

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	Preparations for Elections 2010	
Key Decision	n/a	Item No. 4
Ward	n/a	
Contributors	Kath Nicholson, Head of Law and Malcolm Constable, Electoral Services Manager	
Class	Part 1	Date: 28 January, 2010

1. Purpose

This report outlines preparations for Elections in 2010, in particular Local Government Elections, to be held on 6 May and a UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) which must be held before 3 June.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Elections Committee note this report.

3. Introduction

3.1 Combination of Elections

Local Government elections for the London Borough of Lewisham's (LBL) elected Mayor and Councillors have to be held on the 6 May 2010. A UKPGE must be held before 3 June 2010. Election preparations are being made on the assumption that these elections will be combined and held on the 6 May 2010. However contingency planning allows for an earlier UKPGE if called. The uncertainty of the timing of the UKPGE and the differences in statutory timetables makes planning of these elections complex.

3.2 Boundaries

The UKPGE will be held on new Parliamentary Boundaries. This means that for the first time the Returning Officer (RO) for the constituencies under his remit will incorporate three wards from Bromley in the newly named Lewisham West and Penge Constituency. This means that the RO for LBL is responsible for an additional 31,946 Parliamentary voters, which includes 3000 postal voters, in these three wards. This will also involve responsibility for 24 additional polling stations to our 109. Local Government boundaries remain unchanged.

The new boundaries give rise to a number of “cross boundary issues” which are being resolved with the Elections Team in Bromley. Meetings have already taken place involving the respective Returning Officers and agreement has been reached on the following:

- i) The RO for LBL will delegate authority to the RO for Bromley to
 - a) select, equip and staff polling stations
 - b) issue and check postal votes
 - c) issue poll cards
- ii) The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for Bromley will make Registers available for Nominations, Polling Stations and Candidates. We are exploring with Bromley the possibility of importing data into our Election Management system to simplify some of these issues. This will be feasible as Bromley use the same software package as ourselves.
- iii) The RO for LBL will be responsible for the counting of Parliamentary Ballot papers for the three constituencies. However he will have to verify all ballot boxes returned to the Count venue including Bromley Ward ballot Boxes.

3.3 Polling Stations and staffing (see separate report to The Elections Committee of the same date)

Preliminary booking letters for staff have been sent and on the basis of returns to date we do not anticipate any issues in obtaining experienced staff. The main issues facing polling station staff are

- i) The issuance of three ballot papers and control of corresponding number lists to different electors of differing franchises. European Electors cannot vote in UK Parliamentary elections. Overseas electors cannot vote in Local Government elections.
- ii) As a result we are considering increasing poll clerks by one in each station over the allocation used in the European Election in June 2009.
- iii) 400 new ballot boxes have been ordered.
- iv) 50 new 4 berth aluminium booths have been ordered to give us sufficient disabled booths and to replace wooden booths that are beyond repair.

3.4 Count

Issues surrounding count timings have been well publicised in the Press and the Media ,ultimately the timing of the counts is the responsibility of RO. The key points for LBL are:

- i) The count venue will be Sedgehill school
- ii) The Parliamentary Constituency counts will be held on the Thursday evening 6 May. Because we will have to verify all three ballot paper accounts including those for Bromley wards, (we have determined it will speed up the count if separate ballot boxes are used for each election), and check Personal Identifiers for Postal Votes handed in at Polling stations, it is unlikely that the Parliamentary Count will commence until 2.30am on Friday and finish at 7.30am.
- iii) Because of the anticipated finish of the Parliamentary count, the availability of key staff and the hours worked by them, it is planned that the Mayoral Count will commence at 4pm, with the Ward Counts following completion of the Mayoral Count.
- iv) We will be using approximately 150 count staff at each count.
- v) Some Bromley counters/observers will be at the verification for the Lewisham West and Penge Count.
- vi) The RO will have to reserve the right to change these arrangements should circumstances change.
- vii) Verification will be face up (note that at postal vote opening ballot papers are kept face down).
- viii) There are no legal provisions for electronic counting.
- ix) Because of different voting methodology for the Mayoral election, experience tells us we can expect a higher number of spoilt ballot papers.
- x) Security of local government Ballot Boxes overnight.
- xi) Transfer of verified ward boxes to Bromley Count.

3.5 Timetables

See attached time table (Appendix A) for Parliamentary and Local Government Elections. Note that the Mayoral timetable is the same as the Local Government. Key issues arising from this are:

- i) We may not know definitely that the UKPGE election is called when the Notice of Election for the Local Government Elections is posted. This could cause issues for poll cards and postal votes (see below).
- ii) Nomination Registers for the two elections will be different, 1 March for Local Government and Mayor. and 1 April for the UKPGE.

3.6 Poll Cards

These must be dispatched as soon as possible after the publication of the Notice of Election. We are proposing to issue combined poll cards. Naturally if the UKPGE is called earlier then separate poll cards will be issued. The franchise issues, new Polling Stations and new Parliamentary constituencies will be noted on the poll cards.

As well as poll cards we will shortly be sending out Confirmation of Elector details to all households in the Borough.

3.7 Postal Votes

Postal votes can only be issued by law earliest 5pm 11 working days before the day of poll. We are assuming at this stage that the Local Government elections will be combined with the UKPGE on the 6 May. If this is the case the earliest that postal votes can be issued is 20 April. However this date coincides with the close of nominations for the UKPGE , which means that it is only that night we will sign off on the ballot paper proofs and our printers will go into production. Because of funding issues and the new postal voting personal identifier checking rules we will be issuing on a combined basis and will thus not be able to issue until we receive the Parliamentary ballot papers. This could be 22 April in which case we will issue on the Friday April 23 and even Saturday 24 if we can arrange a collection with Royal mail that day.

Issue and opening will be more complex because of the insertion of three ballot papers and the differing franchise issues.

We currently have 17,000 postal voters (down from 20,000 at the European election) following close of canvass. However we have mailed out postal vote application forms to 8,500 new applicants. We anticipate having 25,000 postal voters at the combined elections together with 3000 from the three Bromley Wards.

3.8 Suppliers

Our main printer is Financial Data Management Ltd. 15 London Boroughs are using them for the production of poll cards, postal vote packs and ballot papers. In our case we are also using them for the production of the Mayoral Manifesto.

The Elections Manager for LBL has been part of a wordings working group to work on generic wording for poll cards, postal votes and ballot papers. Because of pressure on paper supplies, poll card and postal voting proofs have already been signed off.

15 London Boroughs including three with Mayoral elections have decided to use the following colours for ballot Papers:

UKPGE = White
Borough = Yellow
Mayor = Peach

These colours will be referred to in poll cards, postal vote packs and Guidance for Voters.

3.9 Funding

Funding for Local Government elections has been adequately reserved for. However costs are shared with HM Treasury when elections are combined with a UKPGE. At this stage the Ministry of Justice is still to clarify whether it will pay for separate issues of poll cards and postal votes and on what basis it will share costs. Normally when a UKPGE is combined with a Local Government Election.

3.10 Electorate

Local Government Electors	180,159
Parliamentary Electorate	
Lewisham Deptford	64,809
Lewisham East	64,888
Lewisham West & Penge(LBOL)	38,167
Lewisham West & Penge (Bromley)	31,947
Total	199,811
European Union Citizens	12,312

3.11 Nominations, Candidates and Agents

All candidates will be given a copy of the Electoral Commissions Guide for Candidates and Agents for the appropriate election. Included in this guidance is

- i) explanatory notes re imprint regulations
- ii) expenses formulae
- iii) Guidance on the conduct of tellers
- iv) Guidance on the handling of postal votes
- v) Changes in Nomination legislation

The Elections Team, RO and DROS do not have investigative powers and cannot comment on whether issues are within the regulations or not. Candidates and agents will be advised to seek their own legal advice. Allegation of electoral misconduct will routinely be referred to the Police.

4. **Financial implications**

There are no specific financial implications arising other than those mentioned in 3.9 Funding above.

5. **Legal implications**

There are no legal implications arising.

6. **Crime and disorder implications**

There are no crime and disorder implications arising.

7. **Equalities implications**

There are no equality implications arising. Polling Station accessibility in respect of any new polling stations is discussed in the Polling Places report submitted to the committee concurrently

8. **Environmental implications**

There are no environmental implications arising.

Background documents and originator

The Electoral Services Manager - Malcolm Constable – 020 8314 6907