

**To the Chair and Members of the
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

MAYORAL ELECTION 2nd MAY 2013 EVALUATION REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Mayoral Election took place on the 2 May 2013; the purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of the election. Any issues identified at this meeting will be incorporated into Service Development Plans for future elections.
2. The Mayoral Election result has been published on the Council's website and is attached at Appendix A for the information of members.
3. The Electoral Commission analysed our performance against their performance indicators and we met the standard across all areas.

RECOMMENDATION

4. The Committee is asked to approve the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

BACKGROUND

5. The Electoral Services Manager joined the authority on 20 February 2013. The Electoral Services team was completed by the end of March when 3 members of staff from within legal and democratic services were appointed.
6. The tender exercise for election print services was completed in March 2013. The new contract made savings on the price of printing and also enabled improvements to the postal vote product and savings on postage rates to be made.
7. This is the first major election to be held in the new Civic Offices. Meetings and training sessions were held in the Council Chamber. Ballot papers were delivered and stored securely on site. Ballot boxes were prepared on the ground floor and collected by the Presiding Officers.

DETAIL

8. **Project planning** - The late appointments to the team meant that

project planning had to be accelerated. Particular focus was given to specific areas, communication with electors, the Mayoral election booklet, information to candidates and their agents, production and delivery of poll cards and postal vote packs and postal vote and count procedures.

9. **Communication with electors** - An area on the front page of the web was created; it showed an image of a ballot box and provided all election notices, forms and information in one easily located area. The Civic Building was open from 7am until 10pm on Election Day to allow access to the elections team and for postal vote packs to be handed in personally. The arrangement with the Contact Centre to respond to the majority of enquiries was a very efficient service and considerably reduced pressure on the elections team throughout the process. The helpline was available from 7am until 10pm on Election Day.
10. **Mayoral election booklet** –Improvements were made to the design and content of the booklet. It must be produced and printed within a very short timescale to be delivered before the postal vote packs are delivered, even though there were 10 candidates at this election this was achieved. All 10 candidates contributed £700 towards the printing costs of producing the booklet.
11. **Information to candidates and Agents** - A Candidates and agents meeting was scheduled at the beginning of the nomination process to take place after the close of nomination. This was to ensure all candidates and agents were given the same information. Arrangements for postal vote opening and the count were discussed in detail and it was an opportunity for questions to be asked. An information pack was sent out to anyone who was not able to attend.
12. **Production and delivery of poll cards** – The newly appointed printers worked with us to provide a strategic approach and all deadlines were met. Data was transferred over a secure portal and they arranged pick up/delivery with Royal Mail. In addition they provided a mailing house service that meant a saving of £20,000 on the delivery of poll cards when compared with Royal Mail rates. They sorted the printed poll cards and put them into barcoded trays; Royal Mail scanned the barcodes into their systems and provided a guaranteed 2 day delivery. There were no reported problems of undelivered poll cards.
13. **Production and delivery of postal vote packs** – The opening of postal vote envelopes was held at the Mary Woollett Centre. Postal ballot boxes were sealed and stored in a safe at the end of each opening session. Checks of the personal identifiers on postal votes were undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements with 100% checks being completed. The opening procedure was revised and improvements speeded the processing time and produced a clearer audit trail. The postal vote packs were printed as a one piece mailer. The one piece mailer appears to have reduced the number of postal votes rejected because the statement was not returned, 43 instances

as opposed to 740 in the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Elections. There was also a significant decrease in the number of statements returned without a signature, 107 instances as opposed to 385 in the PCC elections. The total number of rejected postal envelopes fell to 0.02% as opposed to 0.07% in the PCC elections.

14. The revised procedure speeded up the process considerably and postal votes handed in with the ballot boxes at close of poll were processed and delivered to the count venue by 11.30pm.
15. **Verification and count procedure** – The verification and count was held at the Racecourse. The count layout worked well and the staff at the racecourse were very efficient and helpful at all times. The method of delivery of the ballot boxes to the count was revised and all boxes were delivered by 11pm. Postal votes handed in at the count were delivered to the Mary Woollett Centre for processing. The unused ballot papers were verified, stationery from the polling stations was sorted and securely packed and ballot boxes and postal ballot boxes were placed at the relevant count tables ready to begin the count on Friday 3 May.
16. The count began at 9am on Friday the 3rd of May 2013 and was anticipated to be completed before 4pm. In the event the result was declared at approximately 4.50 pm. Although the number of candidates, the 1st and 2nd preference procedures and the close result between the 1st and 2nd candidate contributed to the length of time the count took, errors were made that also contributed to the delay.
17. When votes for the 2 candidates going forward to the 2nd preference vote were brought to the candidates table it became apparent they contained votes for other candidates and votes for more than one candidate in the 1st preference column.
18. The 8 eliminated candidates' votes were then brought to the candidates' tables and it became apparent some bundles contained votes for other candidates and votes for more than one candidate in the 1st preference column.
19. All ballot papers were re-distributed to the count tables to check. Ballot papers that had previously been adjudicated and allowed as good votes with candidates and agents were brought in to question again.
20. A review is ongoing and the count procedure will be amended ready for the next election. This will include:-
 - Two senior counters at each count table to supervise and monitor count assistants more closely and ensure accurate sorting and counting of votes.
 - Standard instructions will be developed for seniors counters to read out to assistants and at every stage – verification, sorting, counting, checking and checking again.

- The 2 supervisors will check every count assistants 1st bundle to address any issues and will continue to undertake spot checks throughout.
- After the initial sort and count, a sort and count check will be undertaken by a different set of 2 assistants. All clips will be removed and the papers looked at again individually to identify any votes for another candidate or doubtful papers.
- A new and revised '25' slip will show the table number and the initials of the count assistants at each stage of the process.
- The area deputy returning officer will counter sign the senior counters adjudication form
- An adjudication slip will be added to allowed votes and these votes will be taken separately to the candidates table so they can be dealt with separately in the event of a recount.

21. Observers from the Electoral Commission were in attendance and gave positive feedback on the proceedings and congratulations and thanks were received for a thorough and accurate count from candidates, agents and members.

22. Performance standard returns were submitted to the Electoral Commission throughout the election, they analysed our performance and we have been notified we met the standard across all areas. The Electoral Commission report will be published in July. At the same time, information about the performance of individual local Returning Officers will be made available on their website:
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards
<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards>

The performance indicators were:-

- Planning for an election
- Administering the poll
- Polling station set-up
- Producing ballot papers, poll cards and notices
- Producing postal vote stationery
- Issuing of postal votes
- Receiving and opening postal votes
- Verifying and counting the votes
- Effective verification and count processes
- Forwarding and storage of documents
- Review of election procedures

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

23. All elections are a statutory duty and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

24. The provisions for the conduct of the Mayoral election are contained in the Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007. These regulations set detailed requirements for the conduct of the elections subject to the requirements of primary legislation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

25. The cost of the Mayoral election is met by the Council.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

File –Mayoral Election – 2 May 2013

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RETURNING OFFICER