

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 16 March 2016 at 7.00 p.m.

MP701, 7th Floor, Mulberry Place, 5, Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

This meeting is open to the public to attend.

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The report outlines the position at the end of the annual canvass 2015 and provides statistics upon publication of the revised Register of Electors 2016; The detailed preparations in place for the Greater London Authority (GLA) election and EU Referendum 2016; and Identifies the registration plans and activities in place for the Annual Canvass 2016.

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Agenda Item 3.1

COMMITTEE	DATE	CLASSIFICATION	REPORT NO	AGENDA ITEM NO.
General Purposes	16 March 2016	Unrestricted		
REPORT OF: Melanie Clay, Director of Law, Probity and Governance		TITLE: 1. Annual Canvass feedback 2015 2. Preparations for the Greater London Authority (GLA) election and EU Referendum 2016 3. Annual Canvass Pilot 2016		
ORIGINATING OFFICER(S) Louise Stamp		WARDS AFFECTED – All		

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report outlines:

The position at the end of the annual canvass 2015 and provides statistics upon publication of the revised Register of Electors 2016;

The detailed preparations in place for the Greater London Authority (GLA) election and EU Referendum 2016; and

Identifies the registration plans and activities in place for the Annual Canvass 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee note the content of this report.

No unpublished background papers were relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report.

3. ANNUAL CANVASS FEEDBACK 2015

- 3.1 Since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in June 2014, the annual canvass in 2015 was the first full canvass conducted under Individual Electoral Registration (IER) during the transitional period.
- 3.2 A total of 125,733 Household Enquiry Forms (HEF), confirming information on the register, were sent to all residential properties in the borough on 4 August 2015. A dedicated website, telephone confirmation line and SMS text services were set up for residents to confirm or update their details using unique property security codes. Any names added to a returned HEF were included on the register as a 'pending elector' and an Invitation to Register (ITR) form was sent out, asking the resident to then provide their personal identifiers (NINO and DOB).
- 3.3 Any returned ITR forms were processed and the residents' information sent electronically to DWP for verification. If the information was verified, the elector would be added to the register. If the information failed the verification stage, the resident was asked to provide further evidence to support their application.
- 3.4 A total of 36,186 (28.78%) HEF forms were returned at the end of the initial stage of the canvass.
- 3.5 Where no response was received by mid September, canvassers were recruited for a six week period to knock at those properties to assist with completing the reminder HEF. We recruited a total of 76 canvassers to undertake the first reminder stage across the borough.
- 3.6 The reminder stage of the canvass was split across the borough to trial the use of mobile tablet devices to capture the information direct into the software system. We assigned 40 canvassers to use mobile devices and 36 canvassers used the traditional paper forms. Both systems had HEF and ITR forms for the non responding properties in their areas.
- 3.7 The return rate for both HEF and ITR forms using both canvass methods showed a vast difference in the response rates.

Method	HEF	ITR	% return
Mobile	30,696	5,504	90%
Paper	12,643	252	41%

- 3.8 Using the mobile tablet device allowed any new ITR forms processed in the office to be added to the tablet devices for canvassing and any forms returned to the office by post were removed from the tablets on a daily basis.
- 3.9 The canvassers using the paper forms were required to return their work weekly and had to use a report to manually remove forms returned by post and

collect additional ITR forms to canvass. When the forms were returned each week, they had to be scanned into the system, processed and then checked for accuracy.

3.10 The final stage of the canvass involved sending final reminder forms to all those properties where canvassers could not gain a response. The letter explained the importance of returning the HEF form, responsibility to register individually and possibility of being removed from the revised register when it was published on 1 December.

3.11 The overall return rate statistics at the end of the canvass were as follows:

1. Overall return = 81.84% (102,920 properties)
2. Changes to details = 25.47% (26,216 properties)
3. Telephone response = 4.09% (4,213 properties)
4. Internet response = 7.57% (7,788 properties)
5. SMS response = 5.16% (5,307 properties)

3.12 One of the major issues we experienced was residents registering on the Government website, not Tower Hamlets dedicated website and then not returning the HEF form. The requirement is for residents to confirm people living at an address, then for any new residents to register individually. We managed to identify some of these properties and contacted the residents by phone or email and used data mining with council tax records. This is to ensure we captured all residents that should be registered at the property before we can confirm the property data was complete.

3.13 The transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) ended on 1 December 2015. At that point, any electors who had not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register were removed from the register before publication. There were 7,782 unconfirmed entries removed on 30 November 2015. At least nine attempts were made to contact the unconfirmed electors and following removal, they were written to advising them to re-register under IER.

3.14 Following the annual canvass period and publication of the revised Register of Electors 2016 on 1 December 2015, IER continues on a monthly basis to add, amend or remove details on the revised Register.

4. PREPARATIONS FOR THE GLA ELECTION – 5 MAY 2016

4.1 The elections in Tower Hamlets in May and June 2015 were delivered successfully and without challenge. A joint report was prepared in order to provide a legacy of recommendations for future elections in Tower Hamlets. The new Returning Officer has seen the recommendations in the report as an important platform on which to build for future elections.

- 4.2 Planning and delivery for the Greater London Authority (GLA) election on 5 May 2016 are progressing well. An Elections working group is in place, chaired by the Returning Officer, with officers from across the Council, the Metropolitan Police and Agilisys. Preparations are well underway and are based on best practice and lessons learnt from the two elections conducted in 2015. A number of successful initiatives trialed in the past will be employed for the polls in 2016 and a number of other enhancements introduced.
- 4.3 Four London boroughs make up the City and East Constituency for the GLA election, Newham (lead), Barking and Dagenham, Tower Hamlets and The City. The Chief Executive is the Borough Returning Officer responsible for the conduct of the election in Tower Hamlets and reports to the Constituency Returning Officer at Newham.

Electoral Services

- 4.4 Following a restructure of the electoral services team in July 2015, the separation into two teams consisting of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and the conduct of elections is working well and ensures both functions stay on track. The separation of services has been recognised and adopted by other boroughs in London and across the country.
- 4.5 A detailed election planner and risk and contingency register has been prepared for the GLA election and acts as a working document for the team throughout the timetable.
- 4.6 Additional staff from a range of departments will be identified and trained to cover a number of functions to assist the conduct of the election. One example consists of the task of staffing phones on election day when a wide range of election specific calls are received.
- 4.7 A work package agreement with Agilisys ensures any IT system failures will be responded to within 24 hours.
- 4.8 Discussions have taken place with the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO), the City and East Constituency Returning Officer, as well as within the Council, concerning the Maximum Recoverable Amount (MRA) expenditure for the GLA election.

Polling Places

- 4.9 All polling places have been secured for the GLA election, with 116 polling stations used on the day. A contractor is in place to fit up and collect the equipment from each polling place.
- 4.10 Recruitment of all staff is complete - 116 presiding officers, 348 poll clerks and 10 polling station inspectors have been appointed and will be attending compulsory two hour training sessions from April 2016.

- 4.11 We have recruited 3 reserve presiding officers and 40 reserve poll clerks to cover any 'drop-outs' before polling day. All reserves must attend a training session and some reserves are identified to attend the Town Hall at 6am on the day of election to cover as required.
- 4.12 The Met Police are closely involved in the election planning. They have appointed a senior officer with previous elections experience in Tower Hamlets as the Single Point of Contact (SPOC). Detailed discussions are taking place with the Met Police on how Police Officers will be deployed at polling places across the borough and joint training has been scheduled.

Postal vote opening

- 4.13 Eight postal vote opening sessions have been organised for the GLA election. A work package agreement with Agilisys is in place to set up the postal vote opening equipment and ensure an engineer is on call for all sessions in the event of IT failure.
- 4.14 There will be a total of 30 staff working on the opening sessions. The final opening session will take place from 8pm on Thursday 5 May 2016.
- 4.15 The opening process has been improved to ensure staff downtime is reduced.

The Count

- 4.16 The electronic count for the GLA election will take place at ExCeL London on Friday 6 May 2016, commencing at 8am.
- 4.17 All count staff have been recruited from the four boroughs in the City and East constituency. Staff completed their online training organised by London Elects and attended a one day practical training session in Hounslow.

Registration

- 4.18 Following publication of the revised register on 1 December 2016, household notification letters (HNL) were sent out to every property in the borough at the end of January 2016. We have received a good response and are following up new electors.
- 4.19 Registration days have been organised in four Ideas stores across the borough during February March and April 2016. Two further registration events have taken place in Tower Hamlets College and Queen Mary's University.
- 4.20 The usual visits to properties with more than six electors is taking place now to ensure the register is up-to-date for the election.

- 4.21 Daily new property checks are being undertaken with Council Tax to ensure everyone is registered and appropriate information exchanged.
- 4.22 The website has been updated to include the statutory dates to register and apply for a postal/proxy vote for the GLA election.
- 4.23 We have approached the Cabinet Office to conduct a pilot scheme using 80 mobile tablets during the canvass 2016. The tablets were used for 50% of the non-responding properties during the canvass 2015 and proved to be very successful.

5. EU REFERENDUM – 23 JUNE 2016

- 5.1 The Counting Officer is responsible for the conduct of the EU Referendum in Tower Hamlets and reports to the Greater London Returning Officer at City Hall.
- 5.2 All polling places used for the GLA election have been secured for the Referendum. A contractor is in place to fit up and collect the equipment from each polling place.
- 5.3 We will endeavour to use the same staff allocation used for the GLA election. Presiding officers will be asked to identify staff that did not perform well in May and polling station inspectors will provide a report on presiding officer suitability.
- 5.4 Fewer poll clerks will be required for the Referendum, so the additional poll clerks can be used as count staff.
- 5.5 Joint planning meetings are being introduced to ensure project plans and risk registers are updated together.
- 5.6 Suppliers have been contracted to print ballot papers, postal vote packs and poll cards.
- 5.7 All rooms required for the EU Referendum have been secured.
- 5.8 The count for the EU Referendum will take place at East Wintergarden, Canary Wharf, on Thursday 23 June commencing at 10pm.

6. ANNUAL CANVASS PILOT 2016

- 6.1 Tower Hamlets has applied to the Cabinet Officer to conduct an annual canvass pilot starting in July 2016. The annual canvass would normally commence in August, but we want to trial the use of an additional Household Notification Letters (HNL), which has proven to be more successful than the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) used during the annual canvass period.
- 6.2 Following the successful use of tablets in the 2015 annual canvass, we have applied to the Cabinet Office to undertake this alternative method of canvassing by using a

combination of Household Notification Letters (HNL), mobile tablet devices for all canvass reminders and also various data matching exercises.

- 6.2 If granted, there will be at least 5 stages of the canvass pilot used for the annual canvass 2016. Appendix 1 shows the process map we are proposing, using the following methods:

	Purpose	Method	Cost	Pilot Area
Pilot	Improving response rate for both HEF and ITR forms during the Annual Canvass period.	Initial HNL	£35,000	Whole borough Non responders
		40 Mobile Tablet Devices	£26,400	
		Data Matching	n/a	

6.3 **Stage one**

The first stage of the pilot canvass will commence at the beginning of July and involve sending out a HNL to every property in the borough. Residents will be required to return the HNL if there are changes or no changes to be made and we hope to include use of an online internet response to capture the details as well. The responses will then be used as the first stage of the canvass.

6.3 **Stage two**

The next stage of the pilot canvass will be to send Household Enquiry Forms (HEF) to those properties that have not responded to the HNL at the beginning of August. This is normally the initial stage of the canvass and will hopefully reduce the number of HEF forms that need to be sent out.

6.4 **Stage three**

At the end of August, whilst all the forms are still coming in, we will commence a data matching exercise with Council Tax and Housing Benefits data to match empty properties (voids) and single person discount claimants. We will also use this data to capture any new residents.

6.5 **Stage four**

In mid September, all properties that have yet to respond will receive a personal visit from our canvassers, who will all be using the mobile tablet devices. Feedback from the canvassers in 2015 confirmed that they were easy to use and the residents thought the whole process was more professional. Canvassers will continue the door knocking stage until mid November 2016.

6.6 **Stage five**

The final stage of the canvass will involve further data matching and data mining, which has proven to be very useful since the launch of IER as an alternative method to assist with the verification of individuals. The datasets we will be using are:

- Council Tax (Voids) and (SPD)
- Housing Benefits (SPD)
- Parking Services (Voids)
- Leaseholder (Voids)
- Tower Hamlets Homes (THH Council)
- Decant Properties (with Guardians in situ)

6.7 Additional work will be undertaken during the canvass period to receive lists or make personal visits to confirm residents living at the following properties:

1. Universities
2. Hostels
3. Elderly Persons Homes
4. Hospital Accommodation
5. Women's refuges

6.8 Funding

Funding will play a large part in ensuring that we can deliver a successful canvass pilot, with the combination of methods we propose to use to undertake at each stage. We will also be faced with ensuring that our software suppliers have applied the necessary changes to the functionality of the tablet devices and add additional reports to ensure we can evaluate the success of the canvass pilot.

The overall cost for the additional elements included in the pilot proposal would be £61,000.

7. RISK ASSESSMENTS AND MITIGATIONS

7.1 Mobile tablet device

- **Risk:** the device experiences some technical issues with regards to the sync process. Reduced or no connectivity. Damaged or stolen device, which will result in the canvasser reverting back to paper forms.
- **Mitigation:** prevention, to ensure the devices have tracking capability and the device is insured to cover use and physical damage. Work can be carried out offline when there is no connectivity and will be synced when device is within

connectivity range.

7.2 Data Matching

- **Risk:** Data set provided may contain out of date information for data matching.
- **Mitigation:** To ensure we only check information before matching to ensure up-to-date data lists from internal providers.

7.3 HNL

- **Risk:** This may confuse residents receiving a HNL in July as the HNLs sent in February confirmed where there are No Changes **not** to return the HNL letter. The HNLs that we would issue during our pilot phase, will require the elector to return the letter, whether there are changes or no changes to be made.
- **Mitigation:** To ensure the instructions are clear and concise on the HNL and use pictorial instructions to follow. Inform residents the HNL will substitute the HEF Annual Canvass form that they are used to receiving in August.

8. OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 8.1 This is a noting report which provides the general purpose committee with an update on the 2015 annual canvass and preparations for the GLA elections and EU referendum in 2016.
- 8.2 The Council's electoral services manages the annual canvass, IER process and both local and general elections. The service costs £613k per annum and is funded through general fund resources. Budgets of £123k and £68k are also set aside to manage the annual canvass and IER costs.
- 8.3 The GLA and EU referendum is estimated to cost £356k and £413k respectively and this is expected to be fully funded through Cabinet Office funding.
- 8.4 There are no additional financial commitments arising from the recommendations within this report.

9. LEGAL SERVICES COMMENTS

- 9.1 The annual canvass 2015 was conducted satisfactorily in compliance with sections 10ZC and 10ZD of the Representation of the People Act 1983. A canvass pilot for 2016 as described in the report will require new modified legislation which the Government will promote in order to facilitate the pilot.
- 9.2 The GLA election is being conducted in compliance with the GLA Election Rules 2015 and the EU Referendum will be conducted in compliance with the European Union Referendum (Conduct) Regulations 2016 made under the European Union

Referendum Act 2015.

9.3 There are no other immediate legal implications arising from this report.

10. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising from this report.

11. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT (SAGE)

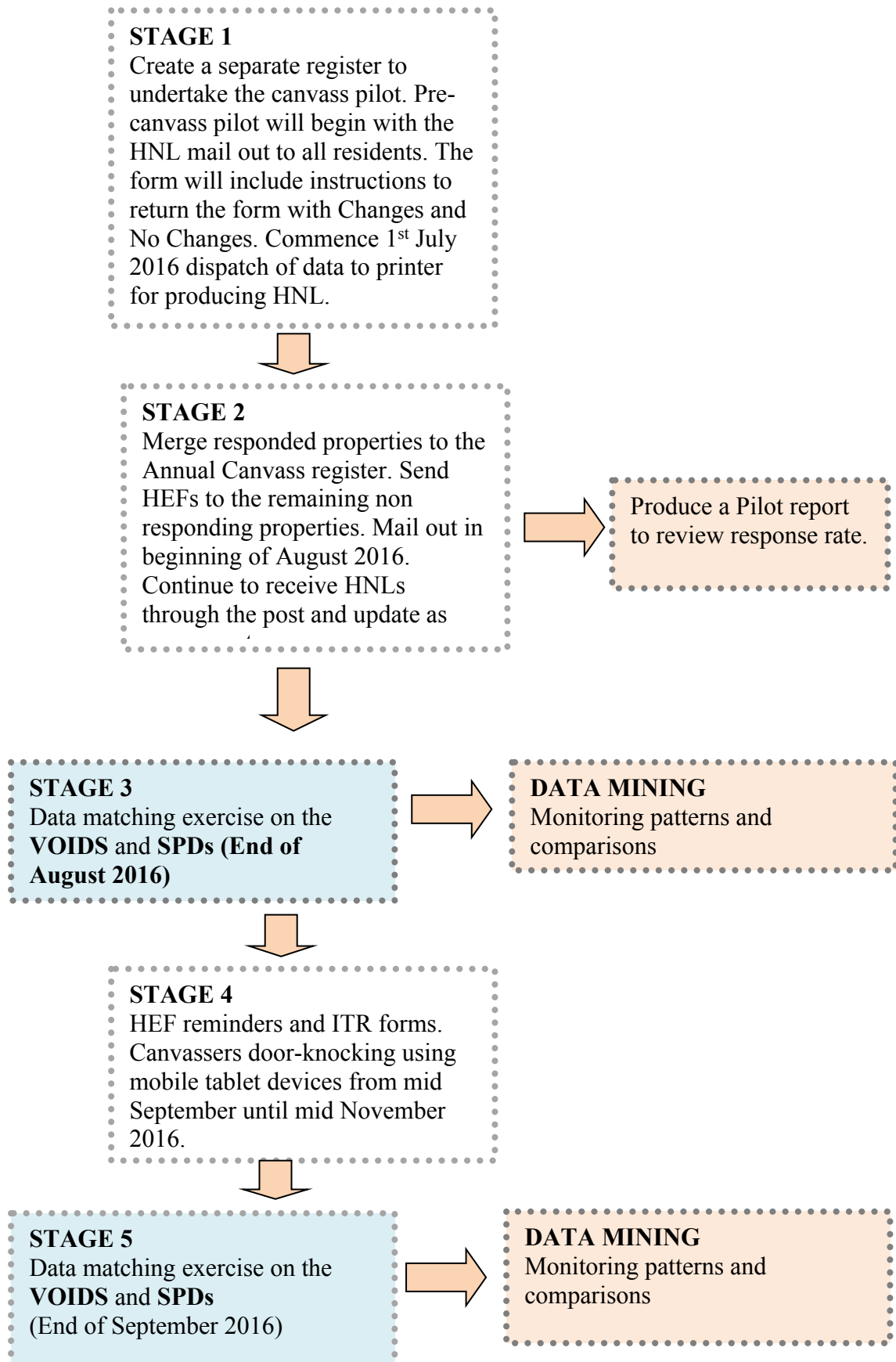
11.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no specific crime and disorder reduction implications arising out of this report.

Canvass Pilot - Process Map

Appendix 1



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