

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	European Parliamentary Election – 4 June, 2009 – Review	
Key Decision	n/a	Item No. 6
Ward	n/a	
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Class	Part 1	Date: 30 July, 2009

1. Purpose

This report looks briefly at the recent European Parliamentary arrangements.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the report be noted.

3. Election financing

- 3.1 The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) have moved to a different way of funding national elections, which was introduced for the first time for the European Parliamentary elections. Previously there have been a mixture of set costs – e.g. for poll staff, with other costs reimbursed on an ‘actual and necessary’ basis – e.g. supplier charges. The new system, aimed broadly at making elections more cost-effective, involves Returning Officers being given a set budget to run elections; with costs for the various elements being based partly on historical costs with an inflationary uplift and partly information provided to the MoJ by electoral administrators. For London boroughs, there is an additional allowance made within the funding provided. Whereas previously some individual elements of cost were effectively capped, the MoJ's new funding regime is said to provide for more flexibility in meeting any ‘overspends’ in one area by using any underspend in others.
- 3.2 The Council's GLA election costs were somewhere in the region of £362,000 and although the cost profile for a European Parliamentary elections is different (e.g. the Local Returning Officer not dealing with nominations/different Count arrangements), the initial financial exemplification from the MoJ both for Lewisham and elsewhere in London suggested a significant shortfall in the amount of funding required to successfully manage the election processes. Following representations made to the MoJ, by the Local Returning Officer and

others in London, election budgets were increased and the 'allowance' for the borough was set, finally, at £321,839. This had implications for how the election was organised, as explained below.

4. Candidates

Members will know that there were 19 parties / independent candidates standing for election for the 8 seats in the London Region. This resulted in a very long ballot paper and the problems of dealing with this – both in relation to the poll and the Count – were considerable.

5. Electorate

For these elections, registered citizens of European Union States were required to 'opt in' to vote here rather than their home country. An application form for this purpose was sent to all those entitled in January of this year. Approximately 3,400 of 11,400 did so. The electorate was, in total, 173,461, 17,047 of whom were postal voters (10.98%).

6 Polling places

6.1 109 Polling places were used at this election. Of these, four were new polling places designated under the delegation given to the Chief Executive by the Committee on 26th March. These were cases where the originally designated polling place was unavailable for some reason. In two other cases, polling places designated for the first time for the 2008 GLA elections were again used. In all these cases, consultation was undertaken with Ward Councillors and Committee members. Use of all of these polling places was satisfactory. Only one complaint was received in relation to a polling place – Grove Park Youth Club in polling district EGB – and this will be reviewed prior to any further use.

6.2 As a result of the initial uncertainty relating to the funding of this election, an early decision was taken to identify potential savings in costs. With an anticipated low turnout expected and increasing use of postal voting, it was determined that for polling places with less than 1,250 station electors, a Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk would be appointed (rather than the two Poll Clerks usually appointed). Although this seems to have worked reasonably satisfactorily for this election, it is not considered that such an arrangement would be possible for a Local/Mayoral or Parliamentary General election where turnout would be likely to be higher and/or the election processes more complex .

7. Count

With the poll taking place on Thursday 4th June in this country but on Sunday 7th in most European States, the Verification (the initial stage of the Count) was organised for Friday 5th June and the full Count itself

for the Sunday. Again, to reduce costs and avoid hire charges, both were planned to take place in the Civic Suite, where usable accommodation was limited. Thirty staff, plus supervisors, worked on the Verification which started at 10.00am and finished at 4.45pm. The Count commenced at 3.00pm and was completed shortly before 9.00pm, when the result was conveyed to the Regional Returning Officer at City Hall, where the London-wide results were being calculated. The borough was one of six London borough to submit its results before 9.00pm, with the last being received just before midnight. Fifty staff, plus supervisors worked on the Count.

8. Turnout

The overall turnout rate for the election across the borough was 30.79% compared with a London average of 33.53%. The highest was in Richmond upon Thames at 41.72% and the lowest Newham at 27.27%. The overall 'station' turnout in the borough was 27.4%, with postal voting at 57.8%.

9. Election review

- 9.1 Partly in line with the performance standards regime for Returning Officers being introduced nationally by the Electoral Commission (which is the subject of separate report to the Committee) and also best practice, the opportunity was taken to seek feedback from various stakeholders in the election and review complaints received.
- 9.2 So far as complaints are concerned, the number of written complaints at 10 is considered small. Of these, two were in relation to the use of the Corresponding Numbers List, use of which (to record details of the ballot paper number issued to electors), is a legal requirement. Other complaints were in relation to registration/postal voting matters. In all cases formal responses were made to complainants and in two cases thanks for the replies were received. So far as telephone enquiries/complaints are concerned, a number were in relation to non receipt of poll cards. Although, generally it appears that these were delivered to electors in good time prior to the closing date for postal vote applications, in a small number of cases delivery by Royal Mail appears to have been delayed. This has been taken up with them as part of the post-election review process.
- 9.3 Stakeholder reviews have been conducted with local Election Agents, Poll Staff and Count staff. The results of the Agents review, conducted by survey form, is attached at appendix 1. Disappointingly, only two of the local Agents appointed responded to the survey, but the comments made are positive. Similarly, the responses from poll staff in relation to contact with the Electoral Services Office, the planning arrangements, training, etc. are good and specific comments from staff will help inform procedures / arrangements for future elections. Count staff comments were also positive, the main issue raised being in relation to the

accommodation used in the Civic Suite – the reasons for which are explained above.

10. Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

11. Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report .

12. Crime and disorder implications

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report .

13. Equalities implications

There are no equality implications arising from this report .

14. Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications arising from this report .

Background Papers

Election review papers – Dave Kingdon – 020 8314 6907