

Mayoral & Local Elections – May 2018

The Review

Summary

- All objectives were achieved, the elections were a resounding success

Election Team

- Performance was generally very good
- There were some issues with morning punctuality for some of the team. We need more consistency with this in the future
- Temporary staff were of a high quality, especially Louise and Julie
- At times we were overstaffed. It was useful to have the extra staff for contingency but we could have coped without 2 of them quite well
- Delegation of roles went well. The team are learning more about elections each year and taking on more responsibility. This area can be improved further, with responsibility for training and planning being delegated on occasion

Planning

- Written plans were in place for every element of the election. Often these were not read by the whole team but it is useful to have the plans to show that due diligence has been taken on all decisions
- The large timetable was used by the team, with the version placed on the wall giving a good visual indicator of progress
- Perhaps we could reference the plan more often in the project board meetings to tie planning to the discussions

Project Board

- It was useful to hold these meetings but at times there was repetition with team meetings
- The notes weren't always available quickly after the meetings, which meant that occasionally action points were not followed up as quickly as they could have been
- Having the RO present was valuable as it gave her a useful insight into planning progress

Printing

- The printing contractor performed well. We had no evidence of any mistakes with poll cards or postal votes
- The products were of high quality and arrived on time
- Another printer made a high profile mistake which justifies our decision that the printer we used is lower risk

Polling Staff Training

- This was well received with great feedback
- The roleplays were particularly useful and a good learning tool

- The online training seemed a challenge for a lot of council staff. Perhaps because the Learning Pool is rarely used as a tool. It was useful but we must find a way to make the reporting easier and access for external staff
- Daytime sessions were popular – continue with these
- The team all participated by acting as a trainer for a few sessions. They need to do this more regularly to improve their confidence and delivery
- The ballot paper account training was rushed – mainly because this is an area we usually perform well, however for the next sessions we should do more of this as many POs made mistakes
- The threshold for number of staff to attend can be increased to 40 and the number of sessions reduced accordingly

Presiding Officers

- The pool of potential POs has become smaller. Many had to be replaced and we struggled to find reserves
- We need to identify more and replace the people who are no longer performing as required
- Training for new POs should be introduced as separate sessions

Poll Clerks

- We had a large number of new poll clerks
- There aren't many concerns with the quality of their work but a large number didn't turn up to their initial training and had to book again. This causes increased admin work for the team – so perhaps we can improve the communication around training sessions and send more timely and regular reminders

Visiting Officers

- The new VOs performed well
- Having a VO supervisor helps funnel the enquiries and manage the problem solving very well. Troy worked very well with Annetal preventing the election team getting bogged down on facilities type issues
- Some VOs dropped out due to the money no longer being a sufficient incentive. Can we find more money to increase their fee?

Polling Stations

- Very few complaints from voters regarding the new venues. Only 1 in fact, regarding Trinity Primary School and the accessibility for older people from the furthest street
- There were 2 issues access related issues – a fall at Grinling Gibbons and a broken lift at St Winifred's
- The replacement for EWH6 was expensive but massively improved the reliability and reduced risk, which was money well spent
- Portacabins continue to be a logistical headache. Annetal and her team performed extremely well but this is high risk and resource intensive. Replacing portacabins remains a priority of the next polling district review

Postal Voting

- The response was not as great as last year but still relatively high for a local election
- The new format of holding sessions every other day worked well – there were always postal votes to open and Jo Banks could attend the office more regularly
- The bottleneck of the scanning was reduced this year – by using more accomplished scanner operators and being more urgent with the process
- The reconciling of figures at the end of the day could be improved, utilising the openers more so that the entire team can finish earlier

Comms

- There was low level interest throughout the election – difficult to judge whether our comms was effective or not
- The London-wide comms had good coverage and resulted in approximately 1,500 new registrations, not a bad return for £3k
- The email to postal voters was generally well received but did result in a large number of email responses. We didn't do the email to normal voters through fear of receiving an unmanageable number of responses. The turnout was higher than expected which suggests the email was not necessary anyway
- There were few complaints and few issues on social media
- The results went up as they were declared – as quickly as possible

Complaints from Voters

- The number of complaints was drastically fewer than last year. This is to be expected as the turnout and interest was lower
- There were far fewer reports of missing poll cards or postal votes. Either Royal Mail have improved or this is because there is less interest
- This is also evidence that the changes to how we respond to emails has improved – using templates has improved the quality and reduced follow-up emails and complaints

The CSC

- This was their first election answering our phones
- The loss of phones for a long period during the election did cause a problem. If it was a higher profile election there would have been much more significant fallout
- Generally the CSC staff performed well but there were issues with some poor responses from some staff
- Often it was due to a failure to follow the script or a lack of understanding of the service
- It was a good learning opportunity for them and they can only improve

Fitting Up – materials and sundries etc

- Wearside worked as a venue but was too far away. We weren't able to make regular inspections or contribute as a team
- The end result was good but there were some minor issues with some notices not being present in the double stations
- The ordering and delivery of sundries did cause some issues and unnecessary delay

- The new payments system should enable speedier payments to our suppliers to reduce delays. If not, we should consider using the credit card and paying for supplies up front. This would reduce risk of the delays causing issues

The Count Venue

- The size was good and the staff were very accommodating
- It would have been useful to have more spaces in the car park for VIPs and senior staff. This would improve accessibility (although no comments or complaints have been received about that)
- The catering was generally good but could have been improved – drinks weren't available throughout and we had to purchase additional water
- Going upstairs for the results declarations did work quite well. It would have been nice to have the results declared in the counting room, or have the results hall immediately next door, but again there were no negative comments and the process was well received
- A PA system for the counting hall is a must have. Shouting instructions and requests became a little difficult and did not present the well-prepared and professional image we were trying to display

The Count Process

- The verification went well apart from a bottleneck with the accountants
- It would have been preferable to have multiple accountants – 1 per lane at least, perhaps 1 per contest per lane
- The verification did however finish on target – 2am – and the counting was accurate
- The count itself started incredibly well. It was set up nicely and staff arrived on time in good order
- There were some issues with the count stationery – with paperclips and batch headers not being distributed evenly enough
- The mayoral count went extremely smoothly. A few wards slowed it down slightly and perhaps could have been quicker, but the finish time was on target again and the result was accepted with confidence
- The local counts started slowly but gained speed once people had shaken off the lethargy of their lunch and gotten used to the process
- The mixed votes checking went well but caused a slight delay with the accountants again. One way of solving this would be to have more accountants or pass on that role to count supervisors who each have their own laptop
- There were very few recounts and the variance was small. This was probably a result of decent training and daytime counting
- Communication between the senior count staff was good. Often the supervisors needed to ask questions midway through the count. Having senior staff on each lane able to answer all questions was incredibly useful
- The supervisors generally performed very well, along with the senior count staff. Communication was good and leadership was good. There was a definite improvement from 2017 with even more of the supervisor and senior staff being more confident with the process and fast with their decision making. This bodes well for the future as we're developing a strong team

Actions for Future Elections

1. Improve punctuality with all staff arriving by 9am every morning during the entire election period
2. Employ just 2 additional staff of a high standard, rather than 3 FTE
3. Continue with delegation of duties and enabling the team to learn more aspects of elections
4. Use the project plan as the basis for project board meetings
5. Ensure the timing of project board meetings allows the RO to attend
6. Continue with the same printing firm
7. Include a thorough exercise on BPAs for all PO training
8. Introduce a new training session exclusively for new POs
9. Identify more PCs to promote to PO
10. Consider if we can increase the VO fee – raise with AEA London branch
11. Postal vote opening – look for ways to make the reconciliation more efficient and less dependent on the postal vote manager
12. Re-establish relationships with the materials and fitting up suppliers to ensure speedy delivery in future
13. Take the council's own PA system to the count so we have a reliable system to hand
14. Improve the accounting process for the verification and the count to make it even more accurate, efficient and fast