


Non-Executive Report of the: Standards Advisory Committee 14 March 2018	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance	Classification: [Unrestricted]
Mayor and Local Government Elections 2018 Update	

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

Reasons for Urgency

This report contains information about preparations for the Local and Mayoral Elections which are taking place on 3 May 2018. The preparation of this report was delayed due to the need to finalise arrangements for the Election in a number of areas. As the report contains important information and because the Advisory Committee will not be meeting again before 3 May 2018, Members are recommended to consider this report as a urgent item of business.

Summary

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

Recommendations:

The Standards Advisory 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 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

3.2 Premises

As at 12 March 2018 all 75 polling places are now booked with all premises subject to a RAG rating agreed with the police. 4 Polling places are new with one polling place, having been used before, being used on this occasion again.

3.3 Staffing

Staffing commenced 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 this may be 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.

3.4 Postal Vote Pilot

The postal vote pilot has been discussed in detail with the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission following initial scoping documents produced by Tower Hamlets. Two update meetings were held on 10 January 2018 and 19 January 2018 and an assurance validation meeting held at HM Treasury, this to be followed with confirmation to the Returning Officer from the Cabinet Office expressing their satisfaction re preparations made to date given the 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 is now at its second draft stage with the official order due very shortly. The second draft was also scrutinised by Tim Straker acting as Counsel for the Returning Officer. No concerns were raised by Counsel based on the second draft provided.

3.5 Pre-Election meetings

The police have been proactive in their preparations and have attended regular bi-weekly Elections Planning Meetings here 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. One of the immediate outcomes has been to establish a formal web based complaints tool 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 immediately on submission of the web page.

In addition to the web pool there are direct contacts established with the police and details of Crime Stoppers for those who would prefer to be anonymous.

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.

3.6 The count

The count venue is now confirmed as the Excel Exhibition Centre, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16 1XL. The first formal visit to the centre has been arranged for 19 March 2018 and will be attended by the core management team. 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, provided with wrist bands and will only be permitted into restricted areas. All guests will have to provide photograph ID to accompany their tickets, and the names must marry or access into the count will not be permitted.

3.7 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 This report provides an update on preparations for the upcoming mayoral and local elections on 3rd May 2018.

4.2 The preparations and canvassing activities referred to in the report are funded through existing budgets within the elections service, which currently is £862k per annum.

4.3 The additional cost of holding the elections, including the hire of polling stations, polling staff, count venues, count staff and other expenses will be funded through the Councils reserves. Based on past experience the cost of the May 2018 elections is estimated to be in the region of £500k to £700k.

5. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 5.1 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).

6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Report authors should identify any equalities or diversity implications and how the proposals contribute to the achievement of One Tower Hamlets. Please refer to the relevant section of the report writing guide when completing this paragraph. There are no One Tower Hamlets considerations arising out of 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 (SAGE)

- 8.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The risks associated with management of the elections include potential electoral fraud and reputational damage to the Council. In order to reduce these and any other risks the Council has published pre election guidance on the intranet, produced a do's and don'ts leaflet for candidates and is implementing the training and other measures outlined in 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