


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>General Purposes Committee</p>	
<p>Report of Janet Fasan, Divisional Director Legal Services and Interim Monitoring Officer.</p>	<p>Classification: [Unrestricted]</p>
<p>Elections/Polls update – Thursday 6 May 2021</p>	

<p>Originating Officer(s)</p>	<p>Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services</p>
--------------------------------------	--

Summary

This information report summarises observations following the polls undertaken on Thursday 6th May 2021 namely the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections, the Borough Governance Referendum and the Neighbourhood Planning Referendum held on Thursday 6 May 2021

Recommendations:

This report is an information item with no recommendations for the committee.

1. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

1.1. This report is an information item

2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

2.1 None.

3. **DETAILS OF REPORT**

3.1 This report updates GPC following the delivery of the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections, the Borough Governance Referendum and the Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Planning Referendum held on Thursday 6 May 2021

3.2 There were three different 'contests' for the GLA with three different ballot papers for voters with three different counting methods as detailed in the report to GPC on 8 December 2020.

These were for:

- the Mayor of London (Supplementary Vote System)
- the 14 Members of the London Assembly that represent London's 14 Constituencies (First past the post)
- the 11 London Wide Assembly Members that represent the whole of London (The modified d'Hondt formula – proportional representation)

3.3 The two referendums were based on specific questions prescribed in the legislation. These polls were run on a local government franchise, a first past the post count with no specified minimum turnout.

3.4 The GLA elections were in the main managed by the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) working closely with all 33 London Authorities to ensure consistency of approach with risk assessments and project planning reflecting the considerable work undertaken prior to the suspension of the polls in 2020, through to May 2021.

3.5 Tower Hamlets was also part of the City & East Constituency, with Newham the lead authority and a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed for the CEO in his capacity as the Borough Returning Officer to work with Newham for the GLA elections, this ensuring from the very outset a consistency of approach. This collaborative approach was also extremely important with Newham also holding a Governance referendum on the same polling day.

3.5 The two Tower Hamlets Referendums were the personal responsibility of the CEO in an independent statutory role as Counting Officer and these polls were subject to similar statutory timetables, risk assessment and project planning.

4. **Acknowledgement**

- 4.1 The objectives of the polls was to ensure that the electorate were able to exercise their right to vote, be that through absent voting or through attendance at a polling place securely and effectively and ultimately, with precautionary measures having to be in place because of Covid, safely.
- 4.2 This was undoubtedly a uniquely challenging and significant exercise for all involved and, whilst lessons can always be learnt after every poll, the consensus appears to be one of successful polls having been delivered, this endorsed immediately after polling day by the Minister Cloe Smith in a letter to all Returning Officers who praised everyone involved in “successfully delivering an effective set of elections under the most challenging of circumstances”
- 4.3 The letter received from the Minister is attached at Appendix A
- 4.4 This acknowledgement is a credit to all the staff who embraced the unique challenges here in Tower Hamlets.

5 **Administration**

- 5.1 The administration of all polls in Tower Hamlets commence with an Elections Project Board, chaired by the CEO Will Tuckley in his independent statutory roles e.g. Borough Returning Officer for the GLA and Counting Officer for the Referendums, and was convened for the first time, after the initial postponement, on 18 December 2020 and met regularly as polling day approached. The project board was made up of representatives from the Electoral Services Team, the Police, Legal, the Electoral Commission, IT, Facilities, Comms and Corporate Health and Safety.
- 5.2 The meetings were formally minuted, action points assessed, and feedback received from each organisation and/or department.
- 5.3 Following the decision by Government to postpone all polls until 2021 this allowed for a longer lead in time for the May 2021 polls but the addition of the two Referendums, particularly the Borough Wide Governance Referendum, confirmed on Wednesday 18 November 2020, added considerably to the overall administration.
- 5.4 It is acknowledged everyone charged with delivering the polls were faced with a significant logistical exercise dominated by the precautionary measures that had to be implemented because of the Covid pandemic. Unfortunately, due the ever changing circumstances, with infections rates variable across London, this inevitably led to delays in definitive decisions at critical times and pushed preparations closer to polling day than would ordinarily be expected.
- 5.5 Following the decision to hold the Referendums on the same date as the GLA elections it was identified from the very outset that there were differences in the legislation, which did not mirror the familiar election practices that campaigners were used to, and this would be difficult to manage. Examples of this were the provision of electoral registers to campaign groups is not permitted, there is no requirement to submit election expenses plus many other examples and this led to a degree of frustration from campaigners and added to the overall workloads.
- 5.6 Given the identified differences between the elections and Referendums rules, Referendums guidance documents were prepared and distributed highlighting where the rules were different, and a suite of forms compiled to enable campaigners to appoint appropriate agents and the merits of registering with the Counting Officer explained.

- 5.7 Campaigners at Referendums do not have to register with the Electoral Commission, as a political party would at a normal election, and did not have to register with the Counting Officer unless they did so voluntarily and this meant in the initial stages that no briefing or advice could be provided to specific individuals to explain what the stages of the polls were and the methodology that would be adopted. However, for the Governance referendum two campaign groups did eventually register namely the Yes for Mayor and Leading Together with named contacts provided to enable communications to be provided throughout the formal timetable. No formal groups were registered for the Neighbourhood Planning Referendum.
- 5.8 The differences identified in the legislation and process have been passed to the Electoral Commission, who actually do not advise on Governance Referendums but where combined polls take place this would directly affect the advice given, and the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who are responsible for the Referendums legislation and guidance.
- 5.9 The staffing for postal vote opening, polling day and the counts proved extremely difficult with increasing reticence to participate, particularly on polling day itself. Efforts were made to highlight the precautionary measures put in place and assurances given, but this reticence proved to be a major issue with over 100 staff dropping out the week leading up to polling day, 28 staff dropping out the day before polling day and several in the early hours of polling day itself. This was not unexpected with this risk highlighted in a survey undertaken by the GLA across London in 2020. The survey identified the possibility that if infection rates were to remain high as many as 40-50% of staff may not be available. It was fortunate that the infection rates by the end of April had started to decline but the numbers who dropped out so close to and on polling day was disappointing. That said, those who were approached at the last minute coped admirably but this presented its own challenges of appropriate training and relying on experienced staff to chaperone those appointed at the last minute with many having not worked in a polling place before.
- 5.10 The preparation of PPE equipment and stationery for polling places proved to be a considerable task with advice provided by the corporate health and safety team with direct liaison with Public Health for England. Every polling place was provided with an agreed set amount of PPE this delivered with the polling station equipment and the additional stationery/equipment required to be displayed and set up as instructed by the GLA. This coupled with the unusual shape of the GLA box and suggested generic polling station set up for all polling stations added to the demands.
- 5.11 The main tranche of polling cards were dispatched relatively early once the official elections timetable commenced, with each poll sent separately. Those electors approved up to the registration deadline on Monday 19th April 2021 were sent cards as soon as practicable after that date. The layout and content of polling cards is defined in legislation so could not be combined; no polling cards had to be reprinted due to late changes to locations.
- 5.12 With the benefit of hindsight, it may have been more informative for the electorate if the cards had been coloured differently and this will be considered for future polls.
- 5.13 Postal vote packs were dispatched in three tranches with the main data sets sent to the printers relating to the Referendum on the 3rd, 13th and 21st April 2021 and the GLA, because of candidates and withdrawal dates sent to the printers on the 13th, 19th and 21st April 2021.
- 5.14 Ordinarily all the postal vote data is sent to the printers after the deadline for new applications and changes to existing postal votes which for these polls was 20th April 2021. This date, based on a statutory deadline of polling day minus 11 days, is extremely tight particularly if packs have to be sent abroad but is set in stone but we endeavour to get the packs released as is soon as is reasonably practicable.

- 5.15 Consequently, the first two tranches were dispatched before the deadline date with an additional task of all amendments and deletions/cancellations extracted before dispatch. This was a change to usual practices because the team could not attend the printers to do this so was completed in the office where the changes were checked, deletions checked, and authorisation then given to the printers to dispatch. All postal packs were sent 1st class with a 1st class return envelope provided.
- 5.16 Three separate packs were sent out. The first dispatch was the two Referendums which could be prepared early because there were no candidates and no deadlines affecting the content. The second was the more substantial GLA pack containing the three ballot papers which had to be approved by the GLRO and CO. Once approved the packs could be prepared. None of the GLA packs could be prepared prior to the deadline for the withdrawal of candidature at 4pm Tuesday 30 March 2021, this then subject to proofs being prepared and the generic packs signed off. This takes approximately 4-5 working days to complete after each submission of data to the printers.
- 5.17 The second and third tranches of packs were sent out as soon as practicable and were subject to the same timetable restrictions, data extraction, proof checking and then approval.
- 5.18 Approximately 10 emails and the same number of telephone calls were received that the GLA packs from the third tranche were not received until very late. A number of these also confirmed that the packs had been subsequently received.
- 5.19 In addition, the requirement to come into the Town Hall with photographic evidence was not welcomed by those affected who sited the Covid precautions and asked to have the packs posted to them again. This was not possible because the legislation was not changed by Government and therefore this would have been contrary to the election rules.

6 **Communications**

- 6.1 It was clear from the very outset that the communication of the polls to the electorate was going to be vitally important but had to be carefully managed particularly engaging the electorate to attend the polling places and/or apply for an absent vote. Research at polls already having been held internationally and by elections in Scotland had pointed towards the distinct possibility of a heightened reticence of the electorate to attend polling places because of the Covid pandemic.
- 6.2 Actively promoting postal voting was not considered an appropriate approach given the Counting Officers impartiality and preferencing one form of voting over another was not considered appropriate. Consequently, a choice of alternatives was communicated namely postal voting, voting by proxy, or attending the polling station in person, this mirroring the neutral approach also adopted by the Electoral Commission.
- 6.3 An exception to 6.2 was to send a postal vote application to 26,000 residents registered as shielding with the NHS.
- 6.4 The provision of 5 ballot papers in some polling stations was difficult for the electorate but also for staff issuing the ballot papers and then monitoring the papers being placed into the correct boxes. Consequently, information to the electorate had to be clear and concise but also had to be informative without showing any preference for either of the referendum questions which may have resulted in allegations of influence in preference to one question over another. This was particularly important because the questions are prescribed and explanations of the choices available could be open to interpretation.
- 6.5 From the publication of the Notices of Election and Notices of Referendum the council was also under an obligation to observe the rules of purdah and this was strictly observed with a detailed document produced and distributed by the Monitoring Officer and the Head of

External Communications to explain what the requirements and restrictions were during the official timetable.

- 6.6 All communications to the electorate were undertaken in partnership with the GLA and the Electoral Commission to ensure consistency of approach but for the Referendums, with no candidates, this was restricted to a very matter of fact explanation, for the reasons detailed in 5.2, namely that to attempt to explain in detail the merits of the governance arrangements choices was not considered appropriate and therefore avoided.
- 6.7 A list of the Communications undertaken is attached at Appendix B
- 6.8 In addition to the steps taken, an email was sent directly to 135,587 electors in March 2021 explaining the Covid precautionary steps being put in place to try and reassure the electorate that voting in a polling station was as safe as could be reasonable expected. The emails were sent via the Governments secure NOTIFY system and had web links to the council's web page where the information relating to all the polls was detailed.
- 6.9 8,148 individual information emails were also sent to new residents on how to apply to register to vote these emailed directly from the electoral services software during the timetable.
- 6.10 36,925 enquiry and confirmation letters were also sent to the electorate from March 2021 to April 2021 following applications received to register, applications for absent votes or office enquiries to address incomplete applications
- 6.11 These statistics and those detailed in Appendix C represent the significant and unprecedented amount of work that had to be undertaken.

7 Facilities

- 7.1 The delivery and collection of equipment was undertaken by the TH facilities team, this brought in house after the 2018 local elections.
- 7.2 The Covid precautionary measures required to be in place made this a significant task with 75 different locations having to be satisfied that what was being proposed and delivered met exacting standards and that our facilities team were well versed in the precautionary measures, this particularly pertinent in the schools being used.
- 7.3 There was also significantly more equipment to prepare and deliver with two deliveries having to be made at every location instead of the usual one with separate PPE boxes prepared, polling screens and GLA stationery also having to be delivered. This proved to be substantial and more equipment and stationery was prepared and delivered than any other polls previously held.
- 7.4 The team were also responsible for the transportation of the ballot boxes and assorted stationery to the Excel following the close of poll and the clear down of equipment following the close of the Borough Referendums counts with all used papers and associated stationery transported for storage at William Place.

8 The Electoral Commission

- 8.1 The Commission attended all the project board meetings, several polling places on polling day and the verifications and counts at Excel.
- 8.2 The Commission have acknowledged in their provisional national statement that these polls were "one of the most complex sets of polls held in recent times, with additional and far-ranging challenges presented by the Covid pandemic" and "current evidence indicates that they took place without significant or wide-spread administrative issues, making best use of new and adapted processes to support Covid-safety, and supporting the participation of the electorate in these important democratic events"

- 8.3 The Commission will be presenting a more comprehensive report on the 2021 polls in the autumn. The statement can be found here.

[Electoral Commission statement on the running of the 6 May polls | Electoral Commission](#)

9 Polling places

- 9.1 All of the polling places were regularly communicated with throughout 2020 with email correspondence sent to every location every month for the 8 months preceding polling day.
- 9.2 Unfortunately, the late loss of the portacabin units, because of their units being procured by the NHS, this taking priority over our initial bookings, resulted in two locations having to be replaced at East India and the newly proposed site on the Isle of Dogs but these were replaced with the Town Hall and the Marriott Hotel booked very quickly as suitable alternatives having both been utilised before.
- 9.3 New premises were also used at the Brady Arts Centre, Gateway Housing Association, Toynbee Hall and Arnhem Wharf Primary School and all proved to be successful locations.
- 9.4 The polling place at H Forman & Sons, following the loss of Stour Space as a polling place on the day the polling card data went to the printers, was problematic with concern expressed by members and members of the public of the suitability but with deadlines extremely tight the premises did not present any insurmountable problems on the day. Unfortunately, on polling day the lift broke down which was of course unforeseen, but the premises was staffed appropriately, and we received one complaint that the facilities were not as expected.
- 9.5 The booking of school facilities for polling day is enshrined in law but Government decided very late in the day to contact all Returning Officers and School Heads to recommend that alternatives be considered. At this stage all preparations had been completed and arrangements made for equipment to be delivered to the 75 polling places (109 polling stations) and polling cards prepared. Out of the 75 locations used as polling places 45 of these are schools here in Tower Hamlets and to change at such a late stage would not have been impracticable.
- 9.6 This late correspondence from Government was ill timed and resulted in several schools contacting us within a couple of days of receipt to remove their support. All schools were contacted immediately by the Head of Electoral Services to inform them that the correspondence from Government was not a direction but a recommendation and that all schools have a duty in law to provide facilities and until the primary legislation is changed their facilities would still be required.
- 9.7 This is always a sensitive issue particularly on the back of the repeated closures of schools throughout the pandemic but there is a requirement and duty on schools to provide their facilities and once clarification was provided all the schools booked were utilised with the majority of premises supportive.
- 9.8 Ordinarily Tower Hamlets would have a police officer stationed at every polling place from 7am until the close of poll at 10pm or until the polling place closed to ensure the security of the ballot boxes. With all polling places undergoing a RAG rating consensus was reached with the police, considering the polls being held, that those premises with a high risk rating would continue to have this in place and new polling places having an officer on site as a matter of course.
- 9.9 Those premises with a lower risk rating did not have an officer in situ but would, along with all the polling places, have a police attendance sent immediately to the premises if the need arose.

9.10 This worked well for these polls but must not be considered as standard practice for all future polls held. This is not the case; every poll will be risk assessed in advance and the nature of the poll considered and if necessary, police officers will be sought for every polling place irrespective of previous arrangements.

10 **Polling day**

- 10.1 It was expected, having five polls in some polling places, and having to adhere to the precautionary measures imposed to reduce the risk of Covid, that this would prove to be an extremely difficult day for staff. A 2 hour digital training course was provided by the GLA and a supplementary 90 minute virtual training session provided here at Tower Hamlets to all Presiding Officers, Polling Clerks and Polling Inspectors.
- 10.2 Polling places were understandably very busy from the outset, particularly late at night with some premises having large queues at 10pm. However, in the main the polling places were managed well, and queues were not isolated to Tower Hamlets but experienced in other London Boroughs and across the UK where there were combined polls.
- 10.3 It was identified prior to polling day that the precautionary measures adopted because of Covid contributed to the length of time that the electorate spent in the polling stations with social distancing, which was in the main excellently observed, one of the main reasons for the queues. This coupled with the issue of multiple papers, ensuring ballot papers were placed into the correct boxes and periodically checking the queues added to this time.
- 10.4 A very small number of reports were received complaining that campaigners were approaching electors outside the polling places attempting to persuade them to vote in a certain way. This was exacerbated by the queues which meant that some electors were then accessible to campaigners before they reached the polling place to enter the polling station to cast their vote.
- 10.5 Accusations of alleged intimidation and coercion were immediately passed to the police but to date no accusation has been supported or substantiated but it is clear that clarification needs to be provided to all concerned when campaigning occurs outside the polling places and information communicated to electors on what is and isn't permissible outside a polling place.
- 10.6 The Electoral Commission have confirmed that campaigning is permitted and that the Returning Officer/Counting Officers responsibility is restricted to the confines of the polling place and the responsibility to deal with accusations of intimidation/coercion or public order outside of the polling place lie with the police. It is acknowledged that some opinions, particularly on social media, were strongly made that being approached prior to voting is illegal but this is not the case if undertaken in an orderly manner.
- 10.7 There were also concerns raised that "mock ballot papers" were being shown to people as they approached some polling places. There is nothing in law to prevent this provided the approach to the electorate is not intimidatory and attempts made to forcibly coerce an elector to vote in a certain way. If this were to happen this should be reported to the police but again is out of the Counting Officers jurisdiction.
- 10.8 Reports were received about family voting, namely several people going into the single booth together to complete the ballot papers. A formal complaint has been received following a report from an elector which was answered by the Head of Electoral Services and has been referred to the Police. This issue is always implicitly raised in all the training provided and will continue to be the case with the message very clear, that where practicable this should not be permitted.
- 10.9 Complaints have been made to the Police of postal packs being handed into the polling stations and in certain circumstances, although not substantiated, that this was several envelopes at the same time implying that postal votes were being illegally collected and

handled. There is a misconception that this is against the law. It is not, even if packs are handed in for several people.

- 10.10 There isn't any contravention of the law if individuals handle postal packs, but the practice is contrary to a voluntary Code of Conduct compiled by the Electoral Commission and agreed between the majority of political parties/campaigners, this originally put in place in 2015. It is not mandatory and there is no specific offence if postal packs are handled and then handed into the polling place.
- 10.11 There was also the issue this year of those shielding, those reluctant to attend the polling place and even going to a post box with their pack, because of fears of Covid infection.
- 10.12 Frustration has also been expressed that postal votes should always be posted back to the Counting Officer, based on the fact that it is by definition a postal vote, but this is not a requirement in law and packs can be delivered to polling places on polling day and even dropped off at the Town Hall.
- 10.13 It should be noted that the Government have pledged to look at this issue, which again is not particular to Tower Hamlets, with the following press release made by the Minister Chloe Smith coinciding with the recent Queens speech.

“Currently, anyone can collect postal votes from any number of electors and hand them in at a polling station, which presents a risk of postal votes being appropriated and stolen, or voters completing postal ballot papers under duress.

We are making changes that:

- *Ban party campaigners from handling postal votes altogether (with some limited exceptions), making it a criminal offence*
- *Stop postal vote harvesting, by limiting the number of postal votes that a person may hand-in on behalf of others.*
- *Extend secrecy provisions that currently protect voting in polling stations to absent voting - making it an offence for a person to attempt to find out or reveal who a postal voter has chosen to vote for.*
- *Require those registered for a postal vote to reaffirm their identities by re-applying for a postal vote every three years (currently registration is indefinite, so long as the elector provides a signature periodically).”*

The Commissions Code of Conduct can be accessed here:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-03/Code%20of%20conduct%20for%20campaigners%20last%20revised%20Dec%202015.pdf>

11 The Verification & Count

- 11.1 The count venue was confirmed for all polls as the Excel Centre, this a change to the initial proposals by the Counting Officer to the Lead authority and the Greater London Returning Officer that the counts for the Tower Hamlets Referendums take place in the East Wintergarden. The decision for the counts to take place in the Excel was based on legal interpretation where all ballot boxes for all polls must be verified together and at the same time so the verification and counts had to be in the same location. In addition, the GLRO decided that the counting of the ballot papers for City & East Constituency and all ancillary polls, namely the two Referendums would take place on Saturday 8th May.
- 11.2 Following direction from the GLRO, the number of counting assistants and staff was significantly reduced, from a preferred 180 to 100, and this had to be considered when

assessing and implementing the count processes and estimating the timing of the declaration of results.

- 11.3 The GLRO, CO and BRO/CO also agreed, following advice and concern re the necessity to have precautionary Covid measures in place from the Excel and PHE, to reduce the number of attendees scrutinising the count.
- 11.4 The Borough Referendums commenced at 8am and concluded at 5.30pm with provisional results declared at 5pm.
- 11.5 A decision was made to declare the provisional results for the Referendums because the GLA verification of ballot boxes was still ongoing and the changes to the numbers of ballot papers incorrectly placed into the wrong boxes was extremely low at this point and it would have been impractical for the counters and teams to have to wait until that process was concluded.
- 11.6 Estimates at 4.30pm of another 5 hours to wait were permeating out from the City & East Constituency count so agreement was sought from the campaign leads to declare the results provisionally subject to any minor adjustment to the figures once all the boxes at the GLA were eventually verified.
- 11.7 At the close of the GLA verification an additional 17 votes were added to the Yes for Mayor campaign and 6 for the Leading Together.
- 11.8 No votes were added to the NPR, so the result remained the same.
- 11.9 The GLA City & East Constituency count concluded as predicted at 9.30pm.

12 Covid

- 12.1 Following the suspension of the original polling date in 2020 significant work was undertaken to try and predict how restrictions to normal voting practices would affect the way people cast their votes be that through absent voting, polling day and the operational aspects within the count venue.
- 12.2 Risk assessments were compiled with the GLA with advice sought from the Electoral Commission, Government and Public Health for England. Advice was also received from the Tower Hamlets Corporate Health and Safety Team with separate risk assessments specifically compiled for polling day, the opening of postal votes and the verification and count.
- 12.3 The precautionary arrangements in the polling places were in the main accepted with a few comments received from members of the public who felt that the measures were not as extensive as expected. However, feedback received from Dr Andy Liggins (Tower Hamlets Consultant in Public Health) on polling day confirmed that the precautionary measures adopted were in the main welcomed and acceptable. These observations were also supported by visits to polling places by the Counting Officer, Polling Inspectors, and the Electoral Commission.

“great comments received from our Covid Champs on Covid-safe polling setups today. Well done”

"Just been to vote in Canton Street must say I'm very impressed with the social distancing measures, people only being allowed inside one at a time one in one out etc hand sanitiser and facemasks at entrance door and only one pencil being given per person it was marvellous. One slight issue was the queueing system outside no one was watching queue, so people were queueing up close behind each other but other than that it was amazing"

"in my polling station they even provided pencils to take home, to stem the spread, if any..."

"yeah same in mine" – social media stream

"Had a really positive experience at the polling station. Lots of social distancing. Lots of hand wash and masks available. Excellent staff.

"Probably best election experience!"

"Same here. It was a bit cramped at Burcham St because part of the hall was partitioned off as it's usually a Covid testing site. Ventilation could have been better, as an external door had not been unlocked by the caretaker, but as soon as I mentioned this to a member of staff, he thanked me and opened as many windows as he could."

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

6. LEGAL COMMENTS

6.1 This is an information report for the Committee which addresses various legal issues in the context of the information provided in the body of the report. The report does not require a decision by the Committee and there are no other legal implications arising from the report.

7. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 There are no equalities or diversity implications arising from this report

8. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no implications arising from this report

9. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

9.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1

11. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

Appendix A: Statement from the Minister

Appendix B: Main Communication methods

Appendix C: Statistics

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



Chloe Smith MP

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

To: Returning Officers in England

11 May 2021

The set of council, mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections held on 6 May were an already complex set of polls, complicated further by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and all those involved in successfully delivering an effective set of elections under the most challenging of circumstances.

I fully understand the significant additional pressures placed on the elections sector by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting access to supplies, venues, and staff and requiring additional precautions to be taken in all aspects of the organisation and administration of the polls. The tireless work of Returning Officers and your teams, supported by the Electoral Commission, AEA, SOLACE and the LGA, and by measures put in place by the Government, means these polls have now been successfully delivered. I am very pleased to be able to say that COVID-19 did not cancel democracy.

The integrity of our electoral system and the maintenance of British citizens' confidence in our elections continues to be one of this Government's priorities and as we look ahead now to the next Parliamentary session, I look forward to working with you to continue to protect our democracy and ensuring that it remains secure, modern, transparent and fair.

Thank you again for all of your hard work and dedication to the successful delivery of COVID-secure and effective elections.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chloe Smith".

Chloe Smith MP
Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution

Main communications outputs for the Mayor of London and London Assembly elections / Governance Model Referendum and Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Planning Referendum

All communications were linked to a London Wide Communications Planning Group at the GLA and also followed the Electoral Commissions Engagement Strategies.

- Elections Communications Tool Kit adopted with the GLA and Electoral Commission
- Pre-election period guidance for staff updated and issued to all staff and members (Purdah).
- Ongoing handing of pre-election comms issues and ongoing support and advice to officers.
- Web pages created and updated at www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/vote including FAQs, election and referendum timetable, polling station address list and publication of statutory notices.
- Our East End published in March 2021, delivered to every household in the borough (135,000), featuring a double page spread on forthcoming elections and Referendums on Thursday 6th May 2021. [Issue 20 / March 2021 / Our East End \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk) (Page 14)
- Main communications outputs for the Mayor of London and London Assembly elections / Governance Model Referendum and Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Planning Referendum
- Supporting promotion of 'Got 5' Electoral Commission Campaign by sharing posts on social media.
- Website carousel banners to promote voter registration and elections pages and updated according to various election deadlines.
- E-mail signatures/boiler plate on all council emails to promote voter registration and elections pages updated according to various election deadlines.
- Promotion of register to vote deadline across all internal and external channels (press release/e-news/website/social media/TH now/CE Newsletter/Yammer/AV screens/Member's Information Bulletin)
- Promotion of "register for a postal vote" deadline across all internal and external channels (press release/e-news (55,000 recipients)/website/social media/TH now/CE Newsletter/Yammer/AV screens/Member's Information Bulletin)
- Promotion of proxy vote deadline across all internal and external channels (press release/e-news/website/social media/TH now/CE Newsletter/Yammer/AV screens/Member's Information Bulletin)
- Regular proactive social media posts highlighting elections and referendums taking place
- Reactive social media posts, responding to queries from members of the public re: elections and referendums
- Creation of dedicated 'in case of emergency' WhatsApp group to rapidly escalate queries and issues to Elections team
- Monitoring of social media throughout polling day and the count day, logging queries received for future learning ahead of next election in 2022.
- Working with GLA to accredit media for the count venue
- Putting in place pooling arrangements for count content and reporting

- Chaperoning accredited media at court venue
- Announcement of results across all internal and external channels (press release/e-news/website/social media/TH now/CE Newsletter/Yammer/AV screens/Member's Information Bulletin)

Statistics

203,598 polling cards dispatched in envelopes (GLA)
202,026 polling cards dispatched in envelopes (GR)
25,882 polling cards dispatched in envelopes (Isle of Dogs NPR)
143,000 (Household Notification Letter enveloped)

667,417 items posted out in TH amounting to **1.5 million** pieces of paper

627,300 GLA Ballot Papers printed
22,300 NPR Ballot Papers printed
174,950 GR Ballot Papers printed
824,550 Ballot Papers printed

8,148 individual information emails on how to apply to register to vote were emailed directly from the electoral services software during the timetable.

36,925 enquiry and confirmation letters were sent to the electorate from March 2021 until polling day predominantly through email but not all.

135,587 emails sent via the Governments NOTIFY software.

180,660 individual communications sent to electors in 10 weeks

26,000 Postal Vote applications (Shielding electors)
31,212 Postal packs dispatched (GLA)
31,212 Postal packs dispatched (GR)
4,487 Postal packs dispatched (NPR)

66,911 postal packs dispatched

20,665 postal packs received for the GLA
2,165 postal packs received for the NPR
18,049 postal packs received
40,879 postal packs were received and processed

22,903 packs were received at the GE in 2019