

## CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

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REPORT OF: Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer

TO: Civic Affairs Committee

25/6/2014

WARDS: None directly affected

### **ELECTIONS MAY 2014 (REVIEW) AND UPDATE ON INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

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#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to review elections held on 22 May 2014 and update on the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee notes the issues raised in the report, and to give feedback on any matters concerning the running of the elections which it wishes the Returning Officer to consider further in planning and running future elections.

#### **3. ELECTIONS 2014**

##### **Project planning**

3.1 2014 was a combined European Parliamentary and city council election year (there was an additional city council by-election held on the same day in Petersfield ward). The Regional Returning Officer (RRO) covering the East of England for the European Parliamentary elections was based in Chelmsford and issued some Directions which had to be followed such as the ballot paper template. Most of the decisions for arranging the European Parliamentary election were left to Local Returning Officers (LRO) who know what works best in their jurisdiction.

3.2 An Election Project Team, chaired by the Electoral Services Manager, and comprising officers from across the Council was tasked with leading on the known service requirements to run a

successful election. This year it met twice in the run up to the elections and dealt with operational issues. An Election Steering Group, chaired by the Local Returning Officer met at least monthly from January. Its role was to monitor progress against the project plan, statutory electoral timetables and consider any ad-hoc matters.

### **Party Agents and potential candidates briefing**

- 3.3 On 20 February, the local party agents and potential candidates were briefed on the preparations required and the electoral timetable.

### **Communication**

- 3.4 The Regional Returning Officer in Chelmsford led on the European Parliamentary elections. There were updates to the City Council website, with prominence given to electoral news on the homepage and links to Chelmsford's website. Press releases notifying the media of key deadlines and a media information pack were produced.

### **Correspondence**

- 3.5 The Customer Service Centre received 824 telephone calls during the four weeks to polling day (compared to 569 over the same period in 2013). A further 701 were received directly into the Electoral Services office. The Electoral Services office received 654 election related e-mails this year, compared with 525 in 2013.

### **Training**

- 3.6 The Returning Officer required every person working at a polling station to receive training – if they did not attend the training they would not be employed. Three training sessions for Presiding Officers and four sessions for poll clerks were held. Training information was provided by the Electoral Commission and adapted to local circumstances with reference to local case studies from previous elections as learning points.

### **Issue of postal votes**

- 3.7 Postal vote packs were issued in-house and 100% were handed over to Royal Mail for delivery on Friday 9 May, two days after the application deadline. The total number of postal vote packs issued

was 11,825. The total number re-issued because of being spoilt, lost or not received was 13, compared to 4 in 2013.

### **Opening of postal votes**

- 3.8 Postal votes were not opened daily as the volumes returned did not require it. 76.3% of postal votes were returned for inclusion in the count (68.7% in 2013). Signature and date of birth checking was carried out for 100% of returned postal votes and 2.3% were rejected due to either an invalid or missing signature/date of birth. (3.6% in 2013).

### **Polling stations**

- 3.10 There were four different polling station locations from 2013. In King's Hedges, Arbury Community Centre was once again available for our use. In Market, one of the polling stations in Fisher Hall was relocated to St. Columba's Church Hall, as the space in Fisher Hall is no longer appropriate for two polling stations to operate effectively. In Newnham, Trinity Old Field Pavillion was used for the first time. In Romsey, because of the third polling district created at the 2013 polling district review, a portacabin was used as a temporary solution. It is expected that the 3C's Church (at Coldham's Lane roundabout) rebuilding programme will be completed for the 2015 elections.
- 3.11 Overall there were 47 stations, with 47 Presiding Officers and 122 poll clerks.

### **Inspectors**

- 3.12 Four Polling Station Inspectors were responsible for checking all the polling stations at least twice during the course of the day. This was in addition to the Returning Officer visiting all polling stations.

### **The Count**

- 3.13 Staffing was six counters per ward and as last year, the Small Hall was used to count five of the 14 wards, with a Deputy Returning Officer overseeing proceedings.
- 3.14 Unlike both 2013 and 2012, there were two elections to verify and one election to count overnight. For May 2015 and 2016, there will also be combined elections which will extend the time it takes to

complete the count considerably and further consideration will need to be given to the best arrangements for dealing with this.

## **Complaints**

- 3.15 Four EU residents have complained that they could not vote in the European Parliamentary election despite voting in the local election (one of who was registered but believed they were not). One elector complained about the distance from his home to the polling station.

## **4. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION (IER)**

- 4.1 IER went live on 10 June and when a resident applies to register, they now need to provide their date of birth and national insurance number in addition to name, address and nationality. For those electors on the current Register, they will be written to individually in mid-July advising whether they have transferred successfully under IER transition or that we need further information from them. A nationwide publicity campaign by the Electoral Commission begins on 3 July. We will be providing a briefing on IER for members soon.

## **5. CONSULTATIONS**

- 5.1 Local Party Agents have been asked for their feedback on the election and this will be reported to Committee at the meeting. All councillors have been sent a copy of this report and any feedback will be reported .

## **6 IMPLICATIONS**

- (a) **Financial Implications** - none
- (b) **Staffing Implications** - none
- (c) **Equal Opportunities Implications** – there will be an equality impact assessment of any new proposed polling station prior to it being confirmed.
- (d) **Environmental Implications** - none
- (e) **Community Safety** - none

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** There were no background papers.

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