

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

30 August 2007

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION/COUNCIL DECISION

Corporate and Social Inclusion - Lead Cabinet Member - Councillor Laing

REVIEW OF ELECTIONS 2007

1. Summary

In view of members' wishes to become much more informed about the preparations for and feedback from elections, this report provides specific details about the implementation of the recommendations from the review of the 2005 elections and the review which has taken place concerning the 2007 elections

2. Recommendation

Cabinet note the report and endorse the recommendations contained in appendix 2

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To provide members with specific details about the implementation of the recommendations from the review of the 2005 elections and the review which has taken place concerning the 2007 elections.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same

purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;

- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

In view of members' wishes to become much more informed about the preparations for and feedback from elections, this report provides specific details about the implementation of the recommendations from the review of the 2005 elections and the review which has taken place concerning the 2007 elections

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet note the report and endorse the recommendations contained in **Appendix 2**

DETAIL

1. Following the Parliamentary General Election and Local Government Elections held in 2005, a review was undertaken which resulted in some twenty four recommendations for improvement across all areas of election management and administration. Members expressed a clear wish to become much more informed about the detailed preparations for and feedback from future elections and what follows is an extensive report regarding the implementation of the recommendations from the 2005 elections review and the review concerning the most recent elections in 2007.
2. Implementation of these recommendations commenced in September 2005 led by the Head of Democratic Services (Deputy RO) and supported by the Returning Officer and Team Leader for Electoral Community Engagement and Civic services (Deputy RO).

A summary of progress follows with full details of the implementation illustrated in **Appendix 1**.

Dedicated Team

In order to address the significant capacity and skills shortage experienced during the 2005 Election the Elections Team has been restructured and a Team Leader and Election Assistant have been appointed. A significant programme of training has taken place including Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) professional training for the assistants post, accompanied by on the job training for all team members supplemented by regional AEA / Electoral Commission (EC) training as appropriate.

Key Business Processes

A project management approach to the Election was implemented which allowed us to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the key business processes involved in the

delivery. All processes were benchmarked with other authorities both nationally, regionally and sub-regionally to enable the adoption of best practice during this years Election. One example of this was the preparation of the pre-poll information which was used to raise the awareness of the postal vote option and delivered early to encourage applications before closure.

Staffing / Training

Corporate commitment was invaluable in recruiting the majority of the temporary election staff from within SBC. The Recruitment Team went out to the people and this assisted in generating interest and also raising awareness of what an election is. We now have a temporary staff register which we will update annually in January via postmaster; this will also encourage new members of staff to apply for future election duties.

Practical training was provided to supplement the chalk and talk sessions provided for Postal Vote Officers, Presiding Officer, Poll Clerks, Ward Supervisors, and Count Supervisors. This continued on Election Day with on the job training being delivered by Ward Supervisors encouraging Presiding Officers to complete hourly record statistics that promote the correct completion of ballot papers accounts at the close of poll. We also issued specific packing up instructions to ensure the correct documents went in the correct envelopes/sacks and could be retrieved easily if necessary. On the whole this was successful. Feedback has indicated that people would like training sessions to split for those staff that are experienced and non-experienced which we will look to achieve for the next Election.

Friday Count

Feedback received from Members and officers to the holding of the Count on the Friday was positive and was a critical element in the success of this Election. Postal Vote opening did not conclude until 1.30am on the Friday Morning at the Central Library and this would have caused significant problems in conducting the Count on the Thursday at the close of poll.

The processing for conducting the count worked well and the Grass Skirt method was well received by candidates and counting assistants. The process will be refined further to enable us to speed up the counting process by re-examining the count order, use of space within the Pavilion/use of alternative accommodation and the use of technology.

IT / Postal Votes

Significant input from both SBC IT and Express software systems enabled us to completely re-engineer the postal voting process successfully. Implementation of software updates were received on a daily basis right up to opening and installation of the new hardware and getting the system to work end to end was a long and difficult process. Without the support of ICT and Express this process would have clearly suffered and have had a negative impact on the overall Election. An onerous task with 51hours of opening to process approximately 23,000 votes. A re-examination of the process is recommended in this report for the next election.

Election Equipment

A housekeeping exercise was undertaken and all records and equipment were inspected and matched against requirements for the 2007 election. Procurement of disabled polling booths was difficult due to aluminium shortages and we had to compromise and use cardboard booths. However we expect delivery of the aluminium booths within the month to replenish our stocks. We now have an inventory of all election equipment and will review this on an annual basis.

Premises

A full review of polling stations commenced in June of 2006 with the aim of removing the need to use mobile stations however we still had to use 21 mobile units which are not user

friendly and prove difficult to locate and staff. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty for all Polling District Places and Stations to be reviewed by the end of 2007. One of the aims of the Polling District Places and Stations review is to ensure so far is reasonable and practicable that polling places are accessible and we will be consulting with the Disability Panel during the course of the review. This is an area where we will need Corporate support if we are to improve upon the use of mobiles and ensure we are providing accessible places to vote.

Suppliers

We experienced problems with the main supplier of our printing and packing service due to their sub-contractor in the North east withdrawing their service just before the election. Through adapting the project and senior resources being applied we were however able to ensure that there was no detrimental affect on the Election. As a result Postal Ballot papers were prepared in London when originally they should have been prepared in Jarrow however we managed to get them delivered before the date when replacements (eg for non-receipt) had to be issued which could have created a problem for electors and a resource issue for the core Election Team.

3. The Electoral Administration Act complicated preparation and planning for the 2007 Elections due to changes around postal voting and statutory deadlines. The regulations all came into effect on 1 January 2007 and applied to all elections on 3 May 2007. These changes included, amongst other things:
 - All postal voters and postal proxies have to provide personal identifiers
 - Verification of personal identifiers on postal voting statements at opening sessions
 - Creation of a marked postal voters list
 - Polling hours are now 7am to 10pm
 - Applications to register to vote for the election can be made up to 11 days before the poll
 - Requests for a new postal vote can be made up to 11 days before the poll
 - Requests for a new proxy vote can be made up to 6 days before the poll
 - Replacements for lost or spoilt postal ballots is now 5pm on polling day
4. A review of the revised Election management and administration arrangements commenced immediately following this years election. Views were sought on all areas including registration; pre-poll; postal voting; data management; publicity/engagement; communication; staffing; training; polling stations and the Count. We have received many helpful comments to inform this review via Postmaster message service, direct mail to Members, focus groups and the commendations comments and complaints system.
5. Overall there was a very positive response; many commendations were received and only two complaints. However we have analysed the feedback to illustrate what went well and areas for improvement, the information is attached as **Appendix 2**.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

A duty to comply with the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

RISK ASSESSMENT

A project plan and risk log will be developed to implement the above recommendations thereby mitigating the risks involved in relation to the administration and management of the electoral process.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

Liveability

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

The implementation of revised arrangements will be consulted upon with CMT, Cabinet and Council.

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Background Papers

CMT report

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

All

Property

N/A

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS 2005

Recommendation		Progress 2007
1.	In addition to a Head of Democratic Services, an Elections Administrator dedicated to the review, improvement and provision of elections administration and support be appointed as a matter of urgency.	Achieved May 2006
2.	The capacity of the core election team to fulfil the key elections administration tasks be reviewed and any shortfall in capacity and any training needs be identified.	Appointment of Election Assistant and full training provided
3.	A review be undertaken within the next twelve months of potential temporary support available at election time, such a review to encompass both internal and external sources.	Full recruitment exercise undertaken and majority of staff involved in the 2007 Election were SBC employees
4.	Subject but without prejudice to recommendation 2, an appropriate training programme for the core election team be developed and implemented over the course of the next two years, such programme to include specific training on the use of the Express elections administration software by relevant members of the team.	Achieved in part and will continue into 07/08 with specific data management / report extraction training on Express
5.	In addition, the potential for utilising the experience and expertise of IT staff in connection with the election process, particularly the operation of the Express Count module, be explored.	IT staff assisted in the implementation of the new postal vote verification software. Count module operated by Elections team
6.	Key processes for improvement be identified and reviewed within the next twelve months, such reviews to include appropriate benchmarking with other Local Authorities.	Comprehensive benchmarking of all key elections processes was undertaken by HoS and Team Leader; this resulted in significant changes to the management of the Election.
7.	An agreed procurement schedule be drawn up in consultation with appropriate Council services and Tristar Homes regarding election services and supplies which can be provided in-house.	Excellent communication with DLO regarding polling station services
8.	A review of polling stations be commenced, taking into account the feedback from the Parliamentary and Local Government elections, with a view to finalising a list for the 2007 elections by October 2006, the review to include location, accessibility, use of mobiles and cost.	Comprehensive review was undertaken of polling stations however the outcome was disappointing in that we failed to remove the need to use mobile stations. This will need to be addressed in this years review of Polling Districts Places and Stations if we

		are to meet the disability requirements fully.
9.	The Procurement options for poll card printing be explored in good time for the 2007 elections in order to identify potential suppliers, analysing costs, benefits, client feedback etc.	Printing of pre-poll information was brought forward and as a result we were able to raise awareness of the ability to vote by post. ERS were the preferred supplier identified through benchmarking previous year performance.
10.	The procurement options for the printing, packing and delivery of postal ballot papers for the next elections be explored further, including the potential for the in-house filling of ballot packs.	ERS were the preferred supplier identified through benchmarking previous year performance and speaking to our software supplier. However due to sub-contracting problems we experienced major problems with the production of our postal ballot packs which meant additional resource at a senior level being required to ensure the project delivered i.e. ballot packs delivered prior to the official date for replacement.
11.	The postal vote procedures employed at the Parliamentary and Local Government elections be reviewed in light of the experience of those elections and the outcome of the Electoral Commission's "Securing the Vote" report and the recommendations and of any related electoral legislation.	Established new postal vote process which worked well and will be improved upon for next time.
12.	All election equipment (located at Phoenix Sidings or elsewhere) be inspected, and where necessary tested, and an inventory be drawn up and maintained at least 6 months in advance of the 2007 elections, identifying any required replacements, repairs or additional equipment needed.	Achieved. Disabled screens procured although cardboard used due to aluminium shortage.
13.	A standing list of experienced/well-trained Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks be established for the purposes of the next elections.	Temporary staff register in place. Postmaster message proposed every January asking people to update their details with us and encouraging others who haven't already worked on an election to apply
14.	A rolling programme of training commencing as soon as possible be developed for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks in readiness for the 2007 elections.	Established although delivered later than we would have liked due to late arrival of the guidance of new regulations

15.	Election helpdesk arrangements be reviewed and agreed for the purposes of the 2007 elections.	Hunt group operation established and all operators trained. Feedback indicates that this worked well.
16.	A review be undertaken of the ballot box and sack(s) delivery arrangements for future elections, including the procedure and resources for receiving and checking ballot boxes and sack(s) contents.	Process successfully re-engineered. Delivery was moved to front of building reception teams taking delivery and teams running boxes and sacks up to main and side halls meant a quick drop off. Officers in the halls were then able to organise the boxes into order for counting purposes.
17.	The training for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks referred to at recommendation 14, should include specific advice and guidance regarding the statutory requirements relating to the contents of the sack(s).	Packing instructions were issued that stated specifically what goes in what envelope and this was covered both at training and on the day by ward supervisors
18.	A review be undertaken of the staffing resources required to ensure an efficient and effective process for checking ballot paper accounts and for verifying and counting returns from Counting Teams/Supervisors, with the 2007 local government and parish elections specifically in mind.	Hourly record sheets meant that POs had plenty of practice during election day at compiling these accounts and hence we experienced very few incorrect BP accounts (a completely different experience to 2005). Specific training for Count supervisors also helped deliver this smoothly.
19.	In the event of future combined polls consideration be given to using a separate ballot box for each set of ballot papers.	Implemented
20.	The resources required for:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postal vote opening, verifying and matching at the Count; and for • supervising the work of Counting Assistants be reviewed. 	Additional resources will be required in the future to speed up postal vote opening, processing and validating. More training to be given by Count Supervisors to counting assistants next time
21.	A training programme be established and implemented for Count Supervisors.	Implemented
22.	For combined polls, including the District and Parish elections in 2007, the timing of the commencement of the Count for the second of the elections be carefully considered, together with the potential for a separate team of Counting Assistants for each election.	Friday Count worked well and has received positive feedback. This is essential given the postal vote process. Count order was

		established and agreed prior to the election and this order will be reviewed given feedback from 07 Election
23.	The numbers, experience and capabilities of required Counting Assistants be reviewed, in order to ensure that a pool of appropriate individuals is established well in advance of the elections.	Whilst numbers and experience were reviewed and taken into account we did receive comments that some assistants were faster than others.
24.	The use of split sites be considered for the next parliamentary election.	Accommodation continues to be a problem however warehouse sites have been identified in the Borough as potentials for next time depending on availability. Further work with architects to determine if they can design the count differently and accommodate more counting teams will go ahead during 07/08

What Went Well	Areas for Improvement
<p><u>Security</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible security at high risk Stations eg Lawson Street • Liaison and support from Police - Postal Votes, Election Day and Count 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No communication to inform Returning Officer that Pavilion security had been sub-contracted on Election Day.
<p>Recommendation -</p> <p>1. Ensure security services are not sub-contracted without adequate prior notice to and approval of Returning Officer.</p>	
<p><u>Count</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of comments were received indicating the Election Count had gone well including:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much better than previous years - Grass skirts - very good visible process - Reviewing figures worked well with grass skirts - Election generally much more efficient - Count much better - Boxes to Count excellent - no need to carry up and speedy drop off - Friday Count much better - Very good Friday Count - Pairing of Supervisors who already know and work together worked well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results logging and declaration results requires extra resource • Hot in Hall - fans to be considered • Refreshments required for count staff - water coolers and snacks • Excel spreadsheet to be developed for count summary sheets • More calculators, pencils etc • More space for supervisors • More Block votes to speed up count process • More imaginative use of space • Other venues including private to be considered • Length of Count - consider use of technology and space • Members would like one person in centre where adding up is done – transparency • Criteria for count order meant counting a large parish at the end of the count
<p>Recommendations -</p> <p>2. Double resource required to log and declare results at the Count.</p> <p>3. Water coolers and snacks to be made available to staff at the Count.</p> <p>4. Laptops to be used for calculating votes summary.</p> <p>5. Further work with Architects to establish if we can accommodate more Counting Teams.</p> <p>6. Examine ways of speeding up the count process and making it more transparent e.g. more block votes, use of technology reconsider criteria for establishing count order following feedback from 2007 Election.</p>	

<u>What Went Well</u>	Areas for Improvement
<u>Registration</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher registration rate - publicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates reported that some people were not on the Register of Electors • 627 registrations were received between the 10th March and the 18th April prior to cut off 11 day deadline
Recommendation - 7. Continue to deploy comprehensive publicity and engagement activity to encourage electoral registration/voting.	
<u>Polling Stations</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members requesting schools be used by booking 4 years in advance with support of CESC. • Ward Supervisors very helpful • Corresponding Number List (CNL) - no problems reported to Presiding Officers/Poll Clerks • Election day packing up instructions for Presiding Officers - good • High turnout at certain Stations eg Albany - could be due to shopping parade location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove any information in Station relating to existing Councillors - Salters Lane Community Centre • Ensure all staff are aware of who can and cannot come into the Stations • Polling Districts in Village Ward mean Polling Stations are not accessible to some residents - Sherwood Road and Sir Douglas Park • Maps of where neighbouring Stations are should be available to Presiding Officers. • Make sure surveillance cameras in Polling Stations are turned off • Better signposting of Polling Station locations required eg Frederick Nattrass School and St Michaels • Mobile stations reported some access problems - manholes and bushes; uneven grounds; ramps not big enough and steps to buildings • Polling Stations located in front of a candidates home • Complaints from staff regarding the working environment and lack of facilities
Recommendation - 8. Consider all comments raised regarding Polling Stations during the forthcoming review of Polling Districts/Stations particularly accessibility issues and the use of mobiles.	
<u>Data Management</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reports produced in accordance with project deadlines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to exploit Express to maximise functionality - manage data; extract files; produce statistics; produce reports; half day Express training; election procedure manual
Recommendation - 9. Maximise the functionality of Express system to ensure effective management of the election. 10. Produce Elections Management Guide and keep under review in line with best practice and current legislation.	

What Went Well	Areas for Improvement
<p>ICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent support without which 100% check of postal vote personal identifiers would not have been possible. 	
<p>Recommendation - 11. Continue to work with ICT to maintain efficient electoral processes.</p>	
<p>Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Library - postal votes opening ○ Pavilion - Count ○ Police - postal votes storage of verified votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polling Stations - Need schools to support Election process. • Too many mobiles.
<p>Recommendations - 8. Consider all comments raised regarding Polling Stations during the forthcoming review of Polling Districts/Stations particularly accessibility issues and the use of mobiles. 12. Consider suitability of Library to accommodate additional PV scanner and PV Team.</p>	
<p>Suppliers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through determination despite Printers letting us down, we still hit postal vote deadline due to slippage built into original project plan and time and effort of Officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National/Regional disappointment with Printers/Packing
<p>Recommendation - 13. Work with colleagues in the region to analyse supplier options for printing and packing.</p>	
<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop in session good. • Practical sessions good • Handouts excellent. • Handbook handy reference • Clear and precise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried about importance of the job. • Parking when collecting boxes problematic. • Split between new and old staff. • More training for Count Supervisors on process flow • Re-issue training dates to Members at Count for induction. • Specific training for staff working on combined elections • Request for role play DVD to be incorporated. • Counter training may help.

<p>Recommendation - 14. Separate training for experienced staff, those working on combined elections, additional training on process for Count Supervisors.</p>	
<p><u>Communication</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Leaders kept up to speed in regular meetings with Head of Democratic Services • Emails - regular update at every stage • Helpline excellent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agents - Candidates nomination forms - negative impact on resources • Lots of information in candidates' pack • Agents' pack people did not read • Need topline summary • Nomination processing slow • Collection of screens expand collection time and give dimensions of equipment • Statutory timescale too tight between close of nominations and polling day
<p>Recommendations - 15. Additional training for Agents/Candidates on completing nomination forms. 16. Provide topline summary of information in Candidates' pack. 17. Employ a temporary support staff member to assist in the month prior to the election to increase capacity of team to deliver against statutory deadlines. 18. Lobby for change to increase time between close of nominations and polling day</p>	
<p><u>Publicity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive publicity - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stockton News ○ KYIT ○ Representations at Mosques ○ Cinema advertising ○ High Street event 	
<p>Recommendation - 7. Continue to deploy comprehensive publicity and engagement activity to encourage electoral registration / voting.</p>	
<p><u>Postal Votes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process went smoothly • Extensive benchmarking • Extensive liaison work with Express/IT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting returned Postal Votes into Wards - time consuming • More teams to speed up opening and verification process • Supervisors to carry out matching process • Stationery more user-friendly • Review process • Later sweep of Polling Stations to reduce number of postal votes received at close of poll • Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer time out for verification • Replacements issued at Municipal Buildings
<p>Recommendation - 19. Conduct a later sweep of Polling Stations to reduce numbers of postal votes handed in at close of poll.</p>	

What Went Well	Areas for Improvement
<p>Staffing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors - very good, knew their stuff • More internal staff 80/20 - better control • Pay was fair and reflected time and responsibility • Excellent team work • Supervisors assisting other Supervisors with process flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Postmaster to all staff to update details/apply first time • Support if you don't drive for collecting equipment • Main team stretched - re-examine roles; consider temporary support • Mobile phones essential • Pay quicker • Variable speed of counters • Onerous/tedious counting large number of votes • Lots of skirts
<p>Recommendations - 20. Annual Postmaster message (January) requesting temporary election staff to update their contact details and recruit new staff.</p>	
<p>Pre-Poll</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing ideal • Need to continue to hit these deadlines in future elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some complaints that people had not received postal vote packs - resolved with Post Office
<p>Royal Mail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolated instances of Non-delivery of- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ postal vote packs to electorate ○ returned postal votes to SBC
<p>Recommendation - 21. Continue to work with Royal Mail re SBC service requirements</p>	