a bigger way later this month and then leads through into March, but I am sure Claire [Bassett] and others can say more about that. Certainly, the idea is that that will up the amount of information and communication and engagement then running through towards the election.

Unmesh Desai AM: There will be questions later on postal votes, but obviously, especially to the Black and Minority Ethnic media and many television channels that cover Tower Hamlets, the satellite television channels, particularly issues about handling of postal votes and other problems which have arisen in the past. It is about getting that message over.

Lastly, can I ask you about what I think is called 'treating', the very many parties and receptions that are held in the run-up to the election period? Some of the costs of these events never find their way to election returns. What are you doing about monitoring all these events?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): All the election offences clearly are being monitored quite carefully in terms of allegations and other issues that are made. As Sue [Williams] indicated, raising the awareness about those offences, and clearly many of them were featured in the conduct of the electoral court, so it is a vital part of our communication of information to make it clear both to the general electorate but also to political parties what is acceptable and what is not. Treating clearly is something which I think is not as well understood as it might be. Of course, there have been one or two notable occasions nationally and indeed in Tower Hamlets where that has been a key allegation and a key part of conduct that has been undertaken. We are certainly reacting to any allegations we get in relation to treating, being very clear about what the law is. The law is very absolute in relation to it.

Unmesh Desai AM: Chairman, I think I have strayed into other colleagues' areas of questioning, so I will stop at that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): No, that is fine. Indeed. That takes us nicely into the next set of questions, in which will be talking about particularly how you will be dealing with malpractice and other offences. My only comment really is I understand that Commander David Musker is the Gold Commander for the operation, which, for the record, gives me certainly some reassurance. Andrew, you have some questions.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. Thank you. Before I go on to my question, can I ask Sue? You have talked about the training that officers in Tower Hamlets are getting. What about the rest of the MPS? Are they getting any training on this as well? Obviously, Tower Hamlets is something of a special case, but it is not necessarily alone, and electoral problems are growing I think more generally. Are the rest of the MPS officers getting training on this?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): They will not have the same level of training as us. The MPS will put out briefing notes and communications to all officers about what to expect in an election time, what the officer's role is, so similar to what we are doing but it will be in a different format. Some boroughs may choose to include it on their professional development days, like we have. I do not know what the other boroughs are doing. Certainly, because there is going to be a big operation across London, all the people involved in that operation will have a briefing. Every single officer that will be involved in the run-up to the election and their duties on the day and at the count will get a bespoke briefing as to what their roles are, but I cannot hand on heart say that the rest of the MPS is getting what we are giving. I think we have had to look at ours as a specific case, as Tower Hamlets. It is pretty unique. Therefore, we need to make sure that our officers on Tower Hamlets are well trained, understand what has gone on in the past, understand the implications and understand their roles going forward.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): To give you some reassurance, my role is to ensure that the training for staff across London is in place in terms of the officers. The product that Tower Hamlets produces in terms of the training that it gives to the police officers we will be sanitising, obviously taking out the local issues and that sort of thing, and the headlines will be sent out to all staff going into the mayoral elections. Then, as Borough Commander Williams said, part of that will be briefings as we get closer. Obviously, my role within that is scanning as well not just Tower Hamlets but generally across London if there is any theme developing around any electoral malpractice, because it may well be that it will not just be

Tower Hamlets this time. It may be another area which starts having issues, and it would be my role within my team to manage that with the local borough, whichever area that will be.

Andrew Dismore AM: Claire, I would like to talk about registration of political parties. I am just running through quickly the history. You withdrew the recognition of the original political party called Tower Hamlets First, and then in January last year you refused to recognise the new party called Tower Hamlets Together. I think that was because it had a name similar to a local charity working in the health sector. Was that right?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I think it was actually a partnership between health and social providers. It was quite a significant, well-known organisation across Tower Hamlets. Yes. It is about registration, rather than recognition.

Andrew Dismore AM: Registration. Then the symbol of that party, which you disallowed, was a house, the same as it had been for Tower Hamlets First.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes. Would you like me to answer, or would you like to finish?

Andrew Dismore AM: I will take it through. Obviously, I am now heading towards Aspire, which you have accepted. I was wondering what the logic behind accepting that was, bearing in mind that its logo is exactly the same as the one you would not register last year and exactly the same as the one that Tower Hamlets First had. Exactly the same. What I am concerned about in relation to Aspire is that that name is both the name of a national charity and also a local charity working out of Toynbee Hall. In fact, there are quite a number of businesses called Aspire as well operating in the area, as a simple Google search, as I did this morning, showed. What is the difference between registering Aspire and not registering Tower Hamlets Together?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Just to take it a step back, there is a clear statutory test that we apply to the registration of parties, and that is around the party that wishes to be registered providing us with particular information: names, descriptions, emblems, and then financial schemes and details of statutory office-holders within that. That is the only test we have. We have to apply that against the rules that are there. In terms of Tower Hamlets Together, our research showed very clearly that it was a very well-known, established, understood name across Tower Hamlets. We did the same test for Aspire and did not come to the same conclusion, and applied the rules as they were there, which resulted in the registration of that party.

I would just make the point that if a party is not registered, we cannot take any enforcement action against it. This is a process where we robustly apply the rules that we can in testing it, particularly around making sure that we know who the office-holders are and that they have a constitution and the financial schemes that are necessary. Essentially, if those are in place and that is there, and we deem the name unlikely to confuse or cause offence -- it is not enough that it is just a name that is used elsewhere. There are plenty of parties where their names are used elsewhere. It is about whether we deem that likely to cause confusion or offence, and that is the test set out in the statute.

Andrew Dismore AM: I understand it is the same people involved as were in the one that you would not register, but you said you did some research locally on the name. What research into that did you do? What did it consist of?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It went through our standard due diligence process, which is looking to see whether there are other names and taking on board -- I would like to make

clear we had no representations from anyone, and we published the fact that we had received the registration, and we did that, and we did not have registrations about that one in terms of that name being the same as others as we were processing it.

Andrew Dismore AM: I see Councillor [Peter] Golds in the audience looking at that answer with some incredulity.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): He had objections to us registering it on the grounds that people believed that it was similar to a previous party. As I said, we have to apply the rules that are given to us, and that someone who is banned might be associated with that party is not within that test as a reason for us not to register that party. It is our firm belief that if we had not registered the party as it complied with those rules, that would have been a wrong decision that would have been subject to challenge.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am just going back to the question that set it off, which is the research and your due diligence process. What does that research actually consist of? As I say, I did a Google search this morning and found loads of organisations called Aspire, both national and local, operating in Tower Hamlets. If it is a question of passing off, rather than technical.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes. It is about then applying the test of whether it was likely to cause confusion to the voter, that they may think that that party is something that it is not, and we look at that, and we made the decision in that circumstance that we did not think it was likely to cause confusion to the voter.

Andrew Dismore AM: Fine. That is your conclusion. I am asking what the process is that leads to that confusion. As I say, I did the Google search, but you said you did some research locally as well, and I just wondered what that research locally is.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I am afraid I do not know in detail. I strongly suspect it would have included a Google search which would have looked at what those parties were, and general research on social media to see what profiles they had, what companies and organisations were open and active. I can write to you afterwards with the details of exactly what was done. I am afraid I do not know.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): If you could, yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: Going back to your earlier answer in relation to one that you did not allow, Tower Hamlets Together, you said you did some research locally, which I assumed meant local people.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): What I am saying is that it was very clear. Yes. That research threw up a very established, well-known local partnership of established public and voluntary sector providers, I think, and that was a much stronger argument for us to believe that it could cause confusion to the voter.

Andrew Dismore AM: How do you know that was more well-known than, say, Aspire at Toynbee Hall or Aspire as any of the businesses that have that name in Tower Hamlets, or indeed Aspire nationally?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It is not just about whether it is well-known. It is about applying that judgement of whether it is likely to confuse the voter. That is the judgement we apply in every bit of the registration process. At the end of the day, if someone wants to register a party, we have to apply the standard test that is provided to us, and when we have other --

Andrew Dismore AM: I am just asking what the mechanism for doing that is.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I am trying to explain it to you. I am not sure what it is you are trying to establish I did not do that you would like us to have done.

Andrew Dismore AM: What I am getting at is, without actually doing any research on the ground, which it does not seem like you did other than on the internet, in relation to Tower Hamlets Together, why did you conclude that it was a local name that was well known and reject it on those grounds, coming to that conclusion, and why you did not come to the same conclusion in relation to Aspire, bearing in mind that it is both a national charity which is well known, a local charity working out of Toynbee Hall which is well known, and the name for a load of local businesses operating in the area? What is the difference?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): When we look at those, when we looked at Tower Hamlets, that has a higher profile, and we felt that was more likely to confuse the voter --

Andrew Dismore AM: How did you decide it had a higher profile?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): In the analysis that we did -- I am really sorry. I do not have in front of me a detailed breakdown. We do hundreds of registration checks. I do not have a breakdown here of every piece of work we did and looked at. I am very happy for us to write to you afterwards, but at the end of the day we are applying the statutory test, and ultimately that test limits us to: would it confuse the voter? The fact that there are multiple Aspires is different from there being one significant Tower Hamlets Together.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): I think we have pursued it. Please do write to us with more of an analysis of how you arrived at that decision. It would appear to me that the judgement that you arrived at at the end of that decision is one that differs from particularly Andrew and others here. I think we will let that rest, and then, Andrew, continue with your thoughts.

Andrew Dismore AM: The next question on registration is: has Tower Hamlets Independent Group applied to be a political party?

Tony Arbour AM: Before you do that, there is something that I am confused by. You have told us that the test is "likely to confuse". Is that right?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It is to cause confusion. I have the exact wording, if you would like me to read it from the statute here for you.

Tony Arbour AM: The gist of it is that it is "likely to confuse". You have only spoken about the name. You have not spoken about the emblem. This is an electorate where it is likely that the emblem is going to be far more recognisable than the name. Therefore, did you not think that the emblem of this group Aspire, being identical to the emblem which was used by the previous organisation, Mr Rahman's organisation, is much more likely to confuse the electorate inasmuch as they are going to identify the emblem which was used last time with the emblem which they are proposing to use this time?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I appreciate the impact of that, and what we have to do is apply the law as it is there. That is not confusion. We had to apply it as it was, and parties are allowed to use emblems which are no longer in use. We have applied that as it is there.

Tony Arbour AM: Forgive me. When you say it is no longer in use, this is something which is being resuscitated really --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes, but it is not on our register of emblems there, as to that side of it. This is an area of law that we have repeatedly asked to be clarified and made stronger. What I am trying to do is explain to you how we have applied the limited test that we have to whether a party can be registered. At the end of the day, as it stands, we could have just had this repeated process until there was a name that was not on there and that would have happened. I just go back to the point that I made earlier: at least if a party is registered, then we can monitor it and we can take enforcement action against it.

Tony Arbour AM: I do understand that, but Tower Hamlets is certainly unique in London, even if it is not unique in the country, inasmuch as a very high proportion of the electorate is much more likely to be able to recognise a sign than to be able to read a description.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): That is why we have the rules that we do on emblems.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): That is a very fair point because when you are weighing up your judgement call, shall we say, around this, that should, I would have thought, have been factored in, that many people with English as their second or third language, their prime identification will be the sign and the picture of something that is exactly the same as the previous grouping. While you are making this judgement call, I would have thought - or the people out there would have thought - that would have factored quite strongly in. Anyway, Andrew, continue with your thoughts.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am just following that through. The emblem of Aspire is exactly the same as the emblem of the party whose recognition you withdrew. Correct?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Yes, but we withdrew that on the confusion with the organisation.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. That is straightforward. The answer is yes. The Tower Hamlets First one, the one you withdrew from, not the one you would not register. The original Rahman party which you withdrew recognition from. Now, following the points made by Tony [Arbour AM] and indeed the Chair, how would voters know that it was not exactly the same party if they are going by the emblem? If the emblem is exactly the same as a party that you have said is no longer lawful and you have withdrawn recognition of, and that emblem, exactly the same, appears against the name of another party, as far as half the electorate is concerned, they will think it is exactly the same party.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I appreciate that point. The issue of emblems and having them is something we are being challenged in the courts on at the moment and is something that we can review separately. Rather than prolonging this, I am very happy to take that away and, when we write back to the Committee, write back about whether we can review whether there is anything else we can do on that issue. Our hands are tied by the limitations of the law, but I am very happy to undertake to go and have another look at that and see whether there is anything else that we can do.

Andrew Dismore AM: I think that would be careful, because if the point is not to confuse the electorate, the electorate are going to be pretty confused if they see the same emblem for a new party that is exactly the same as the one you have said is not lawful.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): The reason why I am being a bit vague is I am not quite sure to what extent the test extends to emblems, around whether that is just offence, and I think we just need to check that, and I will write back, and I understand that, and we will undertake to review that again.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): You may like to go back to that drawing board because, while you have given the permission, you may now have --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Emblems are different to the name, so your party can be registered and it can have a number of emblems, and we can challenge that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Let me just continue. That is my point. You permitted the party, but perhaps you could do some more work on the emblem where you could perhaps not permit the emblem to not be used on literature for the reasons that we have just talked about, and do some work on that if you could and then write back to us.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I am very happy for us to review that and have a look at that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Andrew.

Tony Arbour AM: Please, still on this precise point. Given the immediacy of this - this thing is happening within days really of the election - reviewing it is clearly not going to stop what is going to happen because of the inevitable delay. Are you telling us absolutely that there is nothing the Electoral Commission can do to prevent a group from using exactly the same emblem of a group which - it is difficult to phrase - does not command the respect of --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): That is what I am agreeing to take away and have another challenge of and have a look at.

Tony Arbour AM: Do you believe it could be stopped before May?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I do not know. If it can be, we can act very quickly. I am afraid, sitting here before you as the Chief Executive, not as the detailed lawyer that is responsible for this area of our work, I am wary of committing either way to that because I just do not know the answer, I am afraid.

Tony Arbour AM: Did you not think that such a question might come up today?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I did, and I am slightly frustrated that I do not have the answer here, and I am sorry.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): If you can commit to go away and look at that with some urgency.

Peter Whittle AM: It is not going to happen before then.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Peter, Andrew has signalled. I like people to signal if they want to speak.

Peter Whittle AM: It is not going to happen.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Andrew, please.

Andrew Dismore AM: I think we have thrashed that through and I think you get the impression that none of us are particularly impressed by the outcome.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): No, and I appreciate that.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): I think that is fair to say.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. Can I go on to the police, please? Can you give us an update on the number and types of allegations of electoral malpractice you have had so far, or fraud, in the run-up to the election, and what investigations you are currently pursuing?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): For this year?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): About 18 allegations so far this year, and it does feed into, to a certain extent, the code of conduct that was discussed earlier. So far, of those 18, 15 are comments made between councillors or candidates in mostly false representation, but reality is, looking through those crimes, which is my role, on how many of those will actually lead to any convictions in the end, only two of those have gone up to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at the moment for early investigation advice. There is a degree of code of conduct issue around some of those in terms of if the code of conduct was statutory and enforceable, a lot of those issues that have already occurred would not have occurred in the first place. A lot of the comments made are being alleged which have occurred previously over the last couple of years, where comments have been made between people over a period of time, and suddenly we go into this election piece and it becomes false representation, rather than it is a continuation of behaviour that has been going on between people for a period of time. We have to be careful about how that looks going forward.

Andrew Dismore AM: There are two questions that come out of that answer for me, Stuart. First of all, what are the two cases? Obviously not the detail, but in the two cases you have referred to CPS, what sort of cases are they?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): The majority is social media in terms of false representations, and two of those are comments made on social media, which our first view is that they do overstep the mark in that respect.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. Then, on the code of conduct, as you have said, it is not statutory, but does it have any evidential force? Certainly, if you look in civil law, codes of conduct can have significant evidential value. Does the code of conduct, even though it is not statutory, have evidential value to you and the CPS in the way you approach and analyse these alleged offences?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): For most of them, under false representation, you have to show that there is an intent to influence and affect that person's potential within that electoral process. The code of conduct does not really deal with that in terms of the intent.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. More generally in relation to the code of conduct and other electoral offences, does it have evidential value even though it is not statutory?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Not from the CPS view at all. I had a meeting with them a couple of weeks ago and that was one of the things we discussed. Within law, it is not added as a positive or a negative in that respect, even if they have had that briefing.

Andrew Dismore AM: It does not carry any evidential value at all?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It is a case-by-case situation, but we cannot do a blanket, "It will cover everything". If the individual has been through the electoral process a number of times before and has had that code of conduct message given to them over a period of time, you could probably use that as a positive. Considering if it is a new person who is going into the electoral process, I do not know whether the code of conduct will have any weight at all.

Andrew Dismore AM: To use a comparator, the Highway Code has evidential value in deciding whether you have been a careless driver or not, does it not?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It does, yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: Right. I am just trying to see the same impact in relation to these codes. They do not have any other evidential value other than what you have just outlined.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It is only because you have to show intent. For the CPS, their view is the code of conduct does not take it any further in terms of intent.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. One of the things that the electoral court criticised and found in favour of the petitioners for was payment of canvassers. Are you getting any intelligence of this going on at the moment?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Not at the moment. This forms part of our intelligence scanning that we are moving into, and it picks on the point Mr [Peter] Whittle made earlier in terms of how do you know what the risks are going into it, rather than just the six weeks before? Part of the media scanning is going to be around whether we are able to find any issues around that as we go forward, and it is also about the lessons learned in 2014 in terms of how we put that into that scanning.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. Then, coming on to treating and intimidation, we have already talked about treating. The interesting thing about treating, if I may digress briefly, is that William Wilberforce [British politician and abolitionist] spent the equivalent of £600,000 on his election 200 years ago for one constituency, and so there is nothing new about treating. He only had about 200 voters at the time as well. There is nothing new about treating, but it was not illegal in those days and it is now. You have no evidence of treating at the moment?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Not at this stage but, as I said, as that media scanning and that scanning of the offences start coming in, that may well change.

Andrew Dismore AM: Or intimidation of voters?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes, nothing like that at the moment. We have information about door-knocking on a couple of occasions but, as part of the lessons learned from 2014, we are working with Tower Hamlets around those locations. Whether it is multi-occupancy areas or streets where there had been a number of offences previously, we will go into those a little bit more frequently than maybe we did previously just to see if we can stop that sort of offending occurring. Part of the issue is about prevention rather than just the prosecution.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. Can I go on to social media now? You have mentioned that you are looking at social media. How exactly are you monitoring social media? I do not know if this is to Sue or to Stuart.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): From my side, I cannot go into detail about how it is going to be delivered in that respect. As I said earlier, there will be a package of words, key sites and key locations to start off with. What will be factored into that as we go forward will be the councillor getting a webpage up for community issues to be forwarded into the council, and we have been meeting with them on a regular basis to capture that intelligence to see if that takes us into different areas in that respect. As a combination of all that information, that is how we will work out where the issues are occurring. I cannot go into too much detail about what it looks like or what the information is because we are still going through it ourselves in terms of what the key words are going to be and the key sites, but that will expand as the intelligence comes in.

Andrew Dismore AM: Sue?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): I was just going to say that, locally, we have our own intelligence team, which is starting to monitor social media. We have the assistance of some Bangladeshi officers on the borough, who will look at some of the websites and do some scan monitoring. They will do more in depth as we get closer to the election and on election day, but, if there is any intelligence, they will bring it to our information so that we can recycle it into the system.

Andrew Dismore AM: I think this is a fair question, to explain what you said. The sorts of things you are looking for are defamation? Intimidation? Rather than use the exact words, what sort of offences are you monitoring social media for?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): It could be like malicious communication. If somebody is using inappropriate language that would constitute a hate crime like Islamophobic or anti-Semitic, then we would pick those up. Sometimes people come to us and say, "There have been people making comments on social media", and so we would go back and review that. If there are offences there, then we would record it or put it in as intelligence.

Andrew Dismore AM: What about at the moment? Councillor [Peter] Golds has sent us some examples of the smearing of, I presume, one of his councillor colleagues, who was being described as Islamophobic. He sent us screenshots of the material, which does look to me, *prima facie* at least, intimidatory and defamatory, for sure. I presume you have seen these as well. The author of them is identified and so it should not be too hard to track him down. What he says is that the initial police response was to say they would basically give him a phone call and have a word with him. Is that it?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): No, totally incorrect. I had a conversation with Councillor Golds before this meeting, actually, around that information and there was a bit

of disingenuity around it. Without going into the depths of the investigation, that has gone to the CPS for early investigation advice. The individual concerned who received that information did not want to make a statement to us at all and just gave it to us for information rather than as a criminal offence.

However, we are considering the learning that happened from 2014. Any information or allegations that we receive will always get a crime report now in that respect.

We took it off our own bat to put that through the CPS and so that is going through early advice. The suspect has not been spoken to yet because we are getting CPS advice first in terms of whether it was in the period when there were candidates in the first place. That is a very grey rule at the moment in terms of the CPS. When does that kick in? That is one of the issues that I have to consider.

As you have seen yourself from the tweet, it is very clear, the message that is in there, but what do we do off that? There are a number of options that will occur off the back of that. The worst-case scenario from our point of view is if the CPS decides it is not a criminal offence. That person will be visited and spoken to and will probably be given words of advice and a letter of warning to start off with if the CPS decides it does not reach a criminal level.

In terms of the phone call, that was never, ever suggested. Everybody in terms of suspects will be physically visited as we go through this process because that is part of our commitment.

Andrew Dismore AM: Presumably, from your answer, then, there may be things which are not a criminal offence when somebody is not a candidate as far the CPS is concerned, but exactly the same thing could be an offence once they are satisfied at the CPS that they are a candidate?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It comes back to that electoral law. It is so archaic that --

Andrew Dismore AM: Is that a fair analysis?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes. It depends when the CPS decides the candidate piece kicks in.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. It used to be a lot easier in the old days.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It did, yes, unfortunately, or fortunately as the case may be.

Andrew Dismore AM: OK. The last question I want to put to you is about the Detective Inspector who was involved in the 2014 issues. Is she involved in the current supervision of the elections and potential offences?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): A bit of clarity: she was never involved in the 2014 offences. She was not in the team then. She did not come into the team until 2015 and so she was never part of the original investigations. She picked it up as it went on. She is still a member of my team. I am more than happy because, when I took it over in November [2017], I reviewed all of the team and all the skills. They have all had enhanced training with the City of London [Police], which has been supported by the Electoral Commission in terms of the first national electoral programme. They are at the national board in February and so I am more than satisfied that the staff in there have the skills.

At the end of the day, one of the reasons I have been brought in is that the final decision-making stops with me. It is not just a Detective Inspector. There are Sergeants in there who have been in there since 2015. At the end of the day, I have the oversight and, at the end of the day, the buck stops with me.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): That was some reassurance around that.

Unmesh Desai AM: Sorry, just two points, Chairman. Stuart, you said someone had not made a statement. Can you just clarify that point? You said someone had not made a statement. This is in relation to the --

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): The original information regarding that social media message, the person who provided us the information had not given it in a statement.

Andrew Dismore AM: The person who was on the receiving end of the --

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes.

Unmesh Desai AM: Is that Mr --

Andrew Dismore AM: We had better not say who it is.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Yes, do not say who it is.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): It had been provided to us as information only, which is fair enough but, because of the learning from 2014, part of it is about those themes, emerging issues, risks, etc. We will still take that as a crime and take that forward even if the person does not want to make a statement because there may well be direct clear evidence that an offence has occurred and it becomes a victimless prosecution to a certain extent.

Andrew Dismore AM: Even if it is not an offence now, it might be later?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes.

Unmesh Desai AM: Sorry, just one more, Chairman. I just want to get my head around this issue of when someone is a candidate and when someone is not. This person - and we have a screenshot of the tweet sent out - has been openly campaigning in that part of Tower Hamlets as a candidate, has been identified in the media, has been speaking at various events, and has now switched parties, actually, from what I gather, in the last few days. For all practical purposes, she is a candidate, and so I just cannot get my head around this. When is someone a candidate and when is someone not?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): We have had a long conversation with the CPS --

Unmesh Desai AM: I know nomination papers have to be served and so on and that has not happened yet, but --

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): I appreciate that but, from the evidential side, the law itself, as far as the CPS is concerned, is not specific enough around what is a candidate and what is not. It is a very broad interpretation. For example, the individuals you are talking about at the

moment, from my point of view are candidates because people have known that they are going to be candidates in this year's election for a period of time before now. However, part of the issue is, if you look at the crimes that have been alleged so far, a lot of the people who have been alleged against at the moment have not formally said they are candidates at this stage. There is no --

Unmesh Desai AM: That will not happen until the papers are filed.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes, and, for the CPS, that is where the confusion sits at the moment. Under the law, which ones are we going to target in terms of whether they are candidates or they are not? That is part of the confusion for them. For me, it is more about the comments that are being made because it may well be hate crime rather than electoral crime. That is one of the lessons, again, learned. We are not focusing on just the electoral offences; it is the wider piece around whether any criminal offences have occurred, not just the electoral pieces. Is there a hate crime there? You know, it is quite direct with some of that conversation that has been put on the media. It is that wider piece as well.

I do not want to get hung up in candidates because I had an hour with the CPS and I was confused when I walked out and so it is not an easy parameter to set in terms of candidates. All I would say is that they are taking the view as a candidate with the widest brush.

Unmesh Desai AM: I will just finish on this point, Chairman. I appreciate your hands are tied and you have to go through the CPS, but speed is of the essence. The impression out there is that these people think they have a licence to say what they want and can get away with it. It is getting the message across, "No, you cannot do this. You are breaching this legislation or that law".

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): I agree with you completely in that respect.

Unmesh Desai AM: That is the problem we had with Tower Hamlets and possibly some of other parts of East London. People think that they can operate freely and with complete freedom to say what they want.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): That is why, within that situation, although we were not clear whether they were a candidate, we have still put it up to the CPS for early investigation advice. As I said, if that does not come back in terms of a criminal offence having occurred because they are not seen as a candidate, we will still be going physically to speak to the individual concerned and we will still be giving a warning and putting that message out that that has been done.

Unmesh Desai AM: It is getting the message out that is important.

Andrew Dismore AM: It may become an offence. Has the CPS --

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Tony, did you want to come in?

Andrew Dismore AM: I will just ask a question. Has the --

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Andrew, please. Look --

Andrew Dismore AM: This is a short question. Has the CPS said that it is going to prioritise getting on with getting an answer or is it going to be hanging on for months like it often is with the CPS? This is the sort of thing where we actually need a very prompt decision from the CPS.

Unmesh Desai AM: Yes, absolutely. That is the point I was getting at, Chairman.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): I get that. It is one person in the CPS who deals with these investigations. It is part of their day job; it is not their day job, as the case may be, because they are also in counterterrorism and so their workload is high. Although they will prioritise the best they can, we cannot set a timescale with them where they will deliver within a set number of weeks. We have made it quite clear in terms of confidence especially that we need a fast answer so that we can get that message out. All we can do is just keep badgering them - I suppose that is the best description - to get that answer.

Andrew Dismore AM: It is no use if it comes in June, is it?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): I can definitely say --

Unmesh Desai AM: Or on 4 May.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): We have that. Tony?

Tony Arbour AM: Yes. In a way, it is related to the necessity for action to be taken before the events of May. I am afraid you have compounded it, Mr Ryan, by talking about how this is their day job and they have terrorism. We heard earlier from Ms Bassett about Brexit stopping legislation. These are the kinds of things that we hear all the time about why things cannot be done.

I want to address this question to ask Mr Stockley about things that he is going to be able to do on time to ensure that the election is cleanly run. Can I ask you, firstly, Mr Stockley, how you are monitoring the use of council assets and council resources by people who want to use them for electioneering purposes?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It is Mr Tuckley but --

Tony Arbour AM: I beg your pardon.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): That is all right. That is not the issue. It is what I do rather than what I am called that is important, is it not?

Council staff are given very clear guidance on what they should do and what is appropriate, not only during the pre-election period or the purdah period but more generally. However, of course, as we approach the election, it is clear that at times some of those boundaries in terms of what candidates or potential candidates do and how they attempt to represent themselves to the public sometimes stray into areas that are unwise.

A number of the allegations that I have received are to do with the use of council resources, things like council email addresses or council telephone numbers or council services appearing on social media in the backgrounds of pictures of candidates. In those sorts of cases, we are very clear through the monitoring officer and through my law teams that that is inappropriate and that it should stop.

Tony Arbour AM: Have you taken any action against anybody?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): We have pointed out in those cases that things are wrong and, where appropriate, we will be taking that to the Standards Committee.

Tony Arbour AM: You will be doing that before May, will you?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Tony Arbour AM: Can I ask you about, if you like, the hijacking of council resources for electioneering? I have in front of me a photograph which was taken last week of a council candidate clearly using council equipment to clean a path. This particular candidate - and I see no reason why I should not name him - is one Abdal Ullah, who says he thanks, in effect, Tower Hamlets for helping to keep Wapping clean and safe. There is a picture of this man on social media, as I say, using equipment. Clearly behind him is a Tower Hamlets vehicle. What action will you take against that? Are you familiar with this?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): That is one of the allegations that has been reported to us. That is being investigated. Clearly, you just had a discussion about who is or is not a candidate. Formally speaking, he presumably is not a candidate because there is a formal nomination process, but the impression that you provide is clear. That is being investigated.

Tony Arbour AM: It is interesting you say that it is not clear, but --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): No, I said it is clear. I said the impression that the prospective candidate appears to be purporting to represent is -- the case is there. There is a case to investigate and to take action on if appropriate.

Tony Arbour AM: Forgive me, but it does sound a bit weak to take action as appropriate and, "I might report it to the Monitoring Officer and I might give him words of advice". Given the spotlight of the London elections is going to be on Tower Hamlets - and this of course applies to all of you who will be looking at matters which are likely to affect the election in Tower Hamlets because you know that you are going to be under the microscope - do not you think that that is a rather weak response? We have been told that this is a partnership with the police, and we have heard this several times, 'partnership with the police'. It is certainly my experience as someone who has been involved in elections over many years that a fear or a belief that one's conduct is likely to be such that it might be reported to the police or the Electoral Commission or something like that is more than the token slap on the wrist that you appear to be offering.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): No, this has been reported to the police.

Tony Arbour AM: It has?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, all the allegations --

Tony Arbour AM: Thank you. That is helpful.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): As was outlined earlier, there is close working between the police and the Council. All the allegations that the Council receives are included in the allegations which go to the police. Therefore, appropriate action is taken --

Tony Arbour AM: Thank you for that, Mr Tuckley. That is a substantial response. Can I therefore ask the police? Can I ask you, Ms Williams? Will you be investigating this matter and looking into it before the election?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): If this is one of the RPA offences, it is under Stuart's remit.

Tony Arbour AM: All right.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Stuart has said - but I will let you speak for yourself - that they are all being investigated. My team locally will deal with the crimes that are not RPA-type offences and I have a separate team that is looking at all of those. There are only a few of those because we had to set criteria.

I am diverting from your question but, for us, our criteria are that it has to be not an RPA offence, be reported from January 2018 and have some sort of electoral connection, be it that it involves an MP, a councillor or a candidate or is perceived to be related to the elections or is raising community tensions. It could be like a hate crime, but they are the ones we are dealing with.

Tony Arbour AM: I understand this and my preamble for all of this was to do with timeliness. Mr Ryan, will this matter be looked into before the election?

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes, it is being looked into at the moment. Just to give you a bit of reassurance around the timescales and things like that, for all the investigations that we get, the outcomes and the status of those investigations will be shared with the Electoral Commission and with the Council anyway. We have a scanning document that we worked on with Tower Hamlets to give an idea of how many allegations are coming in, what the outcomes are going to be looking like, etc. On top of that, we are looking at a local reassurance group to challenge us around the investigations and to turn around to us and say, "What is going on with those?" There is independent pressure. Rather than just, "We will get back to you", there is actually grip around, "What are you actually doing about those investigations?"

I am more than happy in terms of Members to be sharing with you on a monthly basis as we move into this election piece how many allegations we have had and what the outcomes have been, whether it has been closed and why it has been closed or, if it is open, what is being done with it. I am more than happy to share that information.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): If you could do that, that would be helpful.

Tony Arbour AM: All right. Thank you, Chairman.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Thank you. Let us move on now. There are issues around the electoral register, false registration and postal votes. Caroline, you have some questions around that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes, absolutely. Let us start with how accurate the electoral register is. Perhaps to Mr Tuckley, what are you doing to ensure that your electoral register is accurate? You did say earlier that you have 190,000 on the register now, which is the largest it has ever been.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): That is right. Of course, as well as being the Returning Officer, I am also the Electoral Registration Officer and that means that one of my obligations is to try to ensure that everybody who is entitled to register is on the register. We have a pretty extensive and detailed process of trying to make sure the register is as up-to-date and accurate as possible. That includes a detailed electoral canvass, which we have just completed, and that involves the publication of a new register on an annual basis. We send a household notification letter prior to every election and so, in the next few days, those will go out to every household.

One of the things we do particularly - and it has been noted on one or two occasions in the exchanges so far - is that we visit every address that has five or more people registered. They are canvassed in person directly to check that the circumstances are as we have.

We do a whole set of data-matching exercises, again, to try to ensure that the register is accurate. We do that against the council tax register to ensure that the residences are compatible and that we remove previous electors who have moved. We have a weekly process where our council tax team provides details to our electoral registration team of changes in the council tax register.

One of the things we do as we approach the election is, as in other places, we issue poll cards. In our case, we issue them for empty properties as well as properties where there are registered people to alert people to the question that they will not be registered in that address. In Tower Hamlets, again, differently from other places, those polling cards are posted in envelopes in order to try to get that polling card to the person who is individually registered. As you know, we are now in the process of individual electoral registration rather than household registration.

We do Tell Us Once and so we get regular notifications of deaths and of new citizens coming into the borough. That means that that information can be passed into the register. We do regular checks on things like single-person discounts for council tax, again, which needs to be compatible with the data that we have on the electoral register.

One of the key things in the run-up to recent elections has been duplicate registrations. The timing is now very tight between registration and the organisation of the election with people being able to register later than was previously the case. What happens when there is national communication and information about elections and knowledge rises is people reregister, often, because they are not entirely sure whether they are on the register or what the precise arrangements are. We had one of the highest levels of duplicate registration in the country. That causes us intense work because we have to go through and check to make sure absolutely precisely that the duplicate is a genuine duplicate, but we do that very assiduously.

We have whole geographic information system mapping of properties in the borough. As I mentioned earlier, we have had the highest level of population growth and the highest numbers of new properties built in the borough. Therefore, we have to keep real track of the nature of our population and the nature of the area in terms of homes and where people are likely to live. Keeping track of that is a key thing for our planners and the people who name roads. We have to link that to the register and make sure that that is absolutely precise.

We do registration drives. I have done a number of those, particularly in the student accommodation in the borough, which we have quite a lot of. We do it through local libraries and through our Ideas Stores, attempting to make sure that those people who are eligible to vote are on the register. Of course, we send the published registers to political parties and to elected members to try to ensure that, again, the published register is available and people can check to see whether there are any anomalies on the register itself.

It is quite an extensive process to try to make sure it is right. It is the basis of our democracy. It has to be as accurate as we can make it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you for that. It was very comprehensive. Let me just unpack a bit the issue that you go to every address where there are five or more registered. I can see that when you do your annual big canvass that you would have that, but if people then add one person on here and one person on there and it is done drip-drip through the year, are you then looking and saying, "Hang on, we have five or more there. We need to go and check this out"?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is constant? It is not just at the big canvass?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): No, it is constant. I have a core team of ten people as my elections team and it used to be that you could use all ten of those in certain parts of the year for registration and in certain parts of the year to organise an electoral event, a referendum or an election. Actually, under the new arrangements, under Individual Electoral Registration (IER), registration is a constant process. Therefore, I have split my team in two and I have a team that spends all of their time, bar perhaps election day itself, on registration.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Say you have a house that is broken up into bedsits and whatever and you had four registered in each of the individual addresses but really it is one house. Would that flag an alarm with you - because it is just below your five per address - to think, "Hang on, something is going on there"?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It would, and of course I talked about some of the connections we try to make. In common with other boroughs, we now have a variety of licensing schemes for houses of multiple occupation and indeed, in some particular circumstances, for private landlords generally. We do some crosstabulation to try to work out where are likely to be those areas of most risk.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are doing that. Can you clarify the point you were just saying? Polling cards go out in envelopes, great, but to empty properties. Can you just clarify what you mean by that?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): We need to make sure that people who perhaps have recently moved into the borough and have not registered or do not think they have registered get a polling card. It is clear that it is in respect of that empty property to check that those people in that property can then contact us and register because there would still be time for them to do so.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: All right. You are saying a poll card, which really is a flyer saying, "We do not have anyone registered to vote here. If you are living here, this is how you can"?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: All right. It is more of a notification rather than an actual poll card?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, it is.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. That is helpful. For the duplicate registrations, you have the highest level --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Amongst the highest level. I am not quite sure whether it was the highest level, but it was pretty high.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes, but it is up there. If somebody sends you a form and you look and they are already on the register, you check that it is not another person there - father, son, whatever - and then, if you realise it is the same person, you do not have to put that one on the register? OK.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): The complication is that of course now - and it is a good thing - people can register online. Of course, beneath the online registration is a quite complex and appropriately complex administrative process, but it is designed to be very easy for somebody to register, to put their name in and then, if they have it, their National Insurance number. We have to follow that up to ascertain the details and then do the match to see whether that person is a duplicate or not.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: In the election court, it showed that there had been false registration of people's names at different properties and people who had registered twice at different properties. What other work are you doing - dip sampling and the like - to try to make sure that you are not having people falsely registered to vote?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): From that description that I gave of the respective checks and balances, all of those things are designed to try to identify where that is likely to occur. Of course, we also receive regular intelligence, as you talked about earlier, and we therefore have a process of following up on any information that we receive to check whether the registration that we have is accurate and appropriate.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Linked to this, I realise we do not have any formal nominations of candidates yet, but there was open criticism from last time about how false addresses were used. People were known to not even live in the borough and were registering a business address as a home address and so on. What checks are you going to be doing on that, given you have done so much work on your electoral register, to make sure people who are standing genuinely have a right to stand?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): The rules in terms of nominations are pretty clear about what circumstances people have to have in order to be eligible to be nominated. I need to be very clear in my briefing to political parties in particular about what those rules are because the responsibility is on the parties to come forward with appropriate information and to abide by the rules that apply in those circumstances. Yes, that is the position.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are going to be keeping a close eye on that?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I keep a close eye on it, but it is not the Returning Officer's responsibility - and Claire [Bassett] may have more to say about this - to investigate in detail the circumstances that sit behind each candidate. The parties need to make sure that the information that they provide is accurate and appropriate in terms of the circumstances of the nominee. I do not have - and it is probably not appropriate for me to have - an extensive checking process around each candidate.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Surely, if somebody is putting down an address as where they live and it is known to be actually a unit on an industrial estate or a business, that surely would flag an alarm bell and you would check whether they really live there?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It would flag an alarm bell and I build into the processes that I adopt locally plenty of time for those things to be identified. I just wanted to be very clear that it is not

my responsibility to verify the information that comes from the individual. It is the individual's responsibility to make sure that that is right.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: In terms of postal votes in Tower Hamlets, in the election court judgment examples were given where postal votes were handed over for someone else to complete and lots of examples of things filled in the same hand, same ink and so on. What additional checks are you doing on postal votes in Tower Hamlets?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): We are going to be doing a pilot with the Cabinet Office testing additional measures in relation to the integrity of the postal vote process. It is important to emphasise that these are additional to all the measures that are currently in place in relation to postal votes. I think Members will know that, in terms of the postal vote process, there is a really intense exercise that checks the signatures of postal votes that are returned, checks the dates of birth and in essence rejects quite a significant proportion of postal votes on that basis. There is already what I would regard as a pretty robust system in terms of those postal votes that come back to try to verify that the signatures and the dates of birth are precisely correct. In Tower Hamlets, that process has generally led to something like between 3% and 6% of postal votes that are returned being rejected at that point.

In addition to all those other measures that I have described, in terms of the postal vote pilot with the Cabinet Office, we will be doing three things, one of which echoes the point that Claire [Bassett] made at the beginning. We have redesigned the warning information that goes into our postal vote packs. We have about 35,000 postal vote packs that we send out in Tower Hamlets. Each one of those will receive a carefully redrafted set of information that makes it very clear how people should handle their postal vote and that only they should handle it, that it is their vote, that they need to use it and that it should not be interfered with by anybody else.

We will then be doing two other things. We will be selecting a range of electorals on the basis of our electoral management system. There will be a random sample of those people who received postal votes who will receive a follow-up from the Council on behalf of me that will, where their postal votes have been distributed and delivered, check that they have received them. If they have not received them, we will be able to cancel the postal votes that have been issued and reissue them.

Secondly, there will be a similar process that then applies once the postal votes have been returned. That process will check that the elector has returned their postal vote, that it was not interfered with by anybody else, that it was not influenced inappropriately by anybody else and that the postal vote we have back is the postal vote that they posted and provided back to us.

I was very keen to be part of that process in order to test how we could make the postal vote - and of course, as you all know, the number of postal votes has been increasing step by step - and try to make that processes as watertight as it can be.

In addition, in Tower Hamlets, we have been trying to put in place additional controls in relation to, for example, postal votes that are handed in at polling stations, making sure that we take a note of what is returned and by whom so that, again, there is a there is a mechanism to check back and so we have more information in case there is any malpractice taking place in that regard. Of course, the handling of postal votes by political parties was something which it was made very clear was inappropriate in the protocol that we talked about earlier in terms of the questions about the agreement between political parties and the Returning Officer.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Just to check, on that extra check you are doing on polling day itself, on those votes you then absolutely check the signatures and so on to make sure that it is accurate and it is the person who is voting?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): On 100% of postal votes that are returned, the signatures and the dates of birth are all checked, yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Good. Just to clarify these two other bits of follow-up, one is whether you have received your postal vote and one is whether you returned it. How are you following that up? Is that just another letter or is that a phone call or a door knock?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Our intention is to do a phone call.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is good because I was thinking that if you do a mailout and if the post is being interfered with, that is not going to work. Your intention is to do a phone call?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. It is really interesting to hear those additional measures you are putting in place.

Claire, can I come to you? Is there anything else you think Tower Hamlets should be doing to try to prevent some of these problems we have had with postal votes and 'harvesting'? I think that the verb that is used.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): Just set out really clearly the whole range of things we are doing. We really welcome their involvement in the postal vote pilot and we will be conducting the evaluation of that and so the effectiveness of those measures will be captured through that, which, again, will help learning more broadly.

A lot of the measures they are doing are things that we would very much like to see. That example of the handling of postal votes by campaigners is a recommendation in Pickles. There are some challenges around how to define a campaigner, but, essentially, we would support those changes as well.

From our point of view, there are some really good things going on which will help build on the argument for wider, more systemic change. We are monitoring and working with them on the planning of this and I am very pleased with what we are seeing there so far.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are confident that the measures that Mr Tuckley has outlined in detail this morning are going to stop the voter fraud we saw back in 2014?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It is very difficult to say that it would stop all voter fraud --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: No, but on the scale --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): -- and one of the challenges we face here is capturing the extent which it is really happening. These changes and actions are really sensible things that need to be done in order to improve that dramatically and also help us understand that awareness better. Particularly some of the elements of the pilot and follow-ups will, hopefully, through the evaluation we can

see, shine a bright light on areas where it is otherwise quite difficult. We are pleased with what we are seeing, as we say. Unfortunately, I do not think we can ever rule that out.

Just to add, though, the other element that is an issue for all of us is not just what is happening but the public perception --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes, precisely.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): -- and the concern that caused. The fact is that the pilot is taking place and that these actions are happening. People will see those things going on.

We will be doing some additional campaign activity, particularly around Your Vote Yours Alone, which will be a national campaign but for use locally and quite specifically about really trying to get that message out. That will be published in multiple languages so that we can really get it into communities where we have perhaps struggled to get that message in the past. Combined with that because and the increased communication efforts from the police and the transparency there, which we are really pleased to see, it should help with that perception challenge as well as the actual challenge.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Is there anything else, as the Chief Executive, that you think you should be doing or you would like to be doing if resources allowed, and are you confident that what you have put in place is going to prevent fraud on the scale that we saw last time?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I suppose I am in a fortunate position because I am the Chief Executive as well as the Returning Officer and I can ensure that the Council as a whole assists in the electoral process. The Council has a responsibility and all councils have a responsibility to assist their Returning Officers. As you know, in 2014, the Returning Officer was not the Chief Executive of the Council. The Commissioners and indeed the Mayor of Tower Hamlets were very keen and indeed Members in Tower Hamlets were very keen that when they appointed a new Chief Executive, that person was also the Returning Officer.

The mayoral and local elections - as opposed to other elections - are funded locally and so, in that sense, there is a different regime that applies in relation to ensuring that the resources are in place. Notwithstanding austerity and pressures on local government funding and the reductions that Tower Hamlets has experienced, I am in a position to make sure that we have the resources that we need. They are not going to be excessive, but, just so that people know, it is likely that I will employ personally more than 800 people to conduct elements of the election and that is separate from the resources that the police and Sue [Williams] outlined earlier. It is a big undertaking and there is considerable expense, but democracy is really important and the integrity of democracy is really important.

Can I guarantee that there is no fraudulent or corrupt activity? As Claire just said, it is impossible for me to do that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: On the scale --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): What I can do, as I said right at the beginning, is to do everything that is conceivable to learn the lessons from 2014 and to learn the lessons of the four or five electoral processes that I have been responsible for in Tower Hamlets since and to build on my - I worked it out the other day - 21 years' experience of being involved in and running elections. That is probably less than some of you, mind you, but it is still considerable.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is, absolutely. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): We could tell a tale about that, Will, but, anyway, Susan, you wanted to come in?

Susan Hall AM: Yes, please, one very quick one. With the postal vote sampling, if you do some sampling and get some really bad results back with discrepancies, etc, will you go back to look at yet more or will you just say, "There are lots of discrepancies"? What action will you take if you find that the samples show up irregularities?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): You are right. One of the things that we are planning for is what action we will take depending on what the sampling reveals. Clearly, we can take action in relation to individual cases when somebody has not received their postal vote and we sent it out. As I said, we can cancel that and we can make arrangements for them to receive a new postal vote.

If it shows something that could be systematic - an area, say, and for some reason in that area the postal votes have not got through - then you absolutely right and I need to then follow that up with colleagues in the police and take action in terms of ensuring that people can exercise their democratic rights and also looking to see what might have happened in terms of those packs not reaching the people they were intended to reach.

Susan Hall AM: At what level and at which point will you be alarmed? At a percentage or just a feeling?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Any that do not reach anybody is alarming. They need to get --

Susan Hall AM: Good. That is an ideal answer. Any that do not reach there, you will flag it up straight away?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I need to take action because --

Susan Hall AM: No, we are really happy about that. That is good news.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Susan Hall AM: Lovely. Thank you.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Thank you. The last two sets of questions are around discrepancies and allegations outside and inside polling stations, particularly around the outside. This was harassment of voters and other issues around that. Unmesh, you are leading on this.

Unmesh Desai AM: Yes, thank you, Chairman. If I could ask you, Will, these are on some of the realities on the day itself or potential situations that could arise. We have had many allegations - not just allegations but people who have actually seen what goes on - in terms of voter intimidation in and around polling stations or in the approach areas to polling stations. In Tower Hamlets in the past, space has been provided for electors to enter the polling station without being subject to being harangued by activists. Will you be setting this up again for the May elections?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, we will. Members may not have seen it. We have, in essence, a zone around the entrance to polling stations, which is marked out with that characteristic

yellow-and-black tape. That is an area in which, with the assistance of the police officer, we are very clear that only voters who are going through into the polling station should be. Those zones we have employed in all the elections that I have been responsible for and they have been observed extremely well. They are not statutory, but they were recommended by the Pickles report. They have been seen by many other authorities and by the Electoral Commission as good practice. Because in Tower Hamlets we do have police officers at every polling station, which nobody else has, we are in a really strong position to be able to enforce those arrangements.

In addition - and Sue [Williams] described in some detail the training of police officers - we go through an extensive training process for our Presiding Officers and our Poll Clerks. I am generally pretty careful about making sure that we have at least the minimum level recommended by the Electoral Commission and often a higher level of staffing in the polling stations. Those staff are very clear about what behaviour should be like in the station itself and they are ready to intervene at any point should that behaviour not be appropriate. Having very active Presiding Officers has been part of the process of moving Tower Hamlets' electoral operation forward. Those Presiding Officers are trained to intervene if the language being spoken in the polling station is not English; intervene if more than one person looks like they are heading for a polling booth. We have introduced some extra signs on the polling booths to try to emphasise the fact that it is an individual's right to exercise their vote, not a collective process. We have a whole variety of measures in place which seek to retain the sanctity of the polling station.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you for that answer, Will. The next set of questions is about what goes on inside the polling station. If I could just ask you, Sue and Stuart, for your observations, this week the Prime Minister announced that the Government will consult on plans for a new offence of intimidation in public life, aimed at protecting candidates and campaigners. What are your thoughts on these proposals? They are too late, obviously, for the May elections, but they said --

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): I do not think I have seen that. That was --

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It was in the speech yesterday.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Was it in her speech yesterday? I am terribly sorry. I had missed that one.

Unmesh Desai AM: Yes. I saw it on social media two days ago, but the speech was yesterday.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Yes, do you want to -- sorry.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): It might be helpful. The speech was trailed and then the substance of it was in the Prime Minister's speech yesterday. It is about looking at the offences and so they are asking the Law Commission to have a look at the offences around intimidation of candidates. We would all welcome that. There are also some broader issues about social media and the use of that and bullying on social media. We - and I suspect the police and the National Police Chiefs' Council - will be actively feeding into the Law Commission's review. I referenced them earlier in terms of broader electoral law change. They have been extremely useful with the work they have done there and that is something that I suspect we will all be wanting to feed into.

Unmesh Desai AM: I have just two more questions.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Please do.

Unmesh Desai AM: Just going back to what goes on outside polling stations, Will, again, I know this is going to be enforced, but as part of the code of conduct in some boroughs parties have been asked to sign to agree to having a maximum number of campaigners outside of a polling station, two or three. Would that be something that you would consider?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I am just checking the original protocol. It was part of the original [one]. Activity at polling places is restricted to two campaigners per polling place with advice regarding intimidation or undue influence, which was an approach endorsed by the police. That was in place for the last 2014 elections. That is a sensible type of agreement. As you say, the issue is --

Unmesh Desai AM: They have to play by the rules.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): -- about whether you can enforce it.

Unmesh Desai AM: Absolutely, yes.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Sue [Williams] mentioned earlier that the MPS will have some backup resource. One of the things I have done is to strengthen my polling station inspection regime. I now have more people who are there ready to assist Presiding Officers. If Presiding Officers learn from voters that there is some pressure being exerted outside the station, I have some resource which I can call on in conjunction with the MPS to seek to address that. Of course, it depends on the scale and the type of intimidation that is taking place, but I can get reports and I can take some resource into trying to disperse that and take action. Of course, I can contact the relevant party.

Unmesh Desai AM: Just taking a practical situation, if there are crowds that seem to be trying to pressurise voters outside a polling station, what would you expect the officers to do in a situation like that? In Tower Hamlets in 2014 and other elections, we have had groups of 30, 40 or 50 people at certain polling stations, particularly in the northern part of the borough.

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): That has been part of the briefing of the officers if they are learning from the past that there have been quite a lot of people outside either canvassing or intimidating. As we have said, we have officers in every polling station, but we have gone back and looked at the high-risk polling stations and we are putting additional officers there to assist. We do have patrols in the area and so, as soon as an officer sees that there may be an issue, they can call up through their sergeant for those additional patrols to be allocated to that particular area. If we think we have a crowd gathering and we are not quite sure what their intentions are, we will send officers down there to have a look so that we can prevent any intimidation of voters. We have officers from the Special Enquiry Team (SET), who are going to be out and about. We have officers from other units that are working with us, who will also be out and about. As I have said, we have some Bangladeshi officers, who will also be posted around the area so that they will help us so. There are quite a lot of resources that are being put into that.

Just to reassure you on some of our planning we have asked Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) [Gareth] Cann, who is the national police lead on elections, to review our plans and what we have been doing. He has held us up as good practice, as well as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, which we have asked to come in and have a look at what we are doing and where we have our resources. They also - and they have even commented on it in one of their previous documents - hold us up as good practice. That will be learning for the MPS as a whole around some of the things that we are doing.

Andrew Dismore AM: Just a short one to reassure myself. If these gangs of 20, 30 or 40 people do appear in the vicinity of a polling station outside *Will's cordon sanitaire*, do you have sufficient powers to disperse them?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Yes, of course we do. Officers under the Public Order Act have those sorts of powers. If there are offences apparent, then they can deal with them for offences.

They will have their body-worn cameras. That is such a great tool because the minute they turn it on and people know they are being filmed and we know who they are, what they look like and what they are wearing, we can track them. We can track to see if they turn up. We also have an officer who will be at the closed-circuit television (CCTV) control room at the local authority. If we see something happening somewhere and we have dispersed them, the officer with the CCTV will look to see whether that crowd or those people start making their way to another venue. Then we can direct our resources to deal with them accordingly, depending on what offences there are.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): We have over 300 cameras and so it is a place with quite a lot of vigilance.

Andrew Dismore AM: You do have the power to disperse a crowd?

Chief Superintendent Sue Williams QPM (Borough Commander, Tower Hamlets, MPS): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): The power is there. That is reassuring. The last set of questions - and we have touched upon these - is around the activities inside the polling stations and count centres.

Tony Arbour AM: Mr Tuckley, can you tell us what forms of ID will be needed, if any, when people turn up to vote?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): People will not need forms of ID, but they will be challenged to provide their name and address and they will need to provide that, not hand over their poll card. They need to provide that to the poll clerk so that they can be correctly identified.

Tony Arbour AM: That is nothing different from what has always happened?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): That is right.

Tony Arbour AM: Can I ask you, Ms Bassett? Pilots were supposed to be introduced whereby there should have been voter ID. Can you tell us why Tower Hamlets was not a pilot?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I just need to be really clear that we are not responsible for the pilots. The pilots are a Cabinet Office initiative. We have provided advice, but they have been very much Cabinet Office-led. It has been the Cabinet Office which has sought to engage different local authorities in those pilots. Our role is to evaluate them. There are five pilots to do with ID. They are in the process of being developed as we speak and there is one order outstanding. It has been a fairly short timeframe in which they have been set up for these elections and that is why there are, essentially, only five, but we have not had any input into who is in them or what form they take. I would say we really support voter ID in polling stations, though.

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, I am sure you do. When the idea was floated, presumably there would have been some discussion even though the decision was not yours. It is hard to imagine there was not discussion with the Commission as to these pilots. Are you able to say whether or not you suggested to the Cabinet Office that Tower Hamlets ought to be one of the places where this scheme should be piloted?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): There was not a discussion.

Tony Arbour AM: Not at all?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): What happened was the Cabinet Office went out to local authorities and invited applications to be part of the pilot. There was a fairly lengthy period when the idea was worked up and certainly, within that, there was discussion had. For example, the 17 local authorities deemed to be at high risk were looked at and also what comparator would be helpful and what methodology. However, just to be clear, we had very little input into that. The actual process between deciding to open up to local authorities for bids to be part of the pilots and the closing of that deadline was extremely short. It was a matter of just a few weeks and we did not have an input into who that went forward with.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Would it be helpful if I clarified Tower Hamlets' position in relation to this? The work that was done on following up the 2014 and 2015 elections in Tower Hamlets that was done by the Returning Officer indicated that voter ID was something that we were interested in. When the pilots were announced and expressions of interest requested, at that point Tower Hamlets was interested - and indeed continues to be interested and I, as the Returning Officer, continue to be interested - in voter ID in principle. Therefore, I did put in an expression of interest, having discussed it with colleagues in Tower Hamlets and also with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Commissioners who were in place at that time.

However, I was very clear that this is a major change in voting practice and, if we are going to be in a position where if somebody does not turn up with their ID they are sent away and prospectively lose their entitlement to vote as a consequence, we have to have a thoroughly thought through, properly planned and properly executed and communicated plan to make that change. I was very clear that I needed to know by last June that we were going to be a pilot and the form in which that was going to go forward. I made that position very clear in public and to the appropriate Minister. I had an opportunity to speak to the Minister and made that position clear.

For various reasons, other things intervened. There was a general election and it was not possible for the Cabinet Office to confirm the ID pilots in the timescale that I needed in order to make sure that I could run a proper and effective election locally. The risks, when I was not in a position to be able to confirm that by June, were just too great. Indeed, the pilots are still in the process of being designed and are in the final stages.

The election process is a really important process. I am personally in a position where I could be the subject of an election petition. I have duties to make sure that the election is accessible and that people can vote. I also have duties to make sure that the process has integrity. In the circumstances, I came to the conclusion that, where we were in terms of the details of the voter ID pilot, it was too big a risk.

However, I remain committed to the principle. We have remained supportive of the Cabinet Office's endeavours in this regard. I designed a system based on our electoral management system that minimised the prospect of voter ID producing queues in polling stations. Actually, once the general election had taken place, once the winning party had a manifesto commitment that said that there would be a national system, the

model that I had designed for Tower Hamlets would never be that national system because everybody has a different electoral management system. Therefore, the type of pilot that I was planning to do could not be a pilot because it could not test something that could not happen on a national basis. For all those reasons, I could not honestly say that the best thing for me to take forward was the voter ID pilot. However, I was very interested in piloting improvements to the electoral process, hence the postal vote pilot that we talked about earlier.

Tony Arbour AM: Of course, the reason why this hearing is being held and this whole matter has arisen relates to the integrity of the voting system in Tower Hamlets. You have just expressed your worry that some people might turn up to the polling station, be unable to give proof of identity and therefore be deprived of their vote. Do you not think that all the things that you have described to us today that you are going to bring in in relation to postal voting and letters and telephone calls and all the rest of it to ensure that there is that integrity would not have been sufficient to ensure that when a person turned up to vote they would have with them some form of identity? Perhaps that is a rhetorical question.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It may be a rhetorical question but, no, I am not because of the churn in the population of Tower Hamlets and the change, and sometimes it never ceases to surprise me how low the level of understanding about the electoral process and democracy is. I thought there was a real risk that people would turn up without their IDs not because they did not have any or because they were attempting fraudulently to vote but because they did not know. What I could not risk was chaos spread across Tower Hamlets in 2018. That was not in my interest or indeed the voters' interest.

Tony Arbour AM: I understand that but that is tantamount to suggesting in a sort of way that the people who turn up to vote have no idea why they have turned up in the first place. That is the corollary of what you are saying.

We have heard, Mr Tuckley, that - I think your phrase was - it will be predominantly English spoken in the polling station and we have heard from the police that they will have Bangladeshi officers who can speak the first language of many of the voters. Do you not think it appropriate that only English, Mr Tuckley, should be spoken in the polling station?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, that is indeed the arrangement that we have and we have notices and training to that extent. My 'predominantly' was only for the fact that some people may not abide by that. What I was saying was that the role of the Presiding Officer and the Poll Clerks is to intervene and say, "Sorry, only English is spoken in the polling station".

Tony Arbour AM: That is going to happen?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Tony Arbour AM: Finally, all of the other set questions that I have been given have been asked, but I do want to ask you about the allegedly unique counting which goes on in Tower Hamlets elections. What happens is that votes at counting places are entered onto pieces of paper and then into a computer rather than being stacked up according to candidate. Firstly, did that happen and, secondly, is it going to happen?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It is really important - and Councillor Golds and others I have discussed this with - that democracy is seen to happen as well as does happen. I am going to do everything I can to ensure that there are, in the centre of the counting arena, piles of votes that people can see mounting up in relation to however many mayoral candidates that we have and that the process we adopt for

the count is as visible as is possible by those people who are there to observe that the right and proper processes are happening. We have had comments on each of the counts previously and indeed of those that I have been responsible for, and we will take all of that into account and produce a plan for the count, which we will publish and which hopefully will be another step in the direction of being transparent about the processes we are going to adopt.

Tony Arbour AM: What is going to happen at your count in May is going to be no different - I am talking about the actual process - from what is going to happen anywhere else in London?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): That presupposes that all those counts are the same. They all have individual elements. I hope we will have the best practice of all of those counts. That will be my intention.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I have not known different counts. They pile up the votes and then count through the split ones, tallying them up on a chart. It seems very strange if it is hidden, given the reputation of this --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Sorry, it is not hidden, but there are slightly differing methodologies that are adopted. Sorry, I call on others' experiences. If people have stood in different locations, you will see Returning Officers adopt slightly different methodologies. The fundamentals should be the same.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): All right. We have that. All right.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: What I wanted to pick up was what you said earlier, something about how you are going to be recruiting about 800 staff. Does this mean that the people who are going to be doing the counting are going to be, for example, the bank clerks and the like that you see in some places, rather than council staff or others?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): They will be a mixture. The days when we used to employ bank clerks are probably gone, not that we do not want to, but there is a recruitment process and there are lots of checks and balances in that recruitment process. The issue is of course that every election is different, every election is a one-off event, and everybody is recruited for that one-off event by the Returning Officer. We have a process that is designed to do that. What we have done is built in extra checks and balances. Of course, people have to sign up to observing all the appropriate rules of a proper election process, but, also, we have taken the additional step since 2014 of being absolutely clear that nobody can work on a polling station in the area where they live or the ward where they live and nobody is allowed to move seats in the count venue. I have always had the practice - but I gather that this may not have always been the case - of being absolutely clear that the Returning Officer and my staff allocate counters to specific seats and that those candidates should have nothing to do with the wards that they are counting. There is no discretion on anybody's part to move themselves around the count venue or to exercise any discretion on which part of the count they may or may not be involved in.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I was just questioning. I accept that bank clerks are not always used these days, but, given you had had lots of questions about the count itself, maybe having some completely independent people in --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): No, there are.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: -- to do some of that work will help with the reputation of your count.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Absolutely. There are. We recruit on an open basis, but some of those may be council staff. Some of them will be wider.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes. Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM: Are you counting on Thursday night or on Friday morning?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): We are doing the verification, the first stage of the Tower Hamlets mayoral and the Tower Hamlets local elections, through Thursday night into the early hours of Friday morning. That is, as you know, if ballot papers have gone in the wrong box, we can make sure that we have the right number of ballot papers for each election. Then we will be doing the Tower Hamlets mayoral count, following on from doing the verification. Then, at the conclusion of that count, that team will be stood down and will be going home and a new team will come forward after a period to do the local ward count for Tower Hamlets. All of that will take place in one of the large exhibition hangars at ExCel.

Andrew Dismore AM: It is going to be in one continuous process?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): No, there is a break in the middle. There is a break at the end of the Tower Hamlets mayoral count declaration. They disperse, go home and come back to do the ward count. There will also be a break between the verification and the mayoral count because many of the people who will be there observing the verification because they are candidates or associated with the ward count are not entitled to be there for the count for the mayoral election.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That will reduce the crowding.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It will reduce the crowding, but of course it does mean that there are a lot of people there for the verification process. Getting the verification right is an important key part of getting the overall count right.

Andrew Dismore AM: They have different coloured ballot papers?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Fine. I have one last brief question, really, for Claire and Will and this is a wrap question. If anybody out there in Tower Hamlets from now on in - other than people looking at it very closely - does sense an issue and they are worried about electoral fraud and something does not feel right to them and they are not quite sure where to go, where will they go? Where will they see that? Where will they be directed? Claire?

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): If they come in to us, we have a public enquiry line, which would note that. We would refer them to the police and refer the matter ourselves to the police if we thought that was appropriate.

The other thing just to mention is Crimestoppers. We have had a partnership with them since 2015 and there is the anonymous reporting there, which I really encourage people to use if they are concerned.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): We have had and continue to have a special election enquiry line that we make sure that we respond to in 24 hours. As Sue [Williams] mentioned earlier, on the webpages we have now a combined reporting place. That means that anybody can report any incident or issue and that will automatically be reported simultaneously to me at the Council, to both Sue and the Special Enquiry Team and to the Electoral Commission. There should be plenty of opportunities for people to report things, but of course I can also be reached directly if there is any need for that to occur because we are all very sensitive that need to make sure that we maximise the confidence in the process.

Unmesh Desai AM: To you, Will. Are there any circumstances in which you would allow someone to accompany an elector into the polling station?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): People can come into the polling station. The issue is the polling booth.

Unmesh Desai AM: The accompanied person. I was going to come on to that.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): There are certain circumstances in relation to disability when that might be appropriate and I know we have particular arrangements for people who have issues in relation to sight and arrangements to try to support those voters, but it is in very particular circumstances.

Unmesh Desai AM: I thought that would be the answer. I totally agree with the point made by my colleague Tony Arbour about only English being spoken inside the polling station, but presumably there will be polling station staff who could interpret if need be.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): There are, but their role is to listen and to pick things up, not to engage them in dialogue.

Unmesh Desai AM: No, I am going very specifically to issues that were brought to my attention as to what happened in 2014 when people accompanied electors into the polling station ostensibly acting as interpreters and were allowed to get away with it. I have two examples brought to my attention and so I do not make a mountain out of a molehill, but if someone does need help with the process and so on, there will be staff available?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): There will be staff available, yes.

Unmesh Desai AM: What I am saying is there will be no one coming in from outside, coming in as an interpreter and helping people?

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, absolutely, that is the appropriate step for people to take.

Unmesh Desai AM: Secondly, again, speaking to one of the successful candidates from 2014 - this was in the immediate aftermath of 2014 - he was extremely bitter about the way that some of the staff were operating and the whole integrity of the process. You have given us a very comprehensive answer as to how you are doing the recruitment and so on and 800 staff being trained. However, given the seriousness of the allegations that were made about the way some staff operated in 2014, will you be checking - and I know this is an onerous task - or asking the 800 people that you intend to appoint whether they are related to any of the candidates in the election? I know it is a difficult process, Will, but --

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): It is a difficult process, but any of that type of interest is clearly relevant and we will want to look at that very carefully.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): They could sign something. There could be a declaration. They could sign something, possibly.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): Yes, as part of that process --

Unmesh Desai AM: I know the Commissioners have made some recommendations, but in the context of the East End and so on, the issues that happened maybe in 2014.

Will Tuckley (Chief Executive, Tower Hamlets): I should say that my staff and I visit polling stations and we check what is happening there. In terms of behaviour of staff at the count, there are very strict rules about what people can do. There should be no exchange over the tables between the observers and the counting staff. It is not their job to do that there is any conversation needed, it needs to be with more senior staff.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): All right. Thank you for those in-depth answers. There is a lot of reassurance coming across the table from the Council and the police, but, Claire, we have an issue around the emblem.

Claire Bassett (Chief Executive, Electoral Commission): I will follow up.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): That is an issue that has some urgency around it and we would ask you to go away and put that at the top of your pile of things to do.

Unmesh Desai AM: Also, the police could liaise with the CPS about that particular Twitter exchange. Actions speak louder than words. If there is a case for someone to be charged with an offence - only if there is a case, of course - that will send out a far stronger message than any investigation report by us.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): It is the immediacy that we are talking about here.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes, the time.

Steve O'Connell AM (Chairman): Also, Stuart, you have kindly offered to give us some briefings between then and now in a form that we can work between us about how it progresses and your conclusions in the next couple of months. You offered that up earlier --

Detective Superintendent Stuart Ryan (Special Enquiry Team, MPS): Yes, I will give that to you monthly.