

MINUTES OF THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 18 July 2017 at 7pm

PRESENT: Councillors John Paschoud (Chair), Stella Jeffrey (Vice Chair), Jacq Paschoud and Bill Brown.

Also Present: Kath Nicholson (Head of Law), Jamie Baker (Electoral Services Manager), Sarah Assibey (Clerk)

Apologies: Councillor John Slater

1. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared

2. Review of the 8 June UK Parliamentary Election

The Chair expressed himself and the Committee were pleased with the conduct of the Electoral Services manager, Jamie Baker, and his work over the recent elections period. He also stated he was impressed with the brevity of the reports Jamie presented on the agenda.

Jamie Baker gave a presentation on the recent election, detailing the work leading up to Election Day, during and after. He gave the following points alongside his presentation.

- 2.1. The running of the elections was administered to a high standard in Lewisham. He felt that the high standard was maintained from previous elections, after changes were made from the last elections to improve the standard, although there were a few things that could have been improved which were the rise of postal votes and a couple of issues with the polling stations.
- 2.2. There was a lot of positive feedback.
- 2.3. The approach to planning was to create a large timetable plan for the entire period. More detailed plans were produced for specific work streams. Team roles were also changed. Overall, planning was more centralised and election expertise was more spread.
- 2.4. The Project Board is a board of 15 members which were behind the planning of the running of the election for LBL. It included key people involved in the elections i.e. DROs, communications team, election team etc. the board were due to meet 4 times, but only managed to meet twice

because of the tight time-frame and engagement/work load of individual members. This was, however, a minor issue but felt very rushed as it was a very busy time period. Also, the fact that it was a snap-election and management was centralised, this might not have been administered as preferred.

- 2.5. General changes were made for the better: - changes were made to emails, processing, staffing, equipment, planning, team responsibilities and the count. Most of these changes worked well however the recruitment of polling staff was a change that did not perform as well. The new process did not work as efficiently- the established way would have worked better.
- 2.6. Also, the record number of people who were not on poll was very low. Every ward represented at the polling station needed 2 or 3 more staff to manage the queues. However, the polling staff were happy with how things went.
- 2.7. In terms of printing and posting, performance was strong in all areas apart from postal voting. Of 35,000 postal votes, 371 were reissued which is 100 more than there was for the referendum election. Most complaints came from overseas with Australia being the worst affected. The outcome was similar to that of other London boroughs, although Lewisham's postal vote count is higher.
- 2.8. There were over 26,000 applications over the election period, with over 2000 on the deadline day alone. There were 8000 duplicates this year, which was a lower figure than most local authorities. Almost 4000 emails were received over this period, of which 100% were responded to. In Lewisham alone, there were over 50,000 letters generated.
- 2.9. 821 jobs were created for the election. The team recruited, allocated and trained all staff. 600 staff were trained over 22 sessions. The polling staff performed excellently, as did the count staff and feedback was very positive. Next year's election will be more complex so more recruitment and training will be needed, particularly of count staff. 50% of count staff were new to Lewisham.
- 2.10. Joanne Banks from the elections team at Lewisham managed the process of postal votes and was brilliant. There were no IT issues this year. Sharing an IT system with Brent, meant that at the last election a system that was unfamiliar to Lewisham was used. Their response rates from Lewisham at the last election were poor. The software issues were resolved this year so everything ran a lot smoother. No machines were used at the postal vote opening as they were not considered worth the risk of a miscount. The opening was difficult to observe because of the

management of it. Over 30,000 postal votes were sent to the count- 1% were rejected and 1600 were handed in at the polling station.

2.11. In regards to the count, the date meant that other venues for the count were unsuitable (e.g. schools). Parking and access was slightly difficult but with the venue itself, the teams made the space work. The colours separating the constituents worked very well- it will be difficult to replicate that at local elections but colour will be used to identify staff. There was an increase in staff numbers- counting could have been completed 30 minutes quicker, but there was some recounting that needed to be done. Overall 90% of the feedback regarding the count and staff was positive.

RESOLVED that the Committee note this report.

3. Parliamentary Boundaries

Jamie Baker gave a brief update from the Cabinet office:

A final public consultation on revised proposals will be conducted by the Boundary Commission for England towards the end of 2017. Those will be submitted to Parliament to approve prior to the next scheduled parliamentary election in May 2022.

Non-parliamentary constituents will be notified of any revisions, likely in by the end of summer 2018 in line with their deadline to report to Parliament. A bill will then be acceded by September 2019.

RESOLVED that the Committee note this report.

4. Electoral Registration Plans for the Annual Canvass

Jamie Baker gave an update on future canvassing plans:

Annual Canvassing has become a heavily prescribed process. HEF (Household Enquiry Form) responses have decreased significantly since IER was introduced. Electoral services want to use the canvass to maximise registration prior to a local and mayoral election year.

Lewisham are aiming for an 85% HEF response- a 10% increase from last year.

Online response for HEFs, however, is much higher than other similar authorities. Emailing people their HEFs will mean people are more likely to fill out the forms and they will be easier to follow up this way. All electors on the register with an email address will receive regular email reminders until their household responds.

The door knocking stage will be changing with canvassers being asked to chase non-responding properties at least once per week for 6 weeks, rather than the previous 2-3 visits.

A Household Notification Letter will go out early in the New Year. This confirmation letter will help residents to update the register before the election period starts.

RESOLVED that the Committee note this report.

5. Engagement Opportunities to Promote Participation in 2018

Jamie Baker presented this report and added the following points:

The engagement plan details the policies and approach of Lewisham.

The most successful element was the pan-London digital campaign. Social media advertising saw massive click-through rates and subsequent registrations for very low cost.

The campaign will take place upon registration until the deadline and then on participation

The restrictions on communications due to 'purdah' will mean the second stage of the campaign will need to be approved at the highest level and will not be able to go through the Elections Committee.

RESOLVED that the Committee note this report.

6. Plans for Snap-Elections, By-elections and Neighbourhood Planning Referendums

There is a standard plan for a council by-election which is largely unchanged from the last 2 by-elections. As a result of our election evaluation the plans for a snap parliamentary election will be revised.

The Elections Team will be seeking Council's approval for changes to several polling station within the next few months.

The Committee were asked to consider the implications of holding the neighbourhood planning referendums on the same day as the Mayoral and Local Elections on May 2018. The Committee discussed its convenience, but also noted that this may be overwhelming at the polling stations in particular.

RESOLVED that the Committee note this report.

The meeting finished at 8.53pm