

# **Subject: 2020 Mayor of London and London Assembly Elections Preparation**

**Report to: GLA Oversight Committee**

**Report of: Greater London Returning Officer**

**Date: 16 July 2019**

**This report will be considered in public**

## **1. Summary**

1.1 This report updates the GLA Oversight Committee on 2020 elections preparation progress.

## **2. Recommendation**

2.1 **That the Committee notes the contents of this report.**

## **3. Background**

3.1 In November 2018, the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) gave a presentation to the GLA Oversight Committee on the set up of the London Elects programme and its workstreams, how Assembly recommendations arising from the 2016 elections had been actioned, and key milestones for the next six months. This was followed by questions to the GLRO, Deputy GLRO and Senior Elections Programme Manager.

3.2 This paper focusses on the milestones achieved during the last six months and priorities and risks for the next. The Greater London Authority (GLA) Elections Team look forward to taking questions and providing further information at the 16 July 2019 GLA Oversight Committee meeting.

3.3 The implications of the very recent announcement that the May 2020 bank holiday will be moved to Friday 8 May 2020 are being worked through in discussion with Government. The plan remains to count on the Friday, although the GLA's costs will increase and risks around staffing the count have also increased.

## **4. Issues for Consideration**

### **Implementation of Assembly recommendations following 2016 elections**

4.1 Work continues to ensure that the recommendations arising from the 2016 elections are implemented in full.

- 4.2 A similar approach to resourcing the election teams as that used in 2016 is being built upon, with a mix of dedicated and volunteer GLA officers taking on the bulk of election organisation. Alongside this there is greater partnership working and particularly wider the borough involvement, specifically in areas where the team were stretched in 2016. For example, boroughs will play a greater role managing the nominations process, which was under-resourced in 2016.
- 4.3 The team continues to work closely with the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office. It remains the case that the quality assurance framework will be the Electoral Commission's performance standards framework, and that no substantive legislative change is expected before 2020.
- 4.4 Guidance around use of the supplementary vote that electors may or may not choose to utilise will be agreed with the Electoral Commission. It is not at present envisaged that the wording in relation to it will be changed – but this is subject to Electoral Commission views. The borough training programme will also cover clearer advice on this point.
- 4.5 The e-counting services specification has transparency and visibility improvements built in – both in the form of screens at count centres and at City Hall, transmitting live information as votes are counted electronically. The website will transmit the same information. Much progress has been made in bringing preparing these improvements over the last six months.
- 4.6 The proposed random manual sampling process during the count has been discussed with boroughs and will be agreed with contractors in the next couple of weeks. The process will be set out formally, via a direction from the GLRO, to ensure consistency; further details of the plans can be provided at the meeting.
- 4.7 There have been no known significant instances of electoral fraud in London since those relating to the 2014 Tower Hamlets mayoral election; but anti-fraud measures will continue to form part of training provided to boroughs, building on advice from the Tower Hamlets elections team.

#### **Progress so far in 2019**

- 4.8 The elections preparation programme remains on schedule and on budget.
- 4.9 Borough engagement has been embedded into our programme management, with boroughs consulted on all key decisions directly, or through representatives on relevant groups.
- 4.10 Usual programme and risk management measures are in operation – both in respect of the GLA's relationship with the prime e-counting contractor and other suppliers, and internally. The London Elects high level programme plan is attached at **Appendix 1**, for the Committee's information.
- 4.11 The risks outlined in the presentation to the Committee in November in relation to the first half of this year did not materialise; and the relevant risks have been closed. Good progress has been made in respect of the key milestones for January to June 2019, also set out in the previous presentation to the Committee.
- 4.12 The development of the electronic vote-counting solution – the contract for which was close to signature in November – is now well underway; and the first five of the twenty key milestones set out in the contract have been met.
- 4.13 The centrepiece solution - for scanning and processing ballot papers, with auditable results is being provided by IT consultancy CGI in partnership with Smartmatic, an elections technology company.

- 4.14 CGI and Smartmatic have previously delivered successful electronic vote counting systems for Scottish elections. They are working with Rathmhor, who delivered user training for the programme in Scotland in 2017. Hamilton Rentals will supply hardware and audio-visual services at the count centres, using the latest generation of Fujitsu scanners. FDM will print the ballot papers.
- 4.15 The contractors' supplier site at Haringey is operational, and a testing strategy, business continuity plans, and ballot paper layouts have been agreed. Most importantly, a 'minimum viable product' is close to being agreed following initial 'sprint' testing and a successful 'end to end' test with borough and GLA staff on Monday 24 June.
- 4.16 Preparations are now underway for further software and scanner bulk testing over the summer. Much greater levels of testing have been built in by comparison with previous e-counting contracts, which will help reduce the risk of software errors occurring, such as the one which resulted in a delay to the 2016 declarations.
- 4.17 A borough training and e-learning programme has been consulted upon and is now being developed; as is security and compliance testing. A full count 'dress rehearsal' will take place at the Haringey site at the end of the year.
- 4.18 Separately, the three count centres at Olympia, Alexandra Palace and the Excel Centre have been booked, with space at Olympia expanded to allow the Ealing and Hillingdon count to return there (after being shifted to Alexandra Palace for 2016).
- 4.19 The procurement of count centre equipment has been completed. Adfield Harvey have been appointed and have developed initial floor plans for each of the three venues. Procurement of work to ensure that the London Elects website meets latest accessibility standards has been completed; and this work is now being progressed.
- 4.20 The procurement for designing and printing the election booklet for every voter is near completion. The procurement for polling station materials has not yet commenced, as we have been discussing with boroughs where centralised procurement can best add value. But this work remains on schedule.
- 4.21 The London Elects website has already been updated. Information on how to register to vote, ways of voting, how to vote and what the Mayor of London and London Assembly do can be found there. A more comprehensive update is planned ahead of the election.
- 4.22 A first meeting with Constituency and Borough Returning Officers was convened in January 2019 by the GLRO, where the e-counting software was demonstrated. The next meeting is scheduled for September 2019. Financial arrangements for costs to be reimbursed in relation to the elections have been agreed with boroughs.
- 4.23 Joint development of election guidance and performance framework standards with the Electoral Commission is not yet completed, in part because Electoral Commission colleagues had to prioritise European election arrangements in past weeks. However, there is already agreement that neither the guidance nor the framework will require more than minor updating from 2016.
- 4.24 Finally, the resource plan for staffing the elections across the GLA has been agreed with key appointments made, including the new post of a senior GLA e-count elections manager providing independent advice on e-counting progress, based partly with supplier colleagues in Haringey and partly at City Hall. A final fixed-term key post – Head of Media – is about to be advertised.

### **European parliamentary elections**

- 4.25 One event not foreseen in November was the European parliamentary elections. The London Borough of Lewisham was responsible for managing the elections regionally. Notwithstanding the well-publicised national issues around voter registration that arose primarily from the very late confirmation of the election, London regional and local election management was timely and efficient.
- 4.26 The declaration of the London results was held at City Hall on Sunday 26 May. Senior GLA election officials attended and assisted on the night and will put in place some relatively minor lessons learnt from the London-wide process managed by Lewisham that can be applied to the 2020 elections.

### **Key priorities for the rest of 2019**

- 4.27 The key priorities for the next six months are:
- Bulk testing the e-counting solution and training borough colleagues to use it. Assembly Members are very welcome to visit the Haringey office and participate in a demonstration of the technology that will be used;
  - Agreeing e-counting security arrangements;
  - Re-constructing the London Elects website to the latest accessibility standards. There is no intention to make significant changes to the website's content or structure;
  - Finalising the Electoral Commission's guidance for managing the elections;
  - Concluding procurement of the statutory election booklet that must be delivered to each voter;
  - Commencing the procurement for polling station materials; and
  - Investigating new technological alternatives for managing the nominations process and agreeing the boroughs' role.
- 4.28 The key risks and challenges remain unsuccessful procurements or supplier failures in respect of agreed contracts and their milestones.
- 4.29 Two other new areas of significant risk also now arise, and those risks and the steps being taken to mitigate them are set out below.

### **Bank holiday, Friday 8 May 2020**

- 4.30 An unexpected challenge is that Government has confirmed that the 2020 May Day Bank Holiday will be moved to Friday 8 May 2020 to commemorate the seventy fifth anniversary of VE day. Outside London, local elections planned for Thursday 7 May 2020 might now be moved, to avoid counts occurring on a bank holiday. Such a change would require primary legislation.
- 4.31 However, moving the election date in London would not be practicable, due to the three large 'count centre' venues – already paid for – that are required to facilitate electronic vote counting.
- 4.32 Even if funding were found to re-book the venues and contractors for an alternative date, it has already been established that the venues themselves – which were originally reserved last year – have no availability in the following weeks. A manual count has never been tried in respect of the Mayoral and Assembly elections – and is not considered a viable option.
- 4.33 The GLRO has written to all Constituency and Borough Returning Officers and their election teams to note the importance of their continued assistance on what will now be a bank holiday. The holiday is not anticipated to affect the e-counting solution or security, or election day and count centre activity. However, it will increase the costs of managing the counts, as bank holiday rates will need to be paid to staff; and may also make transport to and from the venues more difficult.

4.34 The change will also require minor adjustments to the election timetable, as a bank holiday previously inside the pre-election period will now occur after it. After consultation with the Monitoring Officer, the GLRO proposes to keep the start of the pre-election period as Monday 23 March, rather than delay it to the Tuesday.

#### **Other electoral activity**

4.35 Any further electoral activity in the autumn or spring could adversely impact borough engagement and training; and potentially the finalisation of Electoral Commission guidance. It should not directly affect delivery of the e-counting solution.

4.36 Contingency plans have previously been shared with the Committee on steps to be taken in the event of a national election or referendum on the day of GLA elections, and a GLA/borough working group continues to consider how best to manage any such risk. The bank holiday change would appear to now make the risk less likely.

## **5. Financial Implications**

5.1 There are no specific financial issues arising from this report. The elections budget is set over a four-year period and is closely monitored by the GLRO, DGLRO and finance staff.

## **6. Legal Implications**

6.1 None

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### **List of appendices to this report:**

Appendix 1 – London Elects High Level Programme Plan

<b>Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985</b>	
List of Background Papers:	
None	
Contact Officer:	Alex Conway, Brexit and European Programmes, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer
Telephone:	020 7983 4600
E-mail:	<a href="mailto:Alex.conway@london.gov.uk">Alex.conway@london.gov.uk</a>