

COMMITTEE	DATE	CLASSIFICATION	REPORT NO	AGENDA ITEM NO.
General Purposes	5 July 2017	Unrestricted		
REPORT OF: Will Tuckley, Acting Returning Officer ORIGINATING OFFICER(S) Louise Stamp		TITLE: Update on the UK Parliamentary General Election 2017 WARDS AFFECTED – All		

1. **SUMMARY**

1.1 This report outlines:

Feedback and statistical information for the UK Parliamentary General Election 2017 (UKPGE).

This is a briefer report than would normally be presented as it follows soon after the election and contains early feedback. We are still collating information and undertaking staff reviews.

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No unpublished background papers were relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report.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. UK PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION (UKPGE) UPDATE

- 3.1 With just 8 weeks to plan, prepare and deliver the snap UKPGE, the same processes for previous elections in the borough had to be adopted to ensure the election was delivered successfully.
- 3.2 The elections' working group, chaired by Will Tuckley, Acting Returning Officer, and officers from across the Council, the Metropolitan Police, Electoral Commission and Agilisys, met weekly to discuss progress and plans in place for the election.
- 3.3 There were 6 Candidates standing in Bethnal Green and Bow Constituency; and 7 Candidates standing in Poplar and Limehouse Constituency.
- 3.4 The turnout in each constituency was as follows –

Bethnal Green and Bow – 69.84%

Poplar and Limehouse – 67.68%
- 3.5 A pre-election meeting was held for candidates and their agents on 3 May 2017 to provide a brief on the nomination process, timetable of events, polling place changes, postal vote opening sessions, registration of electors, polling day security/fraud prevention and the count. The Met Police and Electoral Commission were in attendance.
- 3.6 A second meeting for candidates and their agents was held on 25 May 2017 to provide an update on registration and postal vote figures, the count process and to hear an update from the Met Police and Electoral Commission.
- 3.7 The number of allegations reported to the Special Enquiry Team (SET) Met Wide and beyond London in relation to the UKPGE was 53. Of these, 14 allegations (26%) related specifically to Tower Hamlets.

4. PRE-ELECTION PERIOD (PURDAH)

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 1986 prohibits the publication of any material by a local authority which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party or promotes or opposes a point of view on a matter of political controversy. Publication refers to any communication in whatever form addressed to the public at large or a section of the public. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity to which the Council must adhere, provides additional guidance for pre-election periods and reinforces the above prohibition and stresses the need for political neutrality.
- 4.2 During the pre-election period the Council varied its communication techniques so that pictures and quotations from candidates and politicians were not used save for modest 'business as usual' exceptions. The Mayor and Speaker's diaries were

modified so that they were not exposed to events which could lead to allegations of the Council demonstrating political bias. Council buildings were not hired out for political meetings or rallies.

- 4.3 Notwithstanding this rigorous adherence to the legal requirements a number of complaints were made about events in which candidates or prominent Members participated, that the Council had facilitated the use of council land/buildings for electoral purposes. A number of public council events took place during the pre-election period and on each occasion rules were imposed and advice was offered to Members to seek compliance with the legal constraints. A series of education cuts meetings in schools was particularly challenging. When we were aware of a forthcoming event, the booking was cancelled but in several cases we were unaware until after the event, when complaints were received.
- 4.4 It was disappointing that most of these complaints concerned member participation, as guidance had been issued to Members prior to the pre-election period seeking member assistance in aiding the Council to meet its legal obligations. Members had not committed any offences but had not actively assisted the Council and clearly political considerations had been given a higher priority than working with the Council of which they are elected Members. That may be inevitable during an election campaign but does cause considerable work for officers and other agencies such as the Metropolitan Police with which the Council has liaised closely and which also received complaints of inappropriate political behaviour by Members and which in turn reflected back upon the Council. Even so, the complained of events were relatively few and minor in nature.

5. POLLING PLACES

- 5.1 A total of 75 polling places and 104 polling stations were in operation across both constituencies. Each polling station had one presiding officer and two poll clerks on duty throughout the day. All polling places were supervised by 10 polling station inspectors.
- 5.2 The three new polling places, Marion Richardson Primary School, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Locksley Community Centre worked well as polling places and will be considered for future elections in the borough.
- 5.3 The highest turnout at a polling station was 79.35% (Stebon Primary School) and the lowest turnout was 50.15% (Tiller Leisure Centre). The turnout figure for all polling stations is currently being compiled.
- 5.4 Local Tower Hamlets Police were on duty at every polling place from 7am until 10.30pm to ensure the exclusion zone was observed and deter intimidation outside the polling place.

6. SECURITY AND FRAUD PREVENTION

- 6.1 Where possible, polling places had exclusion zones marked outside the entrance to ensure easy access for voters. The police on duty ensured campaigners observed the exclusion zones.
- 6.2 A mark was placed on the corresponding numbers list to indicate the number of votes cast each hour. This was introduced to assist the police to identify the time period in the event a personation allegation.
- 6.3 A sign was placed at every polling station to indicate that no photography was permitted inside the polling station. This was extended to the use of mobile phones.
- 6.4 A new form was used at every polling station to capture the number of postal vote envelopes being handed in and record the name of the person delivering them. This was introduced to reduce the risk of postal vote fraud.
- 6.5 To protect the secrecy of the vote, new privacy screens were installed on each polling booth to ensure electors could cast their vote in private and were not overlooked by other electors in the next booth – see picture below:



7. POSTAL VOTES

- 7.1 Postal vote opening sessions took place from 30 May 2017 – 8 June 2017. The final two sessions took place at ExCeL London on 8 May 2017.
- 7.2 The final postal vote breakdown for each constituency is shown below:

Bethnal Green and Bow (BGB) –

Postal Votes dispatched for BGB = 15,157. Overall return for the six sessions (11,799) = **77.85%**

Overall rejections = 856 (5.65%).

Reasons For Rejection						
Mismatch Signature	Mismatch DOB	Mismatch both	No Signature	No DOB	No DOB and No Signature	No PVS
614	84	52	11	64	10	21

Poplar and Limehouse (PL) –

Postal Votes dispatched for PL = 16,452. Overall Return for the six sessions (12,809) = 77.86%

Overall rejections = 774 (4.7%).

Reasons For Rejection						
Mismatch Signature	Mismatch DOB	Mismatch both	No Signature	No DOB	No DOB and No Signature	No PVS
568	64	29	9	78	10	16

- 7.3 Number of postal vote packs received from Royal Mail sweep = 261
- Number of postal vote packs received from polling stations at 10pm = 1,518
- Number of postal vote replacements issued = 144

8. REGISTRATION

8.1 The final eligible electorate, for each constituency was as follows:

Bethnal Green and Bow – 86,075

Poplar and Limehouse – 87,331

8.2 The number of alterations to the register for the election period from 18/4/2017 – 22/5/2017 was as follows:

Online Applications received – 43,919 (number received on 22/5/2017 - last date to register = 7,303 (16.63%).

Additions to register – 19,159

Overseas Additions - 839

Deletions – 9,038

Duplicate registrations – 19,010

Emails – 6,193 (see Appendix A)

Phone Calls – 9,923

8.3 Canvasser visits to properties with more than five electors registered resulted in –

427 deletions from the register

41 additions to the register

20 alterations to the register

8.4 The Head of Electoral Services is collating statistical data from all London boroughs to highlight the impact IER has on the election process in terms of, new registrations, duplicate entries, postal vote replacements, emergency proxies, phone calls, emails and number of overtime hours worked by electoral staff. The data will be shared with the Cabinet Office, AEA, Electoral Commission and SOLACE.

9. THE COUNT

9.1 The count took place at ExCeL London commencing at 10pm on Thursday 8 June 2017.

9.2 78 count staff (26 teams of 3), 26 supervisors and 3 accountants were appointed in each constituency.

9.3 A total of 75 ballot boxes were returned for verification across both constituencies.

9.4 Counting of the votes into candidate trays commenced at 1.45am on Friday 9 June 2017. There were 13 teams (6 staff in each team) for each constituency.

9.5 The results for both Constituencies were declared between 4:45am and 5am on Friday 9 June 2017. The results were as follows:

Bethnal Green and Bow – Rushanara Ali

Poplar and Limehouse – Jim Fitzpatrick

10. POST- ELECTION REVIEWS

10.1 A series of post-election review sessions are being held to record good practice and capture any suggestions/comments for implementation at future elections. The following staff will attend the review sessions to provide feedback:

Election Planning Group
Presiding Officers
Polling Station Inspectors
DARO's and Count Supervisors
Accountants

- 10.2 The Head of Electoral Services has received positive feedback from various political parties, commenting that the election was well run and thanking staff for all their hard work. It was noted that there was a big improvement on polling day and at the count.

11. MAYOR AND LOCAL ELECTIONS 2018

- 11.1 Plans are already underway for the Mayor and local elections on Thursday 3 May 2018.
- 11.2 Lessons learnt from the 2017 review sessions will be considered and implemented where possible for polling stations and the count.
- 11.3 The count will take place at East Wintergarden, Canary Wharf. The verification of all ballot boxes will commence at 10pm on Thursday 3 May 2018, followed by the mayoral count.
- 11.4 The local ward counts will be deferred until the afternoon of Friday 4 May 2018, with a fresh count team.
- 11.5 Will Tuckley, Returning Officer for the mayor and local elections in 2018, met with officials from the Cabinet Office to confirm that Tower Hamlets will not be taking part in the 2018 ID pilots.
- 11.6 Although we agree in principle with Voter ID at polling stations, the decision not to participate was made to eliminate risks associated with the poll and ensure electors are not disenfranchised.
- 11.7 The Cabinet Office have asked Tower Hamlets to take part in an advisory group for the 2018 pilots, assisting them with reform designed to make the process safer.

12. OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 12.1 This is a noting report which provides the general purpose committee with an update on the preparations for the UKPGE 2017.
- 12.2 The Council's Electoral Services team conduct the UKPGE election on behalf of the ARO. The service costs £613k per annum and is funded through general fund resources.
- 12.3 The UKPGE is estimated to cost around £400k and is expected to be fully funded through Cabinet Office funding.

12.4 There are no additional financial commitments arising from the recommendations within this report.

13. LEGAL SERVICES COMMENTS

13.1 The UKPGE is being conducted in compliance with The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended).

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

14. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

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

15. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT (SAGE)

15.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

16. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

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