


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>General Purposes Committee</p> <p>12 October 2017</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Will Tuckley, Returning Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Update on preparations for the Mayor and Local Government elections 2018</p>	

<p>Originating Officer(s)</p>	<p>Louise Stamp, Head of Electoral Services</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>

Summary

This report outlines preparations in place for the Mayor and Local Government elections 2018.

Recommendations:

The General Purposes Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the content of this report.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To update the Committee on preparations in place for the Mayor and Local Government elections 2018.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 None as this is a noting report.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

- 3.1 Preparations are well underway for the Mayor and Local elections taking place on Thursday 3 May 2018.
- 3.2 Election planning group (EPG) meetings, chaired by Will Tuckley, Returning Officer, and officers from across the council have taken place to discuss initial preparations for the combined elections. The group was asked to review the UKPGE 2017 and offer recommendations for change at future elections.
- 3.3 Further EPG meetings have been arranged monthly until January 2018, then fortnightly until March 2018 and weekly until polling day. The Police and Electoral Commission will be invited to the group meetings from November 2017.
- 3.4 A draft election timetable is attached at Appendix A for information. Members to note the pre-election period (purdah) commences on Tuesday 27 March 2018.
- 3.5 A series of briefings will take place over the next few months providing practical guidance for Political Groups and Independent Members, explaining the process to follow for nominations, registration, purdah, polling day and the count.
- 3.6 A pre-election candidates and agents meeting will be held on Friday 23 March 2018 at 6pm in the Council Chamber. Following publication of the statement of persons nominated on Monday 9 April 2018, a further meeting has been arranged to discuss polling day and count arrangements.

4. LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE UKPGE 2017

- 4.1 A series of meetings have taken place with the Election Planning Group, Polling Station Inspectors, Presiding Officers, Senior Count Staff and Accountants. Some recommendations for consideration from the meetings were:

- Some single stations to become double stations to avoid queues

- Training to be provided in-house as online training would not cover the detail required for combined elections
- More in depth training for presiding officers to cover the register content and various lists
- The number of Polling Stations Inspectors to double – one PSI per ward
- Privacy Banners to be placed on all polling booths to deter family members from influencing the vote
- Better communication from PO's to the PSI's, confirming set up is complete and the station is open
- Form to capture the name of the person handing in postal votes at the polling station
- Polling station ballot papers to be pre-folded to allow the presiding officer to see the back of the ballot paper before being placed in the ballot box
- A dedicated front of house person to be identified for the count

5. POLLING PLACE REVIEWS

5.1 Following the 2017 UKPGE, a number of polling places will be reviewed to assess their suitability for the combined elections in May 2018.

5.2 The polling places and reason for review are listed below:

PD	Polling Place	Reason for review
CW3	Tiller Leisure Centre	First floor location, difficult for disabled voters as lift is often out of order. In the room used for polling, gym equipment had to be relocated the evening before poll and reinstated after close of poll. Contractors need to be involved and there is a high cost element associated with this work.
SB1	Christ Church Primary School	First floor location, difficult for disabled voters. Lift location is through the main reception area and door is kept locked. If lift is not working, the PO has to bring ballot paper down to the elector.
BW2	Olga Primary School	School was newly renovated in 2017 and the hall is now located on the first floor. Lift access for disabled voters.
SB4	Whitechapel Sports Centre	Due to Cross Rail works, the outside area has restricted access and is not suitable for disabled voters. Area used for voting is in the main reception and due to high turnout, a double station is required, but the area is too small.
BW3	Gateway Housing Association	Major difficulty in 2017 with manager at this site who does not want us to use the premises. She requests security guards for each election and the costs are very high.

BE3	Eastside Youth Centre	This location is too small to accommodate a double station. Staff complained that the size of hall is difficult to manage during busy periods.
SD2	Alice Model Nursery	Currently a single station, but needs to be a double station due to high turnout. The area used is too small for a double station.
BC1	Portakabin by East India DLR	Currently no issues using the Portakabin, but we have to gain permission form DLR and Highways to place the kabin on site. In addition, a detailed health and safety report has to be prepared. There is a high cost element invloved due to the hire of the Portakabin (one week minimum), security, highway costs, portaloo cost, electricity cost and generator cost.

5.3 A full report with recommended changes will be presented to GP committee in January 2018.

6. COUNT VENUE 2018

6.1 The count venue secured for the 2018 elections is:

East Wintergarden
43 Bank Street
Canary Wharf
London
E14 5NB

6.2 Verification of both ballot boxes will commence at 10pm on Thursday 3 May 2018, followed by the Mayoral count and declaration.

6.3 The local ward counts will start at 2pm on Friday 4 May 2018, with a fresh count team.

6.4 Excel London was approached for hire because the site has been successfully used for previous elections, but the venue is not available on the required dates.

7. ELECTORAL PILOTS

7.1 Will Tuckley, Returning Officer for the Mayor and local elections in 2018, was approached by the Cabinet Office to undertake a postal vote pilot to trial recommendation 23 of Sir Eric Pickles' report into electoral fraud. The following three areas have been identified:

- A leaflet to be included in postal vote packs to inform electors who to

contact if they suspect fraudulent activity. Contacts to include – the RO, Police and Crime Stoppers

- Random sampling for the receipt and return of postal vote packs
- Possibility of hand delivering postal vote packs with the 5+ elector checks conducted two weeks prior to the deadline for registration. Signature requirements to be discussed.

The postal vote pilot will be evaluated by the Electoral Commission along with evaluation of the five voter ID pilots.

- 7.2 Will Tuckley, met with officials from the Cabinet Office in June 2017, to confirm that Tower Hamlets will not be taking part in the 2018 Voter ID pilots.
- 7.3 This is not because the RO is opposed to voter ID in principle, but the decision not to participate was made to eliminate risks associated with the poll and ensure electors are not disenfranchised.
- 7.4 There have been major developments since the expression of interest was made that have resulted in an assessment that the risks of proceeding are greater than the perceived benefits.
- 7.5 The delay in designing and announcing the pilots is one of those risks. Any change must be planned and implemented carefully and communicated extensively over a significant period of time.
- 7.6 The RO was very clear with the Cabinet Office and in direct dialogue with the Minister that we needed to know by June 2017 if our pilot had been accepted. This timescale was discussed at our Best Value Board where commissioners commented that this was the minimum required.
- 7.7 We had designed a pilot that exploited our secure electoral registration system. This would have allowed voters to confirm their identity electronically and upload a photograph.
- 7.8 Asking for voter ID is a significant change in practice. People who do not comply, either because they are unaware or refuse will, potentially, be turned away and won't be able to vote.
- 7.9 Since the pilots were developed the Conservative Party manifesto has included a clear commitment to introducing this change across the country. In light of this there does not seem to be much point in testing an alternative method with little chance of providing a universal model.
- 7.10 The Head of Electoral Services is taking part in an advisory group for the 2018 pilots, assisting them with reform designed to make the process safer.

8. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 8.1 This is a noting report which provides the general purposes committee with an update on the preparations for the Mayor and Local elections 2018.

8.2 The Council's Electoral Services team administers elections on behalf of the Returning Officer. The mayor and local elections are estimated to cost around £600k and will be fully funded by the council.

9. LEGAL COMMENTS

9.1 The Mayor and Local elections will be conducted in compliance with The Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations (as amended) and The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules (as amended).

10. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 There are no One Tower Hamlets considerations arising from this report.

11. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Allegations of electoral fraud.

11.2 Election petitions following the election.

11.3 Polling places and count venue unavailable.

11.4 Royal Mail strike – unable to deliver poll cars and postal vote packs.

11.5 Incorrect declarations at count.

12. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

12.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

13. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 A detailed risk and contingency planner will be prepared for the combined elections in December 2017.

14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no specific crime and disorder reduction implications arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Reports

None

Appendix 1

- Statutory Timetable

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)
List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report
NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

- Asmat Hussain