

<b>ELECTIONS COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Review of the Parliamentary, Mayoral and Local election in May 2010	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	Item No. 6
<b>Ward</b>	All	
<b>Contributors</b>	Director of Programme Management	
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date: 18 October 2010

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with a review of the administration of the Parliamentary, Local Government and Mayoral elections, held on 6 May 2010 within the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL).

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to note the report, the learning points set out in this document and the conclusions in paragraph 15.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Elections Committee received a report on 28 January 2010 (appendix A) setting out the preparations for the May 2010 elections. This report reviews the implementation of those preparations and notes the lessons learnt.
- 3.2 On 6 May 2010, LBL administered a Parliamentary, Local Government and Mayoral election. This was the first such combination of elections to be held within Lewisham and only three other local authorities within the country administered such a combination (appendix B).
- 3.3 The turnout across all elections improved, with the Parliamentary election representing a 13.5 per cent increase from 2005.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.4 Owing to different franchises, there was a total electorate of 202,006 for the Parliamentary election and 184,255 potential voters in the Mayoral and Local Government elections. Out of these, a total of 128,704 ballots were issued and received in the Parliamentary election, 111,832 in the Mayoral and 110,182 in the Local Government election. This resulted in a total of 350,718 ballot papers that needed to be verified and counted.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based upon Lewisham electors only and excludes new voters from Bromley as part of the Lewisham West and Penge constituency.

- 3.5 A total of 269 candidates stood across all three elections, with 19 standing in the Parliamentary election, 7 in the Mayoral and 243 in the Local Government.

Election	Electorate	Ballots Issued	Valid Ballots (Spoilt Ballots)	Turnout (%)
Parliamentary	202,006	128,704	127,967 (735)	63.7
Mayoral	184,255	111,832	107,569 (4,263)	60.7
Local Government	184,255	110,182	109,386 (796)	59.8

#### 4. Legislative Framework

4.1 The legislative framework surrounding the conduct of the elections in May is complex and varied. The primary acts that set out the regulations governing national and local elections are the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 and the RPA 2000. These have subsequently been amended by further statutes

4.2 The majority of regulations are set out in the RPAs but additional legislation governs other aspects of the Mayoral, Local and Parliamentary elections. These include various regulations relating to the count methodology and the statutory timetables for the elections. The Association of Electoral Administrators noted that:

“Over 25 separate pieces of primary and secondary legislation (some of which have been amended on several occasions) governed the administration of the elections that took place across the UK in May 2010.”<sup>2</sup>

4.3 In undertaking the elections, Lewisham complied fully with all statutory requirements. This included the implementation of new regulations not previously applied at a Parliamentary election, including those set out in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA), the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 and the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 that was given royal assent in April 2010.

4.4. While Lewisham complied with all regulations, the introduction of new legislation placed additional burdens upon staff to ensure compliance without a relative increase in additional resources from central government. The introduction of exception processes such as the provision of poll cards to anonymous electors, emergency proxy voting and reissue of lost or spoilt postal votes all applied pressure on the limited resources of the trained Electoral Services team.

**Learning Point:**

The Council should lobby central government to simplify and streamline the legislative framework surrounding elections administration

<sup>2</sup> Association of Electoral Administrators., Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK. 2010. p. 11

## 5. Timetables

- 5.1 On April 6 2010 the Prime Minister announced that the UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) would be held on May 6. This initiated a tight timeframe within which Lewisham was required to administer three elections. The table below sets out the statutory timetable for the 2010 elections.

### Election Timetable

Activity	Parliamentary	Local & Mayoral Elections
Notice of Election	14 April	29 March
Nominations Open	15 April	30 March
Close of Nominations	20 April	8 April
Nominations Published	20 April	12 April
Deadline to register to vote at election	20 April	20 April
Deadline to make new applications for postal votes	20 April (17:00)	20 April (17:00)
Deadline for appointing counting agents and polling agents	4 May	28 April
Deadline for the reissue of lost or undelivered postal votes	6 May (17:00)	6 May (17:00)
Polling Day	6 May (07:00-22:00)	6 May (07:00-22:00)
Verification and Count	6 May (22:00 onward)	6 May (22:00 onward)

- 5.2 Lewisham conducted the election within this statutory timetable. However, certain aspects of the timeframe placed increased pressure on the Electoral Services Team.
- 5.3 **11 Day Registration Deadline**
- 5.4 Under the EAA the voting registration deadline was extended from 2 months to 11 days prior to an election. This resulted in the deadlines for voter registration, postal vote applications, the publication of polling stations' locations, the publication of the notice of poll and the close of Parliamentary nominations and their publication falling on 20 April.
- 5.5 In the five working days prior to April 20, Lewisham received a total of 658 postal vote applications, 3193 voter registrations, 1074 register amendments and 299 register deletions.
- 5.6 Once the deadline passed, voter registrations received were then processed before the second run of poll cards and postal vote data were sent to the printers. This happened while the ballot paper proofs were being checked. This combination of activity within a short period of time put pressure on the resources of the Electoral Services Team. The statutory notices, such as the statement of person nominated, notice of poll and situation of polling stations

were all prepared beforehand, but there was still a need for them to be published.

5.7 In the case of postal votes the 11 day registration deadline put particular pressure on ensuring the quick registration of late applicants and the issue of their ballots in order to provide the greatest possible time for its return. This was exacerbated in the case of those Lewisham electors abroad.

#### 5.8 ***Poll Card Distribution***

5.9 It is a statutory requirement that polling cards are distributed to all Lewisham electors as soon as practicable after publication of the Notice of Election.

5.10 Lewisham originally planned to distribute combined Parliamentary, Local and Mayoral poll cards, in order to reduce mailings and potential voter confusion. However, at the time of the Notice of Election for the Local and Mayoral election, the UKPGE had not yet been called. In the light of national guidance<sup>3</sup> and statutory requirements, Lewisham decided to issue two sets of poll cards, rather than a combined issue.

#### 5.11 ***Counting Agent Deadline***

5.12 The deadline for the submission of counting agents to oversee the count was the 4 May 2010. The number of people legally entitled to be at the verification and count was in excess of 1000. The requirement to add additional agents two working days prior to the count meant there was minimal time in which to distribute any count tickets and ensure a secure count.

#### 5.13 ***Deadline for the re-issue of lost or undelivered Postal Votes***

5.14 Until 17:00 on polling day there was a requirement to re-issue a replacement postal ballot in the case of loss or non-delivery. This presented a challenge to the Electoral Services Team and polling staff owing to the resources needed to re-issue ballots and the lack of clarity regarding the definition of 'lost' or 'undelivered' within the legislation.

#### 5.15 ***Pressures on Printing***

5.16 The requirement of Returning Officers to receive, proof, print and distribute mayoral booklets ahead of postal votes being sent out put increased pressure on the printers. Due to the volume of orders from multiple authorities, the Electoral Services Team needed to reserve a printing position in November. If the proofs for any purpose required amending, the job in question would need to be rescheduled, placing it at the end of the queue.

#### 5.17 ***Nominations Process***

5.18 From the 29 March (publication of the Notice of Election) to the 8 April (Close of Nominations) the Electoral Services Team handled 7 Mayoral and 243

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<sup>3</sup> Issues for consideration in connection with a potential combined UK Parliamentary general and local government election in England on 6 May 2010.  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/electoral\\_commission\\_pdf\\_file/0017/87110/Issues-paper-on-combined-FINAL.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0017/87110/Issues-paper-on-combined-FINAL.pdf)

Council nominations. In the Parliamentary process, 19 nominations were received between the Notice of Election on the 13 April to the Close of Nominations on the 20 April. The Close of Nominations also coincided with the voter registration cut off on the 20 April putting additional pressure on the Electoral Services Team.

### **Candidate Nominations**

<b>Election</b>	<b>Nominations Received</b>
Parliamentary	19
Mayoral	7
Local Government	243

## **6. Electoral Integrity**

6.1 At the centre of any election is confidence in its integrity and security. In ensuring that confidence remains in the administration of elections locally, Lewisham have reviewed previous elections in the Borough. Whether they be Parliamentary, European, GLA or Mayor or Local Government elections none have demonstrated any concern about systematic fraud or malpractice. Despite this Lewisham has continued to strengthen its electoral integrity arrangements.

### **6.2 *Police***

6.3 A key part of maintaining security and integrity is the Borough's relationship with the Metropolitan Police in Lewisham. In preparation for the election extensive negotiations had taken place with the single point of contact (SPOC) from the police and the Borough Commander in order to identify security and fraud risks.

6.4 A comprehensive integrity plan and risk assessment was undertaken that set out potential risks: the owner, the likelihood and impact of the risk, the action to mitigate or detect the risk and the action to be taken in the event of its occurrence.

6.5 While many of the risks did not materialise, planning worked to mitigate potential difficulties where they could have arisen. A key issue for the election team and the police was the security to be provided at the close of poll, where the increase in voters meant a greater likelihood of disorder. In preparation the police agreed to provide extra coverage at this time and where a queue had built up at one station they provided timely support to the PO.

### **6.6 *Agents and Candidates***

6.7 In order to ensure all Agents and Candidates were aware of the measures and procedures in place to ensure the election's integrity, Electoral Commission Guidance covering areas such as the secrecy of the ballot and the practice for dealing with postal votes and tellers was issued to all Candidates and Agents as part of the nominations process.

6.8 Further emphasis was placed on the integrity of the election in formal meetings with Agents and Candidates and the Electoral Commission A3 guidance sheets in respect of tellers, were placed outside polling stations.

#### 6.9 **Registers**

6.10 A critical element to the integrity of an election is the accuracy of the registers. As the process of registration is through self-declaration, with EROs possessing little powers of investigation, those checks and balances that exist are important to prevent and detect fraud.

6.11 A critical check and instrument by which an accurate register is maintained is the annual canvass. In addition to the canvass, Lewisham acted in accordance with the Electoral Commission best practice guidance for major elections in sending out confirmation letters to all households in February confirming who is registered, and by what method they have chosen to vote i.e. at the polling station, by post or by proxy.

#### 6.12 **Cross Boundary Work**

6.13 Three wards from the London Borough of Bromley were included as part of the newly formed Lewisham West and Penge constituency. The preparatory work carried out between Bromley and Lewisham and the continued liaison throughout the period ensured that on election day no major issues arose as a result of the constituency boundaries crossing the two authorities.

### 7. **Call Centre**

7.1 In the run up to the election, Lewisham administered a call centre to handle questions on the election process from members of the public. While there was no process by which to monitor the volume of calls it was reported from staff that the call centre was well utilised throughout the period.

7.2 On election day the call centre function was transferred to the Electoral Services Team. The volume of calls that the team received on polling day put additional pressure on their normal election day administrative roles.

#### **Learning Point:**

Continue the operation of the call centre for future elections, extending it to include election day. Mechanisms should also be introduced to monitor and record calls.

### 8. **Postal Voting Arrangements**

8.1 A total of 23,526 electors were issued a postal vote for the May 2010 elections. This included 3164 postal voters in Bromley and the 658 who registered in the five working days leading up to the application deadline. In Lewisham the number of overall postal voters in 2010 represented a 23.5 per cent increase from 2009<sup>4</sup> and required a concentrated set of resources to

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<sup>4</sup> based upon 17,621 electors registered for a postal vote on 1 Dec 2009.

distribute, replace, open and verify postal votes. The administration of this work has led to the process becoming a distinct project within itself.

8.2

	<b>Parliamentary</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Mayoral</b>
Postal Votes Issued	<b>23526</b>	<b>21766</b>	<b>21766</b>
Postal Votes Received	<b>16810</b>	<b>17203</b>	<b>17203</b>

### 8.3 ***Postal Vote Issuing***

8.4 In planning for the postal vote issue, Lewisham decided to implement a combined issue of ballot papers into one mailing. This was in order to minimise the cost of multiple distributions, avoid any voter confusion from two sets of mailing and reduce the chances of a mismatch between ballot paper numbers and electors details.

8.5 Each ballot pack mailed included a sheet setting out the postal voting instructions, a postal vote statement (PVS), a return envelope and three colour coded ballot papers for each election.

8.6 The distribution took place from the Town Hall Civic Suite over two days<sup>5</sup> and involved 12 teams of 5 assistants. This was overseen by experienced staff from the Elections' Team. The process involved careful checks in order to ensure that ballot paper numbers corresponded to electors' details prior to mailing.<sup>6</sup>

### 8.7 ***PVI Verification and Checking Process***

8.8 Once ballot papers were returned to the Town Hall or collected from polling stations on election day, work commenced to verify their authenticity through the postal vote identifiers (PVI) on the PVS.

8.9 This verification of PVI was conducted in four stages. This included the initial verification and check, the scanning of the postal voting statement (PVS), ballot paper opening and the final adjudication.<sup>7</sup>

### 8.10 ***Pre-Polling Day PVI Verification***

8.11 There were a series of postal vote opening sessions prior to polling day. All those postal ballot papers verified were then separated into their respective ward, constituency or borough election. This reduced the number of postal vote ballot boxes at the count.

### 8.12 ***Polling Day PVI Verification***

8.13 As a result of the time constraints applied on the issue and receipt of postal votes through the 11 day deadline, it was expected that many postal votes would be handed in at polling stations. In order to reduce the impact upon the

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<sup>5</sup> Friday 23 April and Monday 26 April

<sup>6</sup> Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Issue Instructions (appendix d)

<sup>7</sup> Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Opening Process (appendix e)

count through potentially verifying a large number of PVI's at the close of the poll, the 18 polling station inspectors – one for each ward – collected postal votes at intervals on polling day so that PVI's could be verified at the Town Hall throughout the day.

- 8.14 The last collection of postal votes from polling stations was at 16:00. There was a need to stop the processing of postal votes at this time in order to make arrangements to move the verification computers from the Town Hall and set up the Remote Postal Vote checking ICT at the count venue.
- 8.15 As a result of testing the technology it was known that it would take an hour to download data from the main networked system and import it into the remote system. In addition, arrangements to check postal votes handed in at Bromley stations meant further data imports.
- 8.16 Once the data download was complete it then had to be exported to two stand alone laptops and taken along with two scanners and two printers to the count to be set up. This process was completed by 19:00.
- 8.17 This process had been tested thoroughly on two occasions prior to election day. However, at the commencement of the checking of postal votes at the count venue it was discovered that the data files were corrupted and the underlying postal vote application images could not be accessed.
- 8.18 As part of the contingency planning for the election the software providers had been put on call. As a result a long exchange was entered into with the software provider as to the cause of the corruption.
- 8.19 Whilst there was a manual back up facility, there was a need to get the checking system working in order to maintain a 100 per cent check of PVI's. Elections staff carried out two visits back to the Town Hall to re export and import data with the system finally working by 02.30. Postal Vote checking was completed by 05:00. The issue was found to be a corrupt file path to the underlying scanned postal vote application images, and was only resolved by the software provider dialling into the system and fixing it directly.
- 8.20 The impact upon the count verification process was negligible and while current legislation only required that 20 per cent of PVI's be verified, Lewisham achieved 100 per cent verification, including those postal votes from Bromley polling stations. However it tied up two senior members of the Elections' Team for a considerable time when they could have been utilised elsewhere.

**Learning Point:**

Revisit arrangements for the relocation of postal vote checking ICT, including the practicalities of checking all PVI's at the Town Hall. Where ICT has to be relocated at a critical stage of an election ensure that adequate testing is undertaken and technical support is available.

## **9. Polling Day**

### **9.1 *Ballot Boxes***

9.2 In order to reduce the time spent sorting ballot papers at the count, 3 ballot boxes, one per poll, were issued to polling stations. In order to facilitate this, 400 new large size ballot boxes were purchased. The higher turnout and the size of the ballot papers used in the local government election, (with between 13-15 candidates per ward) led to 20 polling stations having a second local election ballot box issued.

9.3 At the count 411 ballot boxes were required to be verified. This included 32 postal vote ballot boxes containing sealed wallets from each daily opening. The ballot box number also comprised those returned from Lewisham polling stations (327) together with those from Bromley that were required to be verified in respect of Lewisham West and Penge (48 from polling stations and 4 postal vote boxes).

9.4 Arrangements were made, which ensured that the 24 Bromley ward boxes were returned in time for their local count on Friday. However, Lewisham had to verify all the boxes in the first instance.

### **9.5 Polling Stations**

9.6 The location of polling stations are reviewed every year, with Lewisham having performed a full review of all polling stations in 2008. Under current legislation there is a requirement for all polling stations to be reviewed every four years.

9.7 There were a total of 109 polling stations used in Lewisham and 24 in the Bromley controlled area of the Lewisham West and Penge constituency. Polling stations were open from 07:00 to 22:00 and staffed by 3 Polling Clerks (PC) and 1 Presiding Officer (PO) each. In addition 1 Visiting Officer was assigned per ward to oversee all polling stations.

9.8 All staff who worked at polling stations were required to undertake training before they could commence any duties on polling day. The PowerPoint presentation given by the Head of Law to all polling station staff is appended to this report (appendix C).

9.9 While not ideal, Lewisham was required to use portakabins for 6 out of the 109 polling stations owing to unsuitable alternative facilities. However, this was down from the last election where 10 portakabins were used.

9.10 The increased turnout was confirmed by many POs and PCs reporting continuous activity at their respective polling stations. In some cases this led to a build up of voters and queues forming. In the majority of instances this was resolved quickly. While high demand had been anticipated a number of factors contributed to the process of voting taking longer than usual.

9.11 This included polling staff being required to work with three corresponding number lists (CNL). This involved staff writing the ballot number on a separate list, which had to be kept in the same order as the ballot paper. This

requirement to manage corresponding number lists rather than write electors number on a counterfoil slowed down the voting process.

- 9.12 POs and PCs additionally reported a certain level of confusion amongst some voters both with the candidate list and the three different voting methodologies. Some POs and PCs reported time spent responding to voters queries as to why the party leaders were not represented on the ballot paper and having to explain how to put their mark on the ballot paper.
- 9.13 Some more experienced POs who had worked on previous elections where turnout had not been as high, had difficulty adapting to the increased demand placed upon them.
- 9.14 In the one polling station where a queue was expected at the close of the poll, contingency plans were put into operation. This resulted in all electors in the queue being brought into the station before 22:00 and issued with their ballot papers. Subsequently the polling station doors were locked at 22:00 with all electors in the station being able to vote. More information is available through the interim report of polling station queues published by the Electoral Commission.<sup>8</sup>
- 9.15 The capacity to resolve increased demand on the day is limited once ballot paper numbers have been assigned to a polling station and the register produced. While there is the potential to split stations and add more POs and PCs, funding restrictions limit the feasibility of this option. The Ministry of Justice provide funding for 1.8 PCs per station, which in May equated to 196.2 PCs for the whole of the Borough. In Lewisham, to ensure there was sufficient capacity for the scale of election, 3 PCs were employed per station, totalling 327 PCs overall.
- 9.16 Staffing at Polling stations was in line with Electoral Commission Guidelines. No polling station had more than 2,500 voters in person allocated to them and there were only six with over 2,000.

**Learning Point:**

Work should be undertaken to review staffing arrangements for polling stations and examine the selection criteria used for POs and PCs.

## 10. The Count

### 10.1 *The Venue*

10.2 The count took place at Sedgehill School within Bellingham ward. The location and arrangements for the count venue are of great importance to the efficient and effective implementation of the count.

10.3 The planning for the count commenced in November 2009 with a number of factors constraining where the count could be held. The combination of 3 major elections, an expected increase in turnout, along with the additional 48

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<sup>8</sup> 2010 UK Parliamentary General Election: Interim Report: Review of problems at polling stations at close of polls on 6 May 2010  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf)

ballot boxes from Bromley, all required an area large enough to accommodate an adequate number of counters, electoral team staff and observers.

- 10.4 The Borough was also constrained by its limited choice of appropriate venues. While the 2009 European election count was held within the Town Hall, the increased scale of the May 2010 elections meant this was not feasible. In addition, a decision was made not to split the count across two venues to ensure that the core expertise of the Electoral Services Team was not spread too thin. This resulted in the decision to host the count at Sedgehill School as the biggest single venue available within the Borough.
- 10.5 The early preparations allowed both the Electoral Services Team and school enough time to plan for polling day. Under current legislation there is no requirement for schools to agree to host an election count (aside from a mayoral election) and therefore it is important that where a school is requested for a count it feels it has sufficient time to prepare.
- 10.6 Initial preparations for the venue included ensuring that there were uninterruptible power supplies and that equipment could be delivered and arranged on site.
- 10.7 In order to accommodate the count, the Electoral Services Team took control of a complete block of the school which included the school indoor sports hall and two break out rooms to accommodate count staff breaks, agents, candidates and press area for viewing TV and light refreshments.
- 10.8 To have room for all who were legally entitled to attend the count, including agents, candidates, candidates' guests, counting agents, and official observers, 150 counters was the maximum that could be accommodated within the sports hall.
- 10.9 Complaints were received about the quantity and quality of facilities at the count that were available to candidates, agents, guests and counting agents. The ladies' toilet facilities comprised just two cubicles, one of which had a door missing. There was also concern over a lack of adequate seating provision.
- 10.10 ***The Verification Process***
- 10.11 Prior to ballot papers being counted they were required to be verified.<sup>9</sup> Essential to beginning the verification as quickly as possible were the arrangements to transport ballot boxes to the count venue. To achieve this early arrangements had been made with Sedgehill School, the police and the highways departments to improve the traffic flow in the vicinity of the school.
- 10.12 The arrival of POs delivering their ballot boxes was managed in the school car park with POs delivering their materials to three lorry reception areas: one for each constituency. The ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts and postal

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<sup>9</sup> Managing a local government election in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers – Part E – Verification and count.  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/83412/Copy-of-056-localmanual-Part-E-Final-Web.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/83412/Copy-of-056-localmanual-Part-E-Final-Web.pdf)

vote wallets containing envelopes were then brought into the count hall, to be stored, by a team of 22 porters.

- 10.13 The first PO arrived back from a nearby station at 22.15. It had been anticipated that POs would arrive at the count venue later than in previous elections. This was due to the paper work that needed to be completed after the close of polls as an increased turnout occupied the attention of POs throughout the day.
- 10.14 At the peak time for POs returning from ballot stations, there was a queue of POs cars waiting to be processed and whilst one ballot box arrived quite late at about 23.30 on 6 May this did not delay the overall verification process.
- 10.15 The verification process required teams of two to verify a set of ballot boxes. The process was administered efficiently with 95 per cent of boxes being verified on the first count. Where delays had occurred in the verification process this was attributed to arithmetical errors by POs.
- 10.16 As a result of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act (CRAG) coming into force in April 2010 a requirement was placed upon all ROs to take 'reasonable steps' to finish verification and begin the count before 02:00.
- 10.17 As part of the planning process, Lewisham did not expect to finish verifying all ballot papers before 02:00. However, in response to CRAG, a further review was conducted on the verification and count arrangements to examine whether the process could be quickened.
- 10.18 As part of the verification process a detailed check is undertaken on the number of ballot papers in each returned ballot box to ensure they correspond with the ballot paper account provided by Presiding Officers. This needed to be completed before the first count could begin, as it was critical to the overall accuracy of the count.
- 10.19 As a result of the limits on the number of count staff (due to the size of the venue) and the priority to maintain high standards of verification integrity, the review, as with prior reviews, concluded that despite reasonable steps to begin the count as soon as was practicable, Lewisham did not expect to complete its verification process before 02:00.
- 10.20 Lewisham completed the verification of the ballot papers at 05:30am on Friday 7 May, beginning the count at 06:00. The non-completion of the verification process by 02:00 was in line with the majority of other London authorities. As per provisions in CRAG, Lewisham reported back to the Electoral Commission within 30 days that it had not completed the verification by 02:00 and what steps had been taken to begin the count as soon as practicable.
- 10.21 ***The Count Process***
- 10.22 There was a considerable amount of time spent working to optimise the venue for the count process. The decision was made to opt for a triple horseshoe arrangement, with one team of 50 counters per constituency, making 150 in all. There was one Deputy Returning Officer with full powers and one senior accountant assigned to each team, in addition to three supervisors.

- 10.23 In line with legislation the Parliamentary count was commenced first at 06:00 on Friday 7 May. This lasted until 09:15 and was followed by the Mayoral count which started at 16:00 and finished at 20:30. The Mayoral count included a second preference count. At 21:30 the Local Government count began, this lasted until 07:00 on Saturday 8 May with the count for one ward being reconvened on Tuesday 11 May.
- 10.24 The count process varied between elections with a different voting methodology for each election. While the UKPGE was conducted under a first-past-the-post-system, the Mayoral election was carried out under a supplementary vote and the Local Government election used multi-member vote methodology. This had some impact on slowing the count.
- 10.25 In the instance of Grove Park ward, four recounts were conducted due to the small margin of victory between candidates after each count. This led to the declaration of results for the ward being announced after the fourth recount on Tuesday 11 May.
- 10.26 **Declaration of Results**
- 10.27 Following the conclusion of the count for each election the results were declared by the Returning Officer at the following times:

<b><i>Elections</i></b>	<b><i>Declaration Time</i></b>
Parliamentary Election	Friday 7 May – 09:15
Mayoral Election	Friday 7 May – 20:00
Ward	Saturday 8 May – 07:00 <i>(One ward was reconvened &amp; counted on Tuesday 11 May)</i>

**Learning Points:**

Undertake a review of the potential for using shifts of counters to limit the number of continuous hours any one counter worked.  
 Review the expected hours of work by core election staff prior to any election, which incorporates appropriate breaks.  
 Review the count venue to explore an improved utilisation of space.  
 Work should be undertaken prior to the next election to ensure that restroom facilities and seating provision is adequate for all those attending the count.

**11 Work Hours**

- 11.1 An important factor in the integrity of any election is the staff that administer those elections. In order to ensure that staff were equipped to manage the election they were required to undertake training. However, while staff were

well trained for the election, an element of concern is the length of continuous hours worked.

- 11.2 Over the poll and count period, two members of the Elections' Team worked over 50 hours continuously. In the 6 week period leading up to polling day the Elections' Team were on average working between 60 to 70 hour weeks. This entailed staff arriving between 07:00 and 08:00 and not leaving until between 21:00 and 22:00.
- 11.3 The pressures placed on conducting the verification and count quickly can threaten the integrity of an election if the core staff are required to work over an extended period of time.

**Learning Point:**

Review the work hours of elections staff to ensure that adequate resourcing is in place to avoid any compromise of electoral integrity.

## **12 External Validation**

- 12.1 Following the introduction of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Electoral Commission introduced a set of performance standards on the performance of the Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers.<sup>10</sup>
- 12.2 These indicators measured:
- The skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer;
  - The planning processes in place for an election;
  - The training provided to all staff in administering the election;
  - The work done to maintain the integrity of an election;
  - The planning and delivering of public awareness activity;
  - The accessibility of information to electors;
  - The communication of information to candidates and agents.
- 12.3 After the presentation of evidence to the Electoral Commission they agreed with Lewisham's assessment that all indicators were being met at above the standard.

## **13 Internal Objectives and Success Measures**

- 13.1 As part of the ARO's election plan a number of objectives and success measures were set out in order to assess the conduct of the election. These included:
- The conduct of an accurate count resistant to successful challenge;
  - The 100 per cent verification of PVIs;
  - The conduct of a lawful and transparent election;
  - The preparation of accounts in a timely manner;
  - The absence of major difficulties in the conduct of the election;
  - The absence of well founded major complaints.

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<sup>10</sup> Electoral Commission, Background to the Performance Standards.  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/100837/Background.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/100837/Background.pdf)

13.2 In reviewing these objectives and success measures it was determined that they had largely been met. This view is supported through the external recognition from the Electoral Commission as set out in section eleven.

#### **14 Voter, candidate and agents experience of the May 2010 Election**

14.1 The Parliamentary turnout of 63.7% indicates the May 2010 Elections attracted a good response from voters. Nationally, Electoral Commission work indicates that three quarters of those asked indicated that they were very or fairly satisfied with the process of voting. Satisfaction levels were higher (83%) for those over 55, compared with that of 18-34 year olds (67%).

14.2 Locally, the extension to the voting registration deadline attracted a significant number of new voters who were also able to request a postal vote. As set out earlier in this report the number of voters requesting a postal vote increased by 23.5% from 2009.

14.3 Voting at Polling Stations was largely successful with the only concern being the large numbers at one station in the Deptford Constituency. However, the queue of voters was well managed in the run up to the close of poll. Alternative arrangements whereby voters could choose a voting location suitable to them could help to improve the voter experience. However, currently voting at a local polling station is required by legislation. In addition any move would require the voter list to be available live on-line and would require a significant investment in logistics.

14.4 Feedback from candidates and agents was sought by the Electoral Services Team following the election. This indicated that the nominations process was considered to be well managed but concerns were raised about the length of the count and the suitability of the venue. Finally, an agent complained about the queues experienced at a polling station in the Deptford Constituency.

#### **15 Conclusion**

15.1 This report highlights a number of learning points arising from the conduct of the May 2010 election. Subject to the views of this Committee, this will be used by officers to generate an Action Plan for use by Election staff prior to the next major election.

15.2 Integrity is vital to any election and this review concludes that, unlike other parts of the country, no concerns have been raised of systematic fraud or malpractice and no election petition has been received. The Electoral Commission have successfully reviewed the Council's arrangements.

15.3 However, this was a highly complex task involving the management of three separate elections over a very short period of time as required by legislation. The changes being considered for fixed term Parliaments, if agreed, would mean that a similar alignment of election dates would be many years hence. Although it is clear that the election was well planned and executed, along with any task of this complexity it is clear that improvements could be made. The following paragraphs set out a summary of these areas.

15.4 The differing legislative requirements of the three elections made the administration highly complex and burdensome. It is proposed that the Council presses for greater legislative simplicity.

- 15.5 The use of the Call Centre to front enquiries was a good example of broadening support to Election staff and improving the capacity of the whole Council to support the election process.
- 15.6 Given the significant increase in postal voting this element of the election was well managed. To avoid a recurrence of the problems associated with the ICT on the evening of the count it is recommended that additional testing is undertaken and appropriate technical support available on the night.
- 15.7 The preparations for the poll foresaw a high turnout and the potential for queues. This was well managed with support from the Police. A review of the process for selecting presiding officers and poll clerks is recommended.
- 15.8 Where a count is considered to last a prolonged period of time, consideration should be given to the recruitment of a second shift of staff.
- 15.9 The Count Venue, for a number of reasons, proved unsatisfactory. Crucially, the size of the venue acted as a limitation on the number of counting staff that could be accommodated. In addition, rest rooms and seating for guests were inadequate for the numbers of people involved. It is recommended that these matters are addressed in the planning for the next election.
- 15.10 The pressure on the Electoral Services Team working hours in the run up to an election needs to be considered. The potential for flexibly using other Council staff to provide additional support in the crucial period prior to election day needs to be reconsidered.

Appendices:

- A) Elections Committee Report 28 January 2010
- B) Benchmarking Table
- C) Polling Station Staff Training Session PowerPoint
- D) Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Issue Instructions
- E) Elections 6 May 2010, Postal Vote Opening Process