



London Borough of Enfield

Report Title	Local Election Preparation 2026
Report to	Council
Date of Meeting	27 February 2025
Cabinet Member	N/A
Chief Executive	Ian Davis
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Ward(s) affected	All
Classification	Public Public

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval from the General Purposes Committee for changes to the election count process in the run up to the Local Election in May 2026. These recommendations are to be applied at Local Elections only. The report also provides an update to members on the European Union Citizens Voting Rights project and on performance in relation to the last election, namely the General Election held in July 2024.

Recommendations

- I. Agree to move the Local Election count from an overnight to a day count with effect from Thursday 7th May 2026. This would only apply to full Local Borough Elections in future.
- II. Agree to move the counting of the votes from Lee Valley Athletics Centre to B Block South in the Civic Centre.
- III. Note the update on the European Union Citizens Voting Rights in the UK project.
- IV. Note the performance standards review on the General Election which took place on Thursday 4 July 2024.

Background and Options

2. The Local Authority fully funds Local Borough elections and By-elections. Since the last Local Elections in May 2022, the increased cost of running a full borough election has risen by 12%. The main associated costs with running an election have been significant, particularly in areas such as the hiring of our designated count venue Lee Valley Athletics Centre and the recruitment of count staff.

There is no Grant funds provided for this type of election and therefore requires the Council to set aside funding to enable the Returning Officer to deliver these elections successfully and within the remit of Representation Peoples Act 1983 and Local Government Act 1972.

Prior to the preparations for the Local Elections in 2026, it is important that the committee is aware of the increased costs and the burden this will have on the current allocated funding from the Local Authorities' reserves.

Several Local Authorities in London have transitioned from overnight counts to daytime counts for their local elections. The primary feedback regarding this change has been centred on potential cost savings. In **Appendix A**, we have provided a cost comparison example for count staff, which illustrates the financial savings that may arise from shifting from an overnight count to a daytime count.

The current count venue, Lee Valley Athletics Centre, has been used to deliver counts since 2018. Since the takeover of the venue by the GLL, the hire costs have doubled from £11,500 to £25,000 per day. This significant increase is not sustainable against the assigned budget to run Local Borough Elections. Therefore, we are seeking an alternative venue, which would be large and secure enough to accommodate the count.

One option is to use the current vacant space area in B Block South in the Civic Centre. This area is unoccupied and would accommodate the size of a full borough count. The draft count layout for the proposed new venue can be reviewed in **Appendix B**. The hire cost for Lee Valley over 4 days would be in the region of £100k. The Council will not incur this cost if the count takes place at the Civic centre with a saving to the Council of approximately £100k. Another option would be to move venue but continue to hold the count overnight, but the savings would not be as great.

Not only will moving to a day count save money, but staff would be more refreshed, which would lead to a faster and more accurate count. An example to this was a the GLA elections in May 2024, where both Counts were delivered during the day and finished in record time.

There will be security measures put in place for all the sealed ballot boxes delivered to the Civic Centre after the close of poll on the 7 May 2026.

Preferred Option and Reasons for Preferred Option

3. The preferred option is to move the Count to the next day for a 09:00am start after polling day. Anticipated finish time for all 25 wards would be around 3pm. This would reduce the staff cost considerably. The preferred option is to also use the Civic Centre, B Block South, as an alternative count area. This would mean no hire cost, IT infrastructure already in place, plenty of parking spaces available for both Count staff, Candidate and Agents. B Block South is currently unoccupied. There

would be a vast costing of approx. £150k which would ease the pressure on allocated budget assigned for running Local Elections.

European Union Citizens Voting Rights in the UK - Project Review Update

4. The introduction of the Elections Act 2022 introduced several new rules to be implemented. One of the new rules applies to EU registered electors. What this means to EU citizens that they will no longer automatically be entitled to register, vote, or stand for election in local elections and referenda or the Mayor of London and London Assembly elections.

Two groups of EU citizens will retain their voting and candidacy rights:

- **Qualifying EU Citizens** – EU Citizens from countries with reciprocal agreements who have ‘leave to remain’ in the UK or who do not need ‘leave to remain’ in the UK will still be able to vote and stand in elections. These are currently Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain.
- **EU Citizens with Retained Rights** – EU Citizens who were living with a lawful immigration status in the UK before 31 December 2020 (the date when the UK left the EU), will also still be able to vote and stand in elections. These are currently: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden.

These changes will apply to:

- All local elections and referenda in England
- Mayor of London and London Assembly elections

These changes came into force on 7 May 2024.

When registering to vote, whether online, via post or over the phone, if you are an EU Citizen not from a qualifying country, you will be asked a ‘historical residency question’ to determine whether you have retained rights.

Those EU Citizens already on the electoral register prior to 7 May 2024 will have their eligibility reviewed as part of a one-time Eligibility Confirmation Review. This will be undertaken after May 2024 and will attempt to confirm whether EU Citizens on the electoral register have qualified or retained rights. This review may involve corresponding with EU Citizens via post, email, telephone and in-person visits.

The ECR will run until 31 January 2025 by which EU Citizens already on the register will have had their eligibility reviewed and the outcome communicated to them.

The changes will not affect citizens of the Republic of Ireland or citizens of Commonwealth nations.

In preparation for the Local Elections in 2026, the Electoral Services Team have already completed this project delivery, initially writing out to 22,274 EU registered electors in August 2024, with successfully receiving responses from 20,829 electors by the 1 December 2024. This allowed the Team to publish the Register of Electors for 2025 on time and issue removal notice letters to only 1,445 EU electors. To the

run up to the next election, the Team will continue to promote and encourage voter registration.

General Election 4 July 2024 – Performance Standards Review

- The snap General Election was held in July 2024 followed shortly after running the GLA election in May 2024. Officers began preparations from January 2024 with the knowledge that a General Election could be called at any time. The preparations made allowed the delivery to be well organised and a clear and transparent processes put in place. This has led to the successful delivery of both electoral registration and elections.

Following from the last election and in preparation for the 2026 Local Election, officers reviewed and collectively recorded in the Lesson Learnt Log a number of changes to put in place to improve the Returning Officer two performance standards areas (Training and Planning). These changes are set out below:

Performance Standard 3: Training
Improvements around delivery and training material needs to be reviewed. Some staff at polling stations, struggled to remember some of the processes to record spoil and issuing tender ballot papers.
Action
Will consult with I.Learn trainers to assist with delivering Poll Staff training as well as develop I.Learn online bitesize training courses for both internal and external appointed staff. This training course will be available all year round and will include video demo.
Performance Standard 5: Planning - Polling Stations
We currently use 15 Portacabins across the borough to deliver the poll. These temporary building are expensive to hire and install. At the last election, the total cost for all 15 temporary buildings as well as support to situate the buildings came in at £50k. Our aim is to reduce the number of temporary buildings to help reduce the cost of using portacabins as well as source another supplier of portacabins.
Action
Officers will go out to tender in January 2025 to source a cheaper supplier and will review all 15 temporary building locations to seek alternative permanent premises.
Performance Standard 5: Planning – Presiding Officer Paperwork
Presiding Officers do have to complete a large amount of paperwork, which can lead to delays in leaving the polling stations to return the ballot box to the count venue. One way to reduce the time it takes would be to introduce a tablet device which would not only allow the Presiding Officers to complete the necessary checks online but also mark of voters who have been issued with a ballot paper.
Action
Officers will explore the options for moving towards a digital process to reduce staff and printing costs and speed up the process.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

- None.

Financial Implications

7. The Local Authority will directly fund Elections Budget for the Local Elections 2026. There will be no Elections Grant allowance provided by the Cabinet Office Elections Claim Unit to cover the expenses as provided for at the Parliamentary and the London GLA elections.

The London Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators produce the Election scale of fees. These scales of fees have been considered and endorsed by the London Elections Management Board of the AEA and the Elections Claim Unit at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. London boroughs were first empowered to fix their own scales of election fees in 1974. It has been the practice of London Councils and its predecessor bodies to receive a report and commend a London-wide scale of fees for adoption by individual boroughs.

It is proposed that the scale should continue to form basis for fees and expenses for referendums under Local Government Act 2000 and any subsequent London borough mayoral elections.

The Council has adopted the London Agreed scale of Fees in line with the other 31 boroughs within London. The scale of fees is reviewed every two years and where necessary a 2 per cent fee increase is applied to roles for Polling Day and the Count, including the Returning Officer fee.

The current allocated budget reserve for running the 2026 Local Elections is approximately £450.5k. This amount will be further reduced following the recent cost of running the Local Jubilee By-Election which was held in November 2024 and any further by-elections that may be held before November 2025.

Although the cost of running the last local election in 2022 was £480k the more recent General Election is estimated to be in the region of £900k (*please note these figures are still being finalised as we are still awaiting expenditure costs from Haringey Electoral Services team for the management of the four take on cross boundary wards*), which is significantly more than the allocated budget. The reason for this increase is:

- Count Venue Hire – Since the takeover of Lee Valley Athletics Centre by the GLL. Exclusive hire cost of the venue has doubled.
- Postage – This is a cost we must absorb due to postal pack priority mailing and Royal Mail sweeps.
- Staff overnight count fee costs.
- Temporary Buildings – Associated costs to use a portacabin as a polling station.

The proposals in this report will lead to a saving of approximately £150k and further savings might be found from going out to tender on selected suppliers, the proposed review of temporary polling stations and the use of tablet devices by Polling Staff

during polling hours. A bid for additional budget of £250k has already been made and was approved by the Chief Financial Officer in 2023.

However, following from the recent spend for the General Election in July 2024, we are projecting a possible shortfall in the current budget allocated to run the 2026 Local Elections. This is primarily due to increase cost in the primary areas listed above and the additional cost of delivering a Local By-Election(s) during the 4-year period between each full borough Local Election. By-Elections are funded by the allocated Local Election reserve funds.

In preparation for the 2026 Local Elections, the cost saving review will continue, and a separate mid-year review report will be produced to highlight and address any remaining anticipated shortfall in the cost of delivering the next scheduled election.

Legal Implications

8. Where applicable, all relevant legal matters are addressed in the body of the report.

Equalities Implications

9. EQIA initial assessment has been completed and indicates that there are no adverse equality implications arising from these proposals.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Staff Cost Comparisons

Appendix B - Alternative Count Layout – B Block South Civic Centre