

# MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 June 2015 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Hall, Stella Jeffrey, John Paschoud and Roy Kennedy.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Janet Daby.

## 1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 2. **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2015 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

## 3. **UK Parliamentary General Election 7 May 2015**

The Committee considered a report on the current status of preparations for the UK Parliamentary General Election, to be held on 7 May 2015.

The Head of Law distributed tabled the 'Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration' report that the Electoral Registration published in June 2015, and highlighted a number of key points from the report.

The Committee noted that Electoral rolls were up 1% nationally, but 1.9 million electors were still unconfirmed under IER. Variations across the country ranged from 0% to 23% of the electoral roll, and in Lewisham the figure was approximately 16,280 which represented 8.2%. The transition to IER would not be brought to an end until December 2016 as the Electoral Commission wanted to see the outcome of the full Household Enquiry Form (HEF) canvass before making their decision about this, and there would be insufficient time to do that if the transition was closed in December 2015.

77% of all applications for IER had been made online, and online application was particularly popular with young people and overseas voters.

There was concern regarding the fall in the number of young attainers on the electoral roll nationally. Since February/March 2014 the number had fallen by around 47%, attributed by the Electoral Commission to the lack of a comprehensive canvass in 2014. The Electoral Commission believed the full HEF canvass in 2015 may redress this somewhat. Household notification letters that were sent by Lewisham Electoral Registration officers in February 2015 did not particularly attract attainers, possible due to the emphasis on the upcoming general election, for which attainers would for the most part have been too young to vote. The Electoral Commission was encouraging Electoral Registration Officers to update their engagement strategy to now focus on young attainers.

The Head of Law highlighted that turnout had been higher than the 2010 General Election, the postal vote returns were at over 80%, and that there had been a larger than anticipated number of proxy votes requested.

The Chair queried how well the count arrangements were during the election period, and the Head of Law responded that the Laurence House ground floor venue for the count had been adequate but not entirely satisfactory, given the previous difficulties in finding a venue.

Councillor John Paschoud commented that some difficulties had been experienced on the evening of the count, for example two sections of the room were separated by the reception area, which caused some minor delays. Furthermore, there was uncertainty as to whether councillors were admitted to the count. Guidance had previously been that only one nominated counting agent per candidate could attend, but throughout the course of the evening a number of councillors were admitted. The Head of Law noted Councillor John Paschoud's comments and said that feedback on the arrangements was always welcome. The Chair noted the financial implications in the report, and the Head of Law explained that there were additional costs associated with the General Election which were not recoverable, for example the dedicated call centre set up by the Council to handle registration queries was not considered an election expense. The rest of the costs would be reimbursed by HM Treasury.

Councillor Kennedy proposed an additional recommendation, that in the meeting after the next Elections Committee, a report be provided to look at the arrangements for the 2018 General Election and how matters arising from the 2014 Local and 2015 General Elections could be addressed and planned more effectively. The Chair and Committee were in agreement with the additional recommendation.

The Chair extended her thanks to the officers for the work undertaken, and their professionalism during the busy election period.

RESOLVED that

- a) the report be noted; and
- b) a report on the preliminary arrangements of the 2018 UK Parliamentary General Election be provided to the Elections Committee at the meeting after next.

#### **4. Update on IER**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Lewisham.

Given that the Electoral Registration Working Party was scheduled to follow directly from the meeting of the Elections Committee, Members were minded to reserve an in depth discussion on the update on IER to the Working Party meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The Meeting closed at 8.05 p.m.