

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	Reports to the Election Committee on 15.7.21	
Key Decision	n/a	Item No.
Wards	All	
Contributors	Jamie Baker, Head of Electoral Services	
Class	Part 1	Date: 6 July 2021

1. Summary

This report introduces the items to be presented to the Elections Committee to be held on 15 July 2021

2. Purpose

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

- A. Review of 2021 GLA elections and 4 Council By-elections**
Provide feedback and make recommendations for 2022
- B. Parliamentary Boundary Review 2021-23**
Explore implications for Lewisham and recommend an approach for the second stage of the review
- C. Lewisham Polling District Review**
Consider the methodology, in particular the plans for consultation with Councillors and local groups
- D. The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2021**
Note the plans and targets
- E. Grove Park Neighbourhood Planning Referendum**
Recommend polling scheme and plans for encouraging participation and the counting of the votes
- F. Preparations for 2022 Mayoral & Local elections**
Review plans for these elections

3. Recommendation

That the Committee make note of each item and provide their own observations and recommendations for the boundary reviews, future Lewisham elections and registration activity.

4. Background

- 4.1 On 6 May 2021 the GLA elections were held. They had been postponed from May 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition, we also held 4 by-

elections for councillors in the wards of Bellingham, Catford South, New Cross and Sydenham. These elections were a huge undertaking, requiring a significant amount of preparation above and beyond what would normally happen. 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, particularly regarding Covid-secure procedures.

- 4.2 The Boundary Commission for England are conducting a statutory review of the Parliamentary constituencies. The initial proposals were published in the first week of June, and the consultation remains open until 2 August. The Acting Returning Officer, Kim Wright, has submitted a formal response to approve of the methodology but making little comment on the proposals themselves – due to the requirement for impartiality. The committee are asked to identify any implications for Lewisham and our approach to the second stage of the review where alternative proposals will be presented.
- 4.3 Lewisham will have new wards that come into effect in May 2022 which requires a brand new polling scheme. Our polling district review will create new polling districts in every ward. Each district will require a specified polling place. This review will be extremely thorough and detailed, and will benefit hugely from the knowledge and experience of local Councillors.
- 4.3 2021 is the second 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. Given the upcoming important elections in May 2022, it is vital we achieve a good canvass response and work to maximise the registration rates across the entire borough.
- 4.4 The Grove Park Neighbourhood Plan is likely to receive formal approval at Mayor & Cabinet in July. This means they will recommend the plan goes to a local referendum. Once the decision is made public, the council will have 56 days to hold the referendum. As this will be our first Neighbourhood Planning Referendum, it will be helpful to discuss the plans and issues with the Election Committee.
- 4.5 Finally, the Committee will receive a report on the plans for the 2022 Local & Mayoral elections.

5. **Legal implications**

- 5.1 None.

6. **Equalities implications**

- 6.1 The delivery of elections is subject to the DDA and Equality Act provisions. In particular we must ensure there is equal access to voter registration and voting at elections.

6.2 This means that our polling places must be accessible and our postal voting processes do not unfairly discriminate against any particular group.

6.3 Our polling district review will identify polling places where the provision for people with disabilities is below acceptable levels and detail our mitigation plans. An equalities impact assessment will identify the impacts on different groups of people and make recommendations for minimum standards for polling places.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The budget for electoral services has been set and covers all planned activity. Any additional activity will require director approval for increased funding.

8. Crime and disorder implications

8.1 None.

9. Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications arising.

10. Additional documents

- A. Review of 2021 GLA elections and 4 Council By-elections
- B. Parliamentary Boundary Review 2021-23
- C. Lewisham Polling District Review
- D. The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2021
- E. Grove Park Neighbourhood Planning Referendum
- F. Preparations for 2022 Mayoral & Local elections

Jamie Baker

Head of Electoral Services

A – Review of 2021 GLA elections and 4 Council By-elections

Summary

- Administration of the elections were a huge challenge – due to the pandemic
- All objectives were met
 - Successful elections
 - No election petitions or challenges
 - Met all directions and performance standards
 - Applied PHE and government guidance
 - Publication of statutory notices
 - Received excellent feedback
 - Maintained a decent turnout and increased the number of postal voters

Encouraging Participation

- The service had to conduct a huge amount of preparation work to enable accessibility and to encourage participation
- All electors on the Shielding list, or aged 65 or over, sent postal vote applications via email and post
- In addition, 65k postal vote applications sent via email and 30k postal vote applications sent by post
- Total number of postal voters increased by over 10,000 – proportion rose from 12% to 18.5%
- Messaging on poll cards, social media, website and posters to explain the rule for voting in polling stations and assuring people of safety
- Decent turnout of over 40% matches the 2016 GLA elections, which strongly suggests our strategy was a success

Covid- Secure Processes

- Planning for the impact of the pandemic began in December 2019
- Lewisham worked with the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office on plans and guidance for the whole UK – to produce standards, guidance, forms, plans, best practise, etc
- Local arrangements included:
 - Risk assessments of polling places and other election venues
 - Enhanced cleaning of all venues
 - Extra polling staff in every station
 - Increased training – online only
 - 4 separate postal vote staff bubbles – to ensure resilience
 - Masses of PPE for staff and voters
 - Home working for the election team until Notice of Election was published in mid-March
 - In polling places; screens, 1-way systems, notices, single-use pencils, limits on numbers allowed inside, regular cleaning, and more
- £105k additional funding provided by the government. This will cover the vast majority of our additional expenditure. The GLA will cover the remaining election costs

Lessons Learned for Future Elections

- Large amount of data and feedback gathered post-election
- Assessments of all polling places in terms of cost, facilities, accessibility and suitability for future elections – this will greatly assist the polling district review
- Around 40% of polling staff were new – the vast majority performed well, giving us a larger and improved pool of staff for future elections
- Increase in postal voters brings us more in line with rest of London and should assist with future turnout
- Tested new process for adjudication of doubtful ballots at the count for the by-elections. This will be used for the 2022 elections
- Successful Comms campaign to be rolled out again

B – Parliamentary Boundary Review 2021-23

Timetable

March 2020	Relevant date for ward and polling district electorate figures to be used for the review
8 June 2021	BCE published initial proposals. Start of first consultation stage
2 August 2021	End of first consultation stage
Early 2022	BCE to publish all submissions to initial consultation and hold a second consultation for 6 weeks
Late 2022	BCE to publish revised proposals and hold final 4 week consultation
June 2023	BCE to submit final proposals to Parliament
July 2023	New constituencies come into force

Methodology for creating new constituencies

- Using the electorate figures from March 2020
- Wards as the building blocks – only split by polling district if necessary
- For Lewisham, they are using our new wards that will come into effect in 2022 (note we do not yet have any polling districts for these wards)
- Strict electorate quota. All constituencies must be between 69,724 and 77,062 electors
- Looking for equality of representation through constituency size
- Increase of 2 constituencies in London – 1 in South London

Role for Lewisham Council

- Our main role has been to publicise the review and to encourage local residents, groups and parties to participate
- Kim Wright, as ARO and CE for Lewisham, has submitted a short response approving the methodology, and in particular, the use of whole wards as building blocks
- The ARO is impartial and has therefore offered no comment on the proposals themselves, other than they meet the criteria as outlined in their methodology
- No intention for any other submission by the Council

- Local and national political parties are encouraged to submit responses with alternative proposals

The Initial Proposals

- 2 whole constituencies within Lewisham with a third constituency shared with Southwark
- Lewisham would be lead borough for all 3 constituencies
- Little change for Lewisham Deptford and Lewisham East
- Would like to see a change to the name of the proposed Lewisham Deptford constituency, but, as per above, the ARO has made no comment to this effect to date. In 2022 we will have a new ward called Deptford, which may confuse some electors if there is also a constituency of the same name
- We expect there will be many credible counter proposals for the South London region
- In the second consultation phase, it is likely the ARO will want to make a comment on the various counter proposals that affect Lewisham, but is unlikely to state support for any specific proposal, due to requirement for impartiality

Recommendation

- We strongly recommend Lewisham Councillors engage with their local parties to consider the proposals and to submit a response
- It is incredibly important that local parties submit a response – even if they fully support the proposals as the revised proposals will be based on submissions received

C – Lewisham Polling District Review

What is the review?

- New wards for Lewisham will come into effect on the date of the next Mayoral & Local elections on 5 May 2022
- The council must allocate polling districts and places for the new wards following a statutory review process
- The final polling scheme must be approved by Full Council

Proposed Timetable

17 September	Publication of Notice of Review
17 September	RO to publish initial proposals for consultation
22 October	End of consultation stage
3 November	RO to publish final proposals
24 November	Councillors to approve final scheme at Full Council
1 December	Electoral Register published with new districts and wards

How will electoral services produce the initial proposals?

- The new ward boundaries have been inputted into mapping software and the electoral register
- We shall review all current, former and potential venues for suitability as polling places in the new scheme
- New polling districts will be ‘drawn’ around the most preferred venues in each ward. This will create maps and statistics
- A thorough report will be produced showing the full proposals for each ward, with details of the proposed venues and statistics, as well as information on why alternative venues were not chosen and other issues encountered to be considered in the consultation
- The report will be published at the very beginning of the review on 17 September
- The consultation will be based on these proposals

Current Proposed Criteria for each polling district and place

- Polling place to be DDA compliant
- Maximum 15 minute walk for residents to reach the polling place. Maximum of 10 minutes where possible
- Schools not to be used where suitable alternative is possible
- No splitting of streets except for long main roads
- Good facilities for polling staff
- Size of polling place to enable at least 2 polling stations wherever possible – to allow for expansion and resilience

Consultation

- We aim to consult with as many residents and local groups as possible
- Legally required to contact local groups with expertise in accessibility and disability
- Direct contact with local parties
- Potential for an online public meeting if there is enough interest
- Media campaign via social media to help raise awareness of the proposals

Consultation with Councillors

- Would like advice from the Election Committee on how we engage with Councillors
- Currently we plan to contact the members to request 1 meeting per ward. At these meetings, we’ll look at the maps, potential venues, street layouts, and statistics, for that particular ward
- Councillors have detailed local knowledge that we are hoping to use to revise the initial proposals
- All meetings to be minuted with the records made public as part of the consultation

Final Proposals

- The RO is responsible for producing final proposals that will go to Full Council for approval

- These proposals will be very much based on feedback obtained during the consultation, including the meetings with Councillors
- Final proposals to be shared with Councillors in draft form in advance of the publication date with a small window for amendments. It is hoped that the proposals will receive unanimous support from Councillors and where we believe there could be disagreement we will seek additional meetings with relevant members

D – The Annual Electoral Registration Canvass 2021

- This is our second 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
- The 2020 canvass saw a very decent response, despite the pandemic, and despite the inability to conduct a doorknock (PHE and risk assessments prevented us from doing household visits)
- We also worked with ONS on the census and gained valuable insight into how they managed to obtain such a good response (91%)
- 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 100 canvassers
- Target for 15,000 additions and deletions from the register by 1 December 2021
- 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 the 2022 elections

E – Grove Park Neighbourhood Planning Referendum

- Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted and approved by the external examiner with one small change

- Due to the change, it now requires Mayor & Cabinet approval before the Director of Planning can move for a referendum
- Once approval has been given, and notice of decision to move for a referendum has been published, we will be able to begin the referendum timetable
- We are hoping to hold the referendum as soon as possible – August or September
- No information yet on the progress of other neighbourhood forums except that they are not imminent for referendum

F – Preparations for 2022 Mayoral & Local elections

- Register data for new wards already available – but not 100% accurate
- Register to be published on 1 December using new ward and polling district scheme
- Currently no guidance or advice on whether any Covid protocols will be required in May 2022 – if they are, it will be the counting of the votes where we'll have the biggest problems
- Registration promotion activity to begin in January
- Current plan is for the counting of the votes to happen on the day after polling day (Friday) as per 2018
- Knights Academy as the proposed count centre.
- The count will follow similar model to 2018 but with some improvements/refinements with the objective of declaring all results by 4pm
- Does the Election Committee have any views or requests for the administration of the 2022 elections?