

London Borough of Enfield

Council

Meeting Date: 26 January 2022

Subject: Elections - Review

Cabinet Member: Not applicable

Monitoring Officer: Jeremy Chambers, Director of Law & Governance

Key Decision: Not Applicable

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the Local Election pre-planning and Electoral Registration activities.

Proposal(s)

2. The Council is asked to:
 - Review current Election pre-planning tasks;
 - Note the Outreach and Electoral Registration activities.

Reason for Proposal(s)

3. The next scheduled elections in 2022 is the Local Council Elections. This is due to take place on Thursday 5 May. Electoral Services has already commenced pre-planning for the Local Elections. This is to ensure the Local Elections are conducted in accordance with the Electoral Commission Guidance and in line with the Returning Officers Performance Standards.

Relevance to the Council Plan

4. The scheduled Local Council Elections on the 5 May 2022 will impact the Enfield Council Plan between the 23 March until Friday 6 May, due to the Purdah period.

Background

5. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for Electoral Services. The framework has been developed around key outcomes from the perspective of voters and those who want to stand for election, and, whether the Returning Officer are taking the necessary steps to deliver the following outcomes:
 - Performance 1: Voters can vote easily and know that the vote will be counted in the intended way;
 - Performance 2: It is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they must do to comply with these rules;
 - Performance 3: The co-ordination and management of the polls.

6. To achieve the outcome set out in 'Performance Standard 1', Electoral Services has developed and will implement a robust project planning process. This will include:
 - Evaluating the planning for and delivery of previous polls, identifying lessons learnt and updating plans as required;
 - To produce a project planning document that will be kept under review, and;
 - To produce a Risk Register and update Business Continuity arrangements to be kept under review during the election period.

7. The Returning Officer is also the Electoral Registration Officer. The ERO is responsible for compiling the register of electors. In accordance with Section 52 and 54 Representation of the People Act 1983, the Local Authority must provide the resources needed to discharge the EROs statutory functions. Any expenses properly incurred by the ERO in performance of their functions, must be paid by the Local Authority.

8. This report was taken to General Purposes Committee on the 13 January 202 for their consideration.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. In relation to the 1 December 2021 to 1 December 2022 period, the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer will need to consider the following:
 - Revised publication of the Electoral Register on the new ward and polling district boundaries;

- Household Notification Letters due to be despatched in January 2022 including information to residents on the new wards and new list of polling stations;
- Local Council Election scheduled on the 5 May 2022;
- Annual Canvass scheduled between July – November 2022.

Preliminary review

10. Preliminary reviews have already been undertaken and agreed by the General Purpose Committee on 17 November 2021. There will be no further change to any of the agreed polling places, unless the current agreed venue(s) are no longer available or accessible, prior to the scheduled Local Elections in May 2022.

Formal review process

11. The Electoral Commission's guidance on 'Planning for an Election', provides detailed requirements to plan effectively for an election, including preparing a project plan and risk register log, which is to be kept under regular review and used to monitor progress on set tasks and deliverables.

In accordance with the guidance, when compiling a plan together, the Returning Officer must consider the following:

- Project Team and appointed (DRO) Deputy Returning Officers
- Staffing
 - Polling Station roles
 - The Count roles
 - Miscellaneous roles
 - Electoral Services office resources
- Training
 - For all over the above roles
- Venues and Accommodation
 - Polling
 - Count
 - Training and Postal Vote Opening
- Managing Contractors and supplier
 - Elections printers
 - Service hire providers
- Maintaining an Integrity Plan for both Registration and Elections

- Document shared with the SPOC for Enfield
- Communication
 - Raising awareness
 - Information to electors
 - Media Liaison

Election Pre-Planning Activities

12. The Project Board Team has already been established and the first meeting commenced in September 2021. Tasks already completed and scheduled to be completed are as follows:

Month	Activity
Sept 2021	Project Board Team established
Sept 2021	Project Plan and Risk Register Log created
Sept 2021	Election Staff requirement Campaign
Oct 2021	Venue and accommodations agreed and confirmed including layout plans
Oct 2021	Key senior staff roles for the Count and Postal Vote Opening session agreed
Nov 2021	External Services/Suppliers booked
Nov 2021	Training Schedule reviewed and agreed
Nov 2021	Polling and Count equipment ordered
Dec 2021	Mock Election Run through – Review Count processes
Dec 2021	Electoral Services webpage updated – Wards and Revised Polling Scheme
Dec 2021	Generated projected electorate for May 2022 against the new wards and polling districts
8 Dec 2021	Create Live Election – date scheduled
15 Dec 2021	Polling Venue contracts despatch - date scheduled
15 Dec 2021	Staff availability letters despatch - date scheduled

To date the project planning for the Local Elections are ahead of schedule. This was to ensure that the lessons learnt listed from the previous election and areas requiring improving will be implemented prior to the start of the election period, which will commence from 23 March 2022.

Outreach

13. Electoral Services has recently undertaken a postal vote campaign to encourage more electors to become postal voters. The first campaign began in January 2021 when Household Notification Letters were sent to all households within the borough along with a postal vote application form.

The up take on completed applications reached a staggering 15,144 applications. This led to a rise of registered postal voters from 25,603 to 40,747, prior to the start of the GLA election period. Due to this successful postal vote campaign we began another postal vote campaign on the 23 August with over 180,000 personalised postal vote applications despatched to all 'In-person' voters to encourage as many electors to apply to vote by post. Previously, registered postal votes made up 18% of the electorate in July 2021, which was just over 40,000 postal voters.

Since August we have received another positive response, resulting from the campaign, with us reaching just over 12,000 new applications. The current postal votes to date are now 53,500 which is approx. 25% of the electorate. Electoral Services will be continuing to promote voter and postal registration to the run up to the Local Elections in May 2022.

Electoral Registration

14. Electoral Services will be publishing the revised Register of Electors on 1 December and will commence distributing from Monday 6 December to all internal and external stakeholders who are entitled to receive the register in accordance with Representation of the People Regulations 2001. The registers will be accompanied with an information letter and a Street Index for reference on the new wards and polling districts. The letter will set out how the registers may be used and the penalty for misuse.

Electoral Services will also be despatching Household Notification Letters from the week commencing the 10 January 2022. This letter will contain information as to those registered to vote including voting method. Electors will have an opportunity to make amendments if there are any changes. This process is necessary to ensure that the register is as accurate as possible prior to generating poll cards for the Local Elections 2022.

The Household Notification Letters will also include a leaflet to inform residents on where to find more information, on the new wards and the revised polling place scheme, which can be found under our Electoral Services webpage. There will be a post code search function on the webpage, which will allow residents to find their assigned polling place. This function is scheduled to be live in February 2022. In the meantime, there will be an interactive map provide all the necessary information the elector needs

to know. The new wards and polling districts will come into effect on the 5 May 2022.

Safeguarding Implications

15. None

Public Health Implications

16. None

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

17. Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place, for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'. The Electoral Commission guidance (refer to Appendix A) provides further information regarding considering accessibility issues.

The risk assessment for each of the current polling places have already been undertaken this year. All current polling places are DDA compliant.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

18. None

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

19. It is important the Risk Register log and a separate Integrity Plan must be regularly reviewed and updated where required to ensure all anticipated risks has a mitigated action assigned to it. Failure to have robust planning and decision-making processes may lead to reputational risk, an Election Petition or RO and ERO failing to meet their performance standard set out by the Electoral Commission.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

20. None

Financial Implications

21. Elections Budget for the Local Elections 2022 will be directly funded by the Local Authority. We do not receive any MRA allowance to cover the expenses as provided for at Parliamentary, European and the London Mayoral/GLA elections. We anticipate an overspend based on Project estimates. The estimates consist of recent quotes and election scale of fees. A request for additional funding has been made and agreed to cover this shortfall.

The Election scale of fees are produced by the London Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators. These scales of fees have been considered and endorsed by the London Elections Management Board of the AEA. 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.

Enfield Electoral Services have 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.

Legal Implications

22. All relevant legal matters are addressed in the body of the report.

Workforce Implications

23. Additional resources will be allocated to the Electoral Services Team to deal with additional tasks from February 2022.

Property Implications

24. None

Other Implications

25. None

Options Considered

26. None

Conclusions

27. The Returning Officers robust project planning is on schedule along with the statutory functions of the Electoral Registration Officer. Compliance with the Electoral Commission guidance minimises the risk of Electoral Fraud and possible Election petitions.

Report Author: Lee-Marie Grant (Head of Electoral Services)

Date of report: 18 January 2021

Appendices

- APPENDIX A