

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	Reports to the Election Committee on 21.7.22	
Key Decision	n/a	Item No.
Wards	All	
Contributors	Jamie Baker, Head of Electoral Services	
Class	Part 1	Date: 15.6.22

1. Summary

This report introduces the items to be presented to the Elections Committee to be held on 21 July 2022

2. Purpose

To review each item and advise on policies and procedures for future election and electoral registration activity. In particular:

A. Review of 2022 Mayoral and Local Elections

Provide feedback and make recommendations for future elections

B. The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2022

Note the plans and targets

C. The Elections Act 2022 – including Voter ID

Consider the implications of the Elections Act, including voter ID, EU citizens voting rights, changes to absent voting and overseas electoral registration.

3. Recommendation

That the Committee make note of each item and provide their own observations and recommendations for the conduct of electoral registration and running of elections.

4. Background

4.1 The Mayoral and Local elections were held on Thursday 5 May 2022. In addition, we also held a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum for the neighbourhood area of Crofton Park and Honor Oak Park. The Returning Officer, Kim Wright, and the election team, have conducted a review of the election, and consider it to have been a success, but we are keen to hear the views of the election committee and any recommendations they have for future elections and referendums.

4.2 2022 is the third year Lewisham is required to undertake the annual electoral registration canvass using the new 'canvass reform' rules. This enables us to use data to identify electors and properties to focus our resources. This report

will look at statistics from previous canvasses and our objectives and targets for the 2022 canvass.

- 4.4 The Elections Act received Royal Assent in April 2022. It will bring about many significant changes to our electoral processes, including the requirement for voters to show ID in polling stations before they are issued ballot papers. This report will look at the potential implications, resource requirements and mitigations for Lewisham

5. **Legal implications** (Elections Act)

- 5.1 The Elections Act has had Royal Assent and has become law. Statutory Instruments (SIs) will follow soon providing the detail for how we must implement the changes

6. **Equalities implications** (Elections Act)

- 6.1 Accessibility of elections for people without an 'acceptable' form of ID, or those that do not wish to use one for voting.
- 6.2 Accessibility of polling stations for people with a disability. Note the Act places new requirements upon Returning Officers to improve accessibility which will be a benefit to people with a disability.
- 6.3 Loss of voting rights for some EU residents. Inequality of voting rights dependent upon when an EU resident first entered the UK, or dependent upon their nationality

7. **Financial implications** (Elections Act)

- 7.1 Approximately £100k for communicating the changes to residents
Approximately £50k ongoing annual costs for implementing the changes
Approximately £50k additional costs for each election

8. **Crime and disorder implications** (Elections Act)

- 8.1 None.

9. **Environmental implications** (Elections Act)

- 9.1 There are no environmental implications arising.

10. **Additional documents**

- A Review of 2022 Mayoral and Local Elections
- B The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2022
- C The Elections Act 2022 – including Voter ID

Jamie Baker
Head of Electoral Services

A – Review of 2022 Mayoral and Local Elections

Headlines

1. Proof-checking. More staff and/or time needed for proof-checking of all electoral documents
2. Postal vote opening. Final session needs to be more heavily resourced
3. Adjudication of doubtful votes. Can be quicker
4. Guidance to voters. Update all letters, and provide more training and guidance notes for staff to enable consistent messaging

Summary of the review

- Elections were held on Thursday 5 May 2022
- For the Mayor of Lewisham and 54 ward councillors
- Also a neighbourhood planning referendum in Crofton Park
- This document will set out recommendations for future elections
- It will also review each aspect of the election to look for examples of what we can do differently or improve for next time

List of Actions to complete before the next election

1. Consider additional permanent staff member for electoral services
2. Shorter timetable plan for the election team and project board for daily use
3. Polling staff training to be in-person at the next election
4. Implement a process to prevent family voting in polling stations, and add to the training
5. Large posters of the ward map with polling station locations for each station
6. Maps of all the new wards on the website – and sent to all electors during the canvass
7. Investigate new count venues for 2024. Need a much bigger space for a GLA manual count
8. Review polling stations on an annual basis
9. St John's Baptist Church on Bromley Road – very poor lighting. Energy saving bulb with very high ceiling. Investigate and rectify for the next election
10. Use Grass Skirts for mixed vote checking at next local election. More transparent and easier to recount

The report will now review each aspect of the election to give more information about what we can do differently or improve for next time.

Election team

- Strong performance
- Too stretched at times – can improve resilience
- Extra 4 staff in the contact centre were good
- With the increase in unscheduled polls and new burdens brought about from the Elections Act the team would benefit from being bigger all year round
- On some tasks a more thorough briefing note would have helped – e.g. count staff
- Needed more support at certain stages – reviewing the mayoral booklet draft statements is a good example

- Improve process for collating of staff bank details and proof of right to work

Planning

- Plans were of a good quality
- Requirement for written plans and reviews ensures that each element of the election is carefully considered
- It would be useful to have a shorter timetable type plan with key dates and activities
- Should provide more detail in some plans and refer to them more regularly – e.g. fitting up
- Need a more thorough plan for the contact centre with details of exactly what work will be delegated, when, deadlines, actions, lead officers, etc
- When tasks are split between 2 people it gets confusing and can lead to inconsistent delivery

Project board

- Used more to give updates than make decisions
- In future we should try and make it more decision based
- Decisions mostly made in advance of project board – needs to be the other way round

Printing

- Print supplier did well – except for a couple of things. We made our feelings clear and they turned things around really well. For example, delivery of ballot papers
- Proof-checking of items at a local election is a huge task. Do not underestimate this!

Polling staff training

- The online training was good – but can be done cheaper and more effectively in-person
- POs were really pleased to have in-person sessions back

Polling staff

- New VOs, POs and PCs were generally very good
- 15 new POs this year – over 10%!
- Still need more new POs – **target of 20 new POs for 2024**
- Performance generally was very good all round
- Timetable – go back to old timetable for letters, training choices, appointment letters, etc

Polling stations

- A large number of changes – didn't dramatically effect turnout or complaints
- Lots of complaints in polling stations about the change in location, but not followed up once they understood the purpose for the change
- Disabled access improved
- Cost of some stations is now very high. Need to consider if we're happy to continue spending £2k+ for a polling place

- Maps of all the new wards on the website – and sent to all electors during the canvass

Postal voting

- Did not see a large rise in postal voters
- Postal vote turnout was not massive either
- Reissues were low
- Postal vote opening went very well, except for the final day
- Need far more staff for final day

Comms

- Comms support has been very positive
- Booklet, posters, print, social media, results etc, all good

Complaints from voters

- Very low numbers of complaints – only 2 formal complaints on things we actually had control over. 1 on polling station location and 1 on postal vote not being received. Many other complaints about one candidate's mayoral statement
- Lower than usual number of informal complaints (i.e emails and phone calls)
- Missing postal vote, new polling place, wrong ward name on poll card. They were the main themes. Only one other issue was complained about (a lot)
- The main complaint was about a statement in the mayoral booklet from a candidate about same-sex marriage
- Had quite a few complaints from people claiming never to have applied for a postal vote but were marked as postal voters – looks like they forgot about their postal vote application or didn't realise they were filling one in (this is a national issue, the forms and wording are prescribed)

Contact centre

- Strong performance. Especially when given more work to do
- Would use all 4 again
- Ideally bring Lesley and/or Kameron into the office and replace with 1/2 more from CSC

Suppliers

- POs, payments, deliveries etc. Not good performance here. Need better. Credit card purchases were good but the regular supplier process should work properly

Count venue

- Was really good venue again
- Will benefit from a much larger venue in 2024. Need to investigate and report to the RO

Verification

- Mostly very good performance
- New supervisors were good for the most part
- Final addition of postal votes is where we can improve– this accounts for all the delays at the count the following day

The count

- Count staff – deadlines were too tight for appointment process. Do this process much earlier. Make it clearer what the requirements are
- Excellent feedback from candidates and agents
- Could have been much quicker – the problem of the final postal vote formula caused delays to some results. Next time check the formulas carefully
- Adjudication was mixed – must be quicker
- Percentage of mixed votes increased significantly from 2018, almost double in many wards. This was not predicted and had an impact on our count process
- **Consider using Grass Skirts for mixed vote checking next time – more transparent and easier to recount**

Comparisons with other London authorities

Lewisham takes the lead on data collection and comparison for London. We have collected a large amount of data from across London on these elections. Below are some of the easiest comparable stats that can be used to highlight where we've performed well, and/or where we've faced our biggest challenges. Every borough is different of course, and ran their elections in their own specific context. However, these stats are still useful to show overall trends such as the significant drop in turnout from 2018, and the reduction in registration activity.

	Lewisham	London-wide Average
Candidates	226	197
Independent candidates	8	4
Wards	19	20
Councillors	54	57
Electorate	201,814	188,797
Postal voters	32,069	35,543
Turnout	34.55%	33.57%
2018 Turnout	37.38%	39.34%
Turnout change from 2018	-2.83%	-5.77%
Additions to register	9,674	8,382
Deletions to register	7,591	6,476
Duplicate registrations	3,543	3,949
New postal vote applications	1,241	2,030
Staff in election team	4	6
Emails during election	2,673	2,532
Phonecalls during election	1,484	1,649

Polling stations	120	108
Polling staff	407	358
Postal votes handed in at polling stations	1,851	1,694
Verification - total time	3.5 hours	2.75 hours
Count (average ward time)	3 hours	3.66 hours
Percentage of Mixed votes	41%	29.22%
Total ballot papers to verify and count	141,945	71,162
Rejected ballot papers	1,701	506
Number of count assistants	196	186
Number of count supervisors	41	40

B – The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2022

- This is our third canvass under the new legislation
- Essentially, canvass reform has split our register into 2 groups of properties. Each group follows a different 'route'. The register is matched against national data, such as DWP. Electors are given a match rating to show where they match their name and address with national data. Their match status dictates the route the property will take
 - Route 1 – these are properties where all electors have been matched 100%. These properties are almost certainly 'no-change'. A letter must be sent to the property. The property does not have to respond but is able to make corrections if necessary
 - Route 2 – these are properties that either have no electors, or where they have 1 or more electors that did not match against national data. These properties must complete and return a canvass form
- Our previous 2 canvasses under the new rules saw a decent response, despite the pandemic, and despite the inability to conduct a doorknock in 2020 (PHE and risk assessments prevented us from doing household visits)
- The doorknocking in 2021 was not particularly successful, though it did allow us to encourage individual registration to those people that actually answered the door positively
- Wherever possible we are using email and telephone to send forms to residents. Online responses are cheaper, quicker, and more reliable (no manual data entry onto the register)
- At least 2 paper forms sent to all route 2 properties who don't respond online, followed up by 6 weeks of door-knocking by 50 canvassers
- Target for 15,000 additions and deletions from the register by 1 December 2022
- In early February, we'll conduct a mini-canvass. All properties will be sent the form again, and encouraged to check that it is still accurate
- This will encourage more registrations and ensure the register is as accurate and complete as possible before any potential snap elections in 2023
- New this year, we'd like to provide an insert to all properties with more details about elections and registration. More importantly, one half of the insert will be dedicated to providing information on the ward, mayor and councillors. With the names, photos and contact details for their elected representatives. We will work with Comms and the Mayors office on the design of this insert. We consider this to be a great way of improving awareness amongst residents of our new wards and their (new) councillors

C – The Elections Act 2022

Due to the format this report is provided separately.