

Item

REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

-3 MAY 2018



To:

Civic Affairs Committee 25/07/18

Report by:

Returning Officer (Chief Executive), Antoinette Jackson

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Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the City Council elections held on 3 May 2018.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes this report and provides feedback to the Returning Officer on issues it would like to be considered in the management of future polls.

3. Background

- 3.1. On 3 May 2018, elections were held for 14 City Council seats with a city council by-election also in East Chesterton. This was the first year that the city council ran an uncombined election in May since 2013.

- 3.2 At all elections, the Returning Officer appoints deputies with full powers to ensure that all legal aspects of the polls are covered and to allow them to act in the event the Returning Officer becomes unavailable. The Head of Corporate Strategy and the Democratic Services Manager were appointed as deputies for this election. Additionally, a deputy is appointed to run the postal vote opening process.
- 3.8 An Election Steering Group is chaired by the Returning Officer and attended by the deputies and relevant election staff. The Election Steering Group's remit is to review progress against the project plan and advise the Returning Officer on matters arising.
- 3.9 The Electoral Services team was supported by officers from across the authority who have specific roles within their service area, for example; Customer Services, 3CICT and the Facilities team.
- 3.10 Externally, communication is also maintained with the Police, Royal Mail, election printer and other relevant parties in order to ensure successful delivery of the poll.

Candidates and Agents

- 3.11 Communication with agents was regular and a face to face briefing was held on 6 April. Feedback had been requested and overall it was very positive. The following points were made from one agent on their experience:
- (i) earlier advice on polling station locations would be helpful
 - (ii) two occasions of polling staff not doing as they should
 - First, telling someone they could not vote without a polling card (the elector argued the point and was allowed to vote, as they rightly should be);
 - Secondly , not passing on turnout figures.
 - (iii) agents and presiding officers should have something in writing so they have an identical understanding of what is and isn't allowed
We will look at following these points up for next year.

Promotional Activity

- 4.2 Promotional/proactive registration activity included:

- website & social media channels films
- contact by e-mails to all students via the communications officer at Anglia Ruskin University and accommodation officers at each University of Cambridge College
- letters to students at ARU prior to term ending
- bicycle seat covers promoting registration placed on bikes throughout the city centre
- promotional banner on the Guildhall balcony for the 2 weeks prior to registration deadline,
- Cam Radio feature,
- two contact days at Anglia Ruskin University,
- empty property notification cards (a pink postcard sent to each property which had no persons registered).

Correspondence

4.4 Contact from customers was less than the previous two years. The chart below compares contact levels for the five weeks leading up to, and including, polling day against previous polls.

Contact Method	3 May 2018 City	4 May 2017 County and Combined Authority	5 May 2016 City and PCC
E-mails	976	1,730	1,583
Telephone contact to Customer Service Centre	710	1,173	955

4.5 The Council provided polling station data to Democracy Club which is a non-partisan organisation that collects data from various local authorities to create an easy postcode look-up tool for electors to find information about elections taking place in their area, candidates and polling station locations.

- 4.6 90% of local authorities provided Democracy Club with data , Nationally, there were over 500,000 postcode look-ups with 2,230 postcode look-ups for the City Council elections, so we intend to use this again.

Training

- 4.5 Every person working at a polling station was required to receive training – if they did not attend the training, they were not employed. Training was developed locally based on previous programmes and using local experience as learning points. Five face-to-face training sessions were delivered and on-line training sessions were available only to selected experienced polling station staff.

Voter Registration

- 4.6 For the May polls, a total of 3,732 electors were added to the register in advance of the poll.
- 4.7 A total of 91,155 electors (up from 87,020 in May 2017) were eligible to vote in Cambridge on 3 May.

Absent Voting

- 4.8 Postal vote packs were issued in-house. A total of 12,229 (13.4%) electors registered for a postal vote, 8 fewer than May 2017 . The total number re-issued due to being reported as lost or not-received was 7, in contrast to 33 at the May 2017 polls.
- 4.9 The vast majority of postal votes are issued as soon as possible after the deadline for applications, which was 18 April and were handed to Royal Mail on 20 April.
- 4.10 Current legislation requires that electors added to the register at the final deadline and who have also made an application for a postal vote, must wait until they are included on the register before the postal vote can be issued. Therefore these elector's postal packs were issued on 27 April, the date of the final update to the register before 3 May. 43 postal votes were included in the last issue.
- 4.11 Six postal vote opening sessions were conducted with 8,525 (69.7%) postal votes returned for inclusion in the count (70.2% in May 2017). Signature and date of birth checking was carried out on all returned postal votes, and the following numbers were rejected:

- 71 (0.8%) were rejected because either the date of birth and/or signature was absent from the security statement.
- 72 (0.8%) were rejected due to either an invalid signature and/or date of birth (0.6% in 2017); these personal identifiers on the security statement did not match the original postal vote application.
- 20 (0.2%) were rejected due to either the ballot paper or security statement not being returned in the envelope.

A total of 143 (1.7%) postal votes were rejected, compared to 2.0% at the May 2017 combined polls.

4.12 There were 169 electors who voted by proxy and 6 emergency proxies were issued.

Polling Stations

4.13 There were 50 polling stations, staffed by 50 Presiding Officers and 110 poll clerks. Two different polling station sites were required as Milton Road Library was unavailable (NAB polling district was at Polonia Club on Chesterton Hall Crescent and NDG polling district at Arbury Court Library). We received no reports of complaints.

4.16 There were no reported queues at polling stations during the day.

4.17 Four polling station Inspectors were responsible for overseeing station progress and visited each station at least twice during the course of the day. This was in addition to the Returning Officer visiting all polling stations.

The Count

4.21 We had six counters per Ward at the count with both the large and small halls in use. As it was a single election, verification was completed by midnight. Two wards required re-counts. All wards were declared by 03:12.

Complaints

4.24 A total of four complaints were received during the preparation of the election, on polling day and any fall-out. One from an agent about the nomination process, as this is out of the Returning Officer's control it was answered by the Electoral Commission. One was about the non-delivery of a proxy vote (which was resolved to the elector's satisfaction). The third was from an elector about the conduct of a party

worker outside a polling station. The final complaint was about an elector not receiving a poll card. There was no follow up required once the initial complaint was responded to.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

(b) Staffing Implications

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

(d) Environmental Implications

(e) Procurement Implications

(f) Community Safety Implications

None

6. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

8. Queries

If you have a query on the report please contact Gary Clift, Democratic Services Manager, tel: 01223 - 457011, email: gary.clift@cambridge.gov.uk.