

London Borough of Bromley

Report No.
LDCS10129

PART I – PUBLIC

Agenda Item No.:

Decision Maker: GENERAL PURPOSES & LICENSING COMMITTEE

Date: 28th July 2010

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

TITLE: FEEDBACK ON PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS MAY 2010

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Chief Officer: Doug Patterson, Chief Executive & Returning Officer

Ward: N/A

1. Reason for Report

- 1.1 To advise Members on key issues relating to the May 2010 Parliamentary and Local Government Elections and to give Members the opportunity to give comments on the electoral arrangements.
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 Members note the content of the report and consider whether there is any feedback they want to give to the Returning Officer for him to take into account when making arrangements for future elections.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: N/A
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: £823,500
 2. On-going costs: Local Elections held every four years. Estimated costs are built into the four year forecast. General Elections are funded from Ministry of Justice grant
 3. Budget Head/Performance Centre: Conducting Elections
 4. Total current budget for this Head: Local Elections £500,000
 5. Source of funding: London Borough of Bromley funds the Local Election and the Ministry of Justice the General Election
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Staff

1. Number of Staff (current and additional): 6 full-time staff and approximately 1,300 temporary staff (recruited by the Returning Officer for staffing Polling Stations, delivery of polling cards, work related to postal votes and staffing the Count)
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

- 1) Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement. The Council is required to designate one of its officers as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections under the provisions of Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. The Returning Officer was personally liable for the conduct of these Elections.

The Council is also required to designate one of its officers as Electoral Registration Officer under Section 8 of the 1983 Act. The Electoral Registration Officer also acts as Acting Returning Officer for parliamentary Elections (Section 28 of the 1983 Act). The Acting Returning Officer was personally liable for the conduct of these Elections.

- 2) Call In: Not applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): c236,000 registered electors, candidates, agents and staff
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Ward Councillor Views

- 1) Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments: No
- 2) Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 On 2nd November 2009 this Committee considered a report entitled “Election Planning May 2010”. The report advised that the Local Government Elections were fixed for 6th May 2010 with the Election Period commencing on 29th March 2010.
- 3.2 Members were advised that the General Election could be called as late as 10th May 2010 to take place on Thursday, 3rd June 2010. It is now a matter of record that the General Election was called on 12th April 2010 and also took place on 6th May 2010.
- 3.3 This was the first occasion that Bromley had to run a combined parliamentary and Local Government Election.
- 3.4 As was outlined this was particularly challenging as Bromley has a very large electorate of c236,000 registered electors and doubling this across two Elections gave the potential for us to be dealing with one of the largest number of votes returned for any local authority in the country.
- 3.5 Risk Assessment
- 3.5.1 A detailed risk Assessment is produced for each election. The assessment covers such things as staff availability, problems with printing, IT, accommodation and postal votes.
- 3.5.2 A key risk was around the volume of work in dealing with a combined election or two elections over a very short period of time. This was also the first time that a parliamentary election had been held for the new Lewisham West and Penge constituency which spanned the administrative areas of Bromley and Lewisham.
- 3.5.3 The report to the General Purposes & Licensing Committee on 2nd November 2009 identified the majority of the key risks and, in the report, the Returning Officer canvassed Members’ views on the election arrangements to help him make decisions on process and procedure.
- 3.6 Registering to Vote and Accuracy of the Register
- 3.6.1 Under the Rolling Register process, the effective cut off date for registering to vote at these elections was 20th April 2010. The date is governed by legislation and, in common with the majority of election timetables, the Electoral Registration Officer has no discretion to extend dates and deadlines.
- 3.6.2 Extensive efforts were made to advertise the registration process within Bromley to encourage residents to check they were registered so they could vote on polling day. Local publicity was supplemented by national publicity.
- 3.6.3 Bromley has traditionally a high level of voter registration and, by way of example, we were the 3rd highest in London with 97.38% of our residents registering to vote. In total 4,475 new electors were added prior to the elections following the publication of the Electoral Register on 1st December 2009 – 1767 of these were included between the calling of the General Election on 12th April and the close of registration

on 20th April. The number of registered overseas electors increased from 101 on 1st December 2009 to 212 on 20th April 2010 when applications closed .

- 3.6.4 The foundation of an effective electoral process is an accurate and comprehensive Register. Errors in the Register normally come to light when poll cards are delivered. A performance Indicator is adopted to show the accuracy of the Register, calculated on the number of clerical errors recorded at an election as a percentage of the total number of electors on the Register on the publication date. The lower the percentage, the more accurate the Register. Only seven errors were disclosed which represents a high degree of confidence in the quality of the register.
- 3.6.5 A complicating factor for the Elections held in May is that the franchise for a General and Local Election is not the same. For example, overseas electors who are identified with the letter 'F' next to their name on the Electoral Register can vote at a General Election but not a local election; whereas European Union citizens with the letter 'G' or 'K' next to their name on the Register can vote at Local Elections but not at a General Election. There were 231,307 electors registered to vote at the General Election and 237,540 at the local Election. One Register was used with these identifying marks and training for polling staff emphasised the difference in franchise.

3.7 The Election Timetables

- 3.7.1 As has been outlined above, there are different timetables for a Local and Parliamentary Election.
- 3.7.2 The Parliamentary Election was not called until the timetable for the Local Election had commenced. As a consequence of this we were unable to exploit some economies of scale or synergies which might have been possible had we known at an earlier date with certainty that the Elections were going to be combined.
- 3.7.3 As was outlined in the report of 2nd November, the Returning Officer had to issue separate poll cards for both Elections to ensure that print and production deadlines for the Local Government Elections were made and that he was able to comply with his obligation to ensure that poll cards are issued as soon as practicable after the Notice of Election. This was preferable to delaying issue of the Local Government Election poll cards to what, in effect, would have been four days before the deadline for registration and postal vote applications. This arguably had the benefit of advising the majority of voters twice of the pending elections.
- 3.7.4 The decision was taken to issue separate postal vote packs, again to ensure printing deadlines were met and that the issue for the Local Government Elections was not delayed. This was endorsed by the General Purpose & Licensing Committee on 2nd November.
- 3.7.5 The only other issue of consequence was that separate briefings needed to be held for Candidates and Agents as the one for the Local Government Elections had to be given in good time prior to the closing date for nominations.

3.8 Postal and Proxy voting

3.8.1 Postal voting is a growing area of activity. Now any elector may choose to vote by post. The number of electors registered for postal votes has increased from 8,800 for the Local Government Elections in 2002 to 56,221 (for both elections) in the recent Elections in 2010. Between the calling of the General Election on 12th April and the Deadline for applications on 20th April 1, 261 new postal vote applications were processed. The following table gives an indication of the increase in postal voters year on year:

Year	Type of Election	Number of Eligible Electors Registered with a Postal Vote
2002	Local Government Elections	8,800
2004	GLA/European Elections	19,651
2005	General Election	24,670
2006	Local Government Elections	26,277
2008	GLA Election	25,321*
2009	European Election	25,890*
2010	Local Government Elections	27,848
2010	General Election	28,373

* Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced formal checking of personal identifiers

3.8.2 The tables below show the take up and return of postal votes in the 22 Wards in the Local Government Elections and the 4 constituencies wholly or partly within Bromley for the Parliamentary Election:

Ward	Issued	Received	%
Bickley	1,848	1,623	87.83
Biggin Hill	712	618	86.80
Bromley Common & Keston	1,468	1,238	84.33
Bromley Town	1,551	1,293	83.37
Chelsfield & Pratts Bottom	1,412	1,174	83.14
Chislehurst	1,718	1,254	73.00
Clock House	1,228	1,005	81.84
Copers Cope	1,691	1,419	83.91
Cray Valley East	1,307	1,070	81.87
Cray Valley West	1,440	1,167	81.04
Crystal Palace	906	649	71.63
Darwin	498	421	84.54
Farnborough & Crofton	1,511	1,295	85.71
Hayes & Coney Hall	1,370	1,142	83.36
Kelsey & Eden Park	1,449	1,097	75.71
Orpington	1,414	1,203	85.08
Mottingham	739	588	79.57
Penge & Cator	1,161	915	78.81
Petts Wood & Knoll	1,306	1,107	84.76
Plaistow & Sundridge	1,276	1,041	81.58

Shortlands	1,044	868	83.14
West Wickham	1,324	970	73.26
TOTALS	28,373	23,157	81.62
Constituency	Issued	Received	%
Beckenham	8,245	6,714	81.43
Bromley & Chislehurst	8,384	6,698	79.89
Lewisham (Part)	3,155	2,341	74.20
Orpington	8,064	6,745	83.64
TOTALS	27,848	22,498	80.79

3.8.3 Whilst only being required to undertake checks of personal identifiers on 20% of postal votes, the Returning Officer at Bromley insisted on 100% check to ensure that risk of fraud was minimised. No allegations of material fraud were received during the Election process.

3.8.4 Legislation in some circumstances allows a postal voter to be provided with a replacement postal vote up until 5.00 p.m. on polling day with, in some circumstances after a voter can satisfy Election staff they have not received their postal vote, a tendered voter being issued after 5.00 p.m. In total 8 replacement postal votes were issued on polling day. No tendered votes were issued to postal voters.

3.8.5 On the publication of the Electoral Register on 1st December 2009, 100 electors were registered for proxy votes. In the period to 20th April this increased to 400. Between 20th-27th April a further 820 proxy vote applications were processed giving a total of 1220 proxy voters.

3.9 Appointment of Staff

3.9.1 The Returning Officer made 1880 appointments to support both elections. Whilst many individuals fulfilled different roles over 1,000 individuals were appointed for both elections. These are made up as follows:

- Deputy Returning Officers– 2 with full powers and 6 with specific powers;
- 185 Presiding Officers;
- 370 Poll Clerks;
- 6 Poll Inspectors;
- 85 issuing Local Election postal votes clerks;
- 84 issuing General Election postal votes clerks;
- 487 (in total) opening postal votes clerks – spread over 9 sessions;
- 66 Count Supervisors – Local Election;
- 34 Count Supervisors – General Election;
- 250 Counting Assistants – Local Election;
- 266 Counting Assistants – General Election;
- 25 ballot box reception staff;
- 14 count security staff on Thursday night and 12 staff on Friday.

- 3.9.2 In addition assistance was provided by the Biggin Hill Air Cadet Corp to support the drive and drop ballot box reception. This was an innovation introduced for this election and due to its success is likely to be repeated.
- 3.9.3 The prospect of two elections did make recruiting counting staff more challenging. The prospect of commencing work at 9.45 p.m. on Thursday and potentially working through until Friday evening with little or no break did deter several people from applying.
- 3.9.4 Two separate teams of counting assistants were appointed for verification of ballot boxes and counting the General Election on the Thursday/Friday and for counting the local election on the Friday. However, even though several new appointments were made at a supervisory level, there was still considerable duplication between staff working on both count sessions at supervisory level. Furthermore, whilst the Returning Officer's usual policy is to minimise overlap between staff who had been working at the polling stations on the day being included in supervisory roles at the count, this did not prove possible on this occasion (affecting 23 out of a possible 60 supervisors) and they also worked on the Friday count. Deputy Returning Officers who worked on the Thursday night had also been working at polling stations or other electoral duties during the day from 6.00 a.m. on the Thursday morning. These members of staff also worked on the Friday afternoon Count.

3.10 Training of Staff

- 3.10.1 The Returning Officer believes the training of election staff is an important on-going function for the successful delivery of an election. Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks are front line staff who voters come into contact with and, in many cases, are the only members of the Returning Officers' staff who the voter will meet in person.
- 3.10.2 Training is provided for all polling staff and, as well as including details around the technical skills around an election, also covered aspects of customer care. At these elections 6 training sessions were held for Presiding Officers and 14 sessions were held for poll clerks. All training was held at the Civic Centre. Each training session lasted for 2 hours and included a practical exercise based around a model Polling Station environment and also an exercise in completing a ballot paper account.
- 3.10.3 Specific training was provided to staff who were working at polling stations within the borough boundaries supporting the new Parliamentary constituency of Lewisham West & Penge.
- 3.10.4 In addition to training of polling station staff, 3 sessions were provided at the Civic Centre on the Thursday and Friday prior to the election for senior count staff.
- 3.10.5 Count staff at all levels were provided with briefing and procedure notes. A separate note was provided for the two senior staff who were appointed to liaise with the Returning officer at Lewisham on the reception and verification of ballot boxes.

3.11 Candidates

3.11.1 Nominations for the Local Government Election opened on 29th March 2010 and closed on 8th April 2010. In total 211 candidates were nominated for the local elections broken down as follows:

- Conservative Party – 60
- The Labour Party – 59
- Liberal Democrat Party – 59
- UK Independence Party – 10
- The Green Party – 15
- Independents – 5
- British National Party - 3

3.11.2 The greatest number of candidates, 14, stood in Cray Valley West Ward and the least, 3, stood in Darwin Ward. No nomination papers were rejected.

3.11.3 Nominations for the General Election opened on 16th April 2010 and closed on 20th April 2010. Candidates were nominated for each Constituency as follows:

Constituency	Name	Party
Beckenham	Brolly, O.G.W. Cheeseman, D.P. Egan, D.J. Garrett, A.C. Jenkins, S.M. Stewart, R.A. Tonks, R.W.	UKIP English Democrats Labour Party Green Party Liberal Democrats Conservative Party British National Party
Bromley & Chislehurst	Cheeseman, J.D. Jennet, E. Kirby, C.C.A. Neill, R.J. M. Robertson, R.T.S. Savage, R.L. Webber, S.D.	English Democrats UKIP Labour Party Conservative Party Green Party British National Party Liberal Democrats
Orpington	Culnane, M.T. Galloway, T.E. Greenough, J.M. Johnson, J.E. McBride, D. Morgan, S.R. Snape, C.K.	British National Party Green Party UKIP Conservative Party Liberal Democrats Labour Party English Democrats
Lewisham West & Penge	Dowd, J. Feakes, A. Hammond, S.	Labour Party Liberal Democrats Christian Peoples' Alliance

	Phillips, C. Phoenix, R. Staveley, P.	Conservative Party Green Party UKIP
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No nomination papers were rejected.

3.11.4 The Returning officer for Lewisham West & Penge was the Returning Officer for Lewisham and dealt with nominations for the Lewisham West & Penge Constituency.

3.12 Polling

3.12.1 Polling for both elections commenced at 7.00 a.m. and finished at 10.00 p.m. All equipment was delivered to polling stations in advance of polling day and all stations were open to receive voters for the 7.00 a.m. start.

3.12.2 A review of polling places had been carried out after the 2006 Elections. Prior to the election, some concern was expressed by a small number of schools about being used for election purposes. Whilst this is, to some extent, regrettable, the Council is encouraged to use school premises by the Ministry of Justice as this keeps down the cost of an election. In addition, for local government elections, schools are provided with dates on a 20 year programme so they know well in advance when local government elections are being held which allows them to co-ordinate election dates with school development days when schools will be closed to pupils. Head Teachers are, from time to time, also reminded of this.

3.12.3 No material issues were raised on the conduct of the poll.

3.12.4 The Returning Officer arranged for 100% of ballot papers to be printed and, as a consequence, unlike in some parts of the country, there was no issue with ballot papers running out. In addition, whilst polling stations were busy throughout the day, as is to be expected with a 72% turn out, Bromley did not experience difficulties at close of poll with voters being unable to enter polling stations to cast their vote.

3.13 The Count

3.13.1 The report to this Committee on 2nd November canvassed several options for the count venue. The Returning Officer decided on basing the count at the Civic Centre site, using the Great Hall and a Marquee for the count process. The Council Chamber was used initially for opening postal votes received at polling stations and, subsequently, for declarations. The Committee Rooms were used in support of the election and one Committee Room was used to provide a television and rest area for candidates, agents, etc.

3.13.2 A small team was sent to Lewisham to assist in receiving ballot boxes and oversight of the verification process as Lewisham verified both Parliamentary ballot boxes and those for Bromley's Local Government election for the Clock House, Crystal Palace and Penge & Cator Wards. Lewisham were responsible for the secure return of the verified ballot boxes for the Bromley wards in the local government election.

3.13.3 All other ballot boxes were received at the Civic Centre using the drive and drop method which, again, proved extremely successful. The first ballot box was received shortly after 10.15 p.m. The last ballot box was received at 11.10 p.m.

3.13.4 The count for the combined election was extremely demanding. Under the election rules, counting staff had to verify all ballot boxes for the Parliamentary and Local Elections before the counting of votes could start for the General Election. This meant that in excess of 400,000 ballot papers had to be verified before ballot papers would be sorted by candidate and counted.

3.13.5 The verification process was completed at c.3.00 a.m. and the counting process for the 3 Constituencies was concluded at c.5.30 a.m. with Orpington being declared first followed by Bromley & Chislehurst and then Beckenham.

3.13.6 The Count for the Local Government election started at 12 noon on Friday 7th May. This count effectively consisted of 22 individual counts including separate adjudications and declarations. The first result was for Darwin ward and was declared by 1.30 p.m. after a recount and the last result was Cray Valley East at 5.30 p.m., also after a recount. The declarations were made in the Council Chamber and feedback received, so far, around this as a venue for declarations has to date been positive.

3.13.7 In the Local government election electors can, in the majority of wards, vote for up to three candidates - the exceptions being Darwin which has a single vote and Biggin Hill, Crystal Palace, Mottingham & Chislehurst North and Shortlands where two candidates are returned. An increasing tendency for electors to either not use all their vote entitlement or to split votes between political parties added to the complexity of the count as all such votes need to be separately identified and counted using in Bromley's case counting sheets. The table shows the increased numbers of split votes which had to be counted under special procedures in 2010 which was compounded by the higher than usual turnout due to the General Election taking place on the same day.

Ward	Number of Ballot Papers which had to be individually recorded		
	2010	2006	2002
Clock House	2,812	1,505	615
Copers Cope	2,087	658	577
Crystal Palace	1,607	741	489
Kelsey and Eden Park	2,015	1,138	572
Penge & Cator	2,181	1,124	776
Shortlands	1,461	414	291
West Wickham	2,367	629	551
Bickley	2,598	726	468
Bromley Common and Keston	2,487	909	631
Bromley Town	2,909	806	645
Chislehurst	3,412	1,722	753
Hayes and Coney Hall	2,756	883	581
Mottingham and Chislehurst North	1,487	738	476

Plaistow and Sundridge	2,625	1,018	844
Biggin Hill	1,765	341	440
Chelsfield and Pratts Bottom	1,934	984	510
Cray Valley East	2,078	736	458
Cray Valley West	2,679	1,280	810
Darwin	N/A	N/A	N/A
Farnborough and Crofton	2,376	1,537	620
Orpington	2,183	621	525
Petts Wood and Knoll	2,673	917	471

3.14 ELECTION ISSUES

3.14.1 The deadline for election petitions has passed and no challenges have been received for Bromley Wards and Constituencies.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The budget for the General Election was £325,000, funded from a grant from the Ministry of Justice and the Local Government Election £500,000, funded from Bromley's revenue budget. Expenditure was contained within budget.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council is required to designate one of its officers as Returning Officer for Local Government Elections under the provisions of Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. The Returning Officer was personally liable for the conduct of these Elections.

The Council is also required to designate one of its officers as Electoral Registration Officer under Section 8 of the 1983 Act. The Electoral Registration Officer also acts as Returning Officer for parliamentary Elections (Section 28 of the 1983 Act). The Acting Returning Officer was personally liable for the conduct of these Elections.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Policy Implications Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	