


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>General Purposes Committee</p> <p>8th February 2018</p>	
<p>Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Mayor and Local Government Elections 2018 Update</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services
Wards affected	(All Wards);

Summary

This report provides the Committee with an update on preparations for the Mayoral and local elections on 3 May 2018.

Recommendations:

The General Purposes Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the report.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

1.1 No decision is required. This report is for noting only.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

2.1 None.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

3.1 Introduction

Recent meetings of the General Purposes Committee have received regular reports on election matters. The Returning Officer, Chief Executive and Head of Electoral Services have attended to brief Members on key issues. Planning for the Mayor and local government elections 2018 commenced formally early in 2017. The approach builds on recent successful elections management in the borough, including the Parliamentary General Election, the London Mayor and GLA elections, the EU referendum and the Whitechapel by-election. In addition, the work undertaken analysing the experience of the 2014 and 2015 Tower Hamlets Mayor and local elections, the petition, electoral court and subsequent investigations plus the wider national work on election integrity (including the report for the government by sir Eric Pickles) provide essential background and input into planning for 2018.

3.2 Timetable

The combined elections timetable has now been published on the Electoral Commission website and is available at Part B of their guidance <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/local-elections-in-england-and-wales>. An example is attached at Appendix A

3.3 Premises

As at 19 January 2018 there are 75 polling places with 74 confirmed and 1 outstanding but this is progressing and being treated as a priority with a member of staff specifically allocated this task. 4 Polling places are new with one polling place, having been used before, being used on this occasion again.

3.4 Staffing

Staffing will commence at the beginning of February with updated Election Management software being utilised. This will enable all recruitment to be undertaken through an automated system, predominantly through e-mail and a web based application, this system tried and tested in other authorities at previous elections. This new system will streamline the process of recruitment, will reduce paperwork and should reduce costs.

All staff will be trained according to the role undertaken with transparency and integrity stressed as a major part of that training and the serious implications if they do not adhere to these principles. In addition staff will be asked to sign a declaration of impartiality and will not be appointed to areas where they live or, where known, they have connection.

Specific numbers will be determined on the completion of the various project plans taking into consideration recommendations of the Electoral Commission who will provide guidance on their interpretation of specific staffing ratios. Presiding Officers and Polling Clerks will receive face to face training and it is proposed that this is supplemented by an online training course in line with that provided in 2017.

Polling Station Inspectors and all Count Management will also receive face to face training supplemented with guidance appertaining to the task at hand.

3.5 Postal Vote Pilot

The postal vote pilot has been discussed in detail with the Cabinet Office following initial scoping documents produced by Tower Hamlets. Two meetings were held on 10 January 2018 and 19 January 2018 and they have been supplied with a detailed critique of the implications of what is being proposed.

The implementation of the postal pilot will be subject to an official order drafted by the Cabinet Office which will be subject to close scrutiny once provided to the Returning Officer for consideration.

It is proposed that a specific report to the General Purposes Committee will be made on receipt of the Cabinet Office draft order and an agreed project plan established.

3.6 Pre-Election meetings

The police have been proactive in their preparations and have attended the Elections Planning Meetings held on the 14 November 2017 and 12 February 2018 in Mulberry Place. They also have a separate agenda of meetings set up with Electoral Services, the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office.

Elections Planning Meetings are chaired by the Returning Officer and are attended by Electoral Services, the Electoral Commission, Metropolitan Police and Tower Hamlets Communications and IT supplier Agilisys. Several proposals are being considered including a formal complaints protocol established which will incorporate a web based reporting tool and alternative methods available for the public to contact the appropriate authorities if accusations of electoral malpractice need to be made this then permeating out to the appropriate authorities.

This approach is supported by the police and the Returning Officer to ensure that concerns or allegations received are shared and the lines of enquiry, where considered necessary, are consistent and agreed.

3.7 The count

The count venue is now confirmed as the Excel Exhibition Centre, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16 1XL. Visits to the centre are being arranged for the RO, Senior Elections Management team and electoral services. A specific projects event organiser has been allocated by Excel to also assist in the preparation and delivery.

A new system of entry into the count is also being considered subject to initial scrutiny and approval by the Returning Officer.

This proposal would entail capturing a photo of staff, candidates and all agents within the elections management software with count tickets for the above encapsulating a photo. This would enable those supervising the count to identify those officially appointed and establish who would be permitted into official areas of the count venue.

In addition, tickets of official posts would be scanned on entry to the count recording the entry time and display the photo on a monitor for scrutiny.

All guests would be regulated by ticket and wrist bands and only be permitted into restricted areas

3.8 The annual canvass

The annual canvass was completed in accordance with statutory requirements with the electoral registers published on the 1 December 2017.

Responses to the requests for information could be undertaken in a number of ways with the specific numbers detailed as follows

- The total number of properties canvassed was 132,953
- The total number of properties that responded was 113,596 (85.44%)
- Responded properties with changes 33,069 (29.11%)
- Non responding properties 19,357 (14.56%)
- Properties that responded by post was 24,420 (21.50%)
- Properties that responded by telephone was 4,442 (3.91%)
- Properties that responded via the internet was 19,983 (17.59%)
- Properties that responded by text was 8,433 (7.42%)
- Properties that were recorded on the mobile canvassing application was 56,318 (49.58%)

4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

4.1 As this report is for noting only, financial implications have not been sought.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

5.1 As this report is for noting only, legal implications have not been sought.

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

7. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The report outlines new initiatives to improve the conduct and delivery of this election.

8. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

8.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The report outlines how the Council is working with the Police to prevent electoral crime.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Timetable for local elections in England: 3 May 2018.

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:

- Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services