

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>May 2015 Election Counts</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 November 2014
<b>WARD</b>	None specific
<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR</b>	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

**OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

That Members have an understanding of the issues which will affect the timing of the various counts that will take place in May 2015.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the information contained in this report about planning for the election counts in 2015.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

On Thursday 7 May 2015, there will be combined elections held for the UK Parliamentary election, Borough and Town/Parish council elections.

There is also new legislation that came into force for the elections in 2014. Two parts of this directly affect the timing of the count process for the local elections – new checks of postal votes and queues at polling stations when the poll closes. Current legislation also requires Acting Returning Officers to commence the count for the UK Parliamentary within 4 hours of the close of poll. However it is possible that this legislation may change.

In 2010, the declaration of result for the UK Parliamentary election was not until 5.10am on the Friday morning. If the Borough and Town/Parish election counts were to be completed on Friday 8 May counting would need to begin as soon as possible – this would lead to significant resourcing issues in terms of securing sufficient staff to enable an accurate count given that many staff would have been on duty without any significant breaks from 6am on Thursday 7 May.

For the above reasons, the count for the UK Parliamentary election will take place through the early hours of Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May with the Borough and Town/Parish election counts proposed to take place on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May.

## **Background**

At the 6<sup>th</sup> January meeting of this Committee when the arrangements for the May 2014 elections were discussed, it was agreed that the Returning Officer would return to the Committee in advance of the next major elections in May 2015 to inform the Committee of the planning taking place in respect of the timing of the election counts.

## **Analysis of Issues**

The UK Parliamentary general election is held every five years and will next take place on 7 May 2015.

There are four constituencies within the Wokingham Borough:-

Wokingham

Bracknell

Maidenhead

Reading East

Each constituency returns one MP to the House of Commons.

On the same day, Borough elections will take place in the following wards:-

Barkham

Bulmershe and Whitegates

Coronation

Emmbrook

Ewendons

Hawkedon

Hillside

Loddon

Maiden Erlegh

Norreys

Shinfield North

Shinfield South

Sonning

South Lake

Twyford

Wescott

Winnersh

Wokingham Without.

There will also be Parish Elections in the following areas:-

Barkham

Earley (Town)

Shinfield

Sonning

Twyford

Woodley (Town)

Winnersh

Wokingham (Town)

Wokingham Without

It is likely that most of the Town council seats will be contested but as usual no certainty will be received until the close of nominations which is currently 19 working days before polling day

## Legislation

Current legislation requires Acting Returning Officers to commence the count for the UK Parliamentary election within 4 hours of the close of poll. It is possible that this legislation may change in the lead up to next year.

There was also new legislation that came into force for the elections in 2014. Two parts of this directly affect the timing of the count process. Firstly, it has now become compulsory to check 100% of identifiers from postal voters. Previously, we were only required to check 20%. This added significantly the administrative workloads in 2014. It should also be noted that at the final postal vote opening session, which deals with all of the final postal votes that can be handed in until 10pm on election day so all these need verification before the count can commence.

The other change to the legislation in 2014 concerned queues at polling stations at the close of poll. From 2014, any voter who is in the queue at 10pm will be able to vote. This will mean that polling stations may now have to remain open longer to deal with any queuing voters who will now be eligible to vote. Whilst this did not impact significantly on the 2014 election count process, it is likely to have a more significant impact next year meaning that ballot boxes will arrive later at the count venue.

The requirement that all elections must produce accurate results in which all stakeholders are confident will be uppermost in the Returning Officer's mind when deciding the most appropriate timing of the respective counts.

## Impact of Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Individual Electoral Registration (IER) is the voter registration system which took effect from 10 June 2014 in England and Wales. Under the previous system, the "head of the household" was required to register all residents of the household who are eligible. Under the new system individuals are required to register themselves, as well as provide their National Insurance number on the application form so that their identity can be verified.

The main implication for the May 2015 elections is that there will be a number of existing voters who currently vote by post who may be unable to do because their identity has not been verified. This may lead to more people voting in person and/or confusion with the process. More information on this will be provided at the briefing.

## Options

The primary election is the UK Parliamentary for which the count will commence as soon as possible the close of poll on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Over the last two General Elections, the declaration of result has been made as follows:-

## Declaration of Results – UK Parliamentary

Year	Time of declaration
2010	5.10am
2005	1.15am

When comparing declaration times with 2010, it needs to also be noted that there will be many more ballot boxes to verify than in 2010 so will take longer. For example, the boxes that come to us from West Berkshire – they will also have Borough and Parish boxes this time which they did not in 2010.

With regard to the Borough and Town/Parish counts, four possible options have been identified:-

1. Immediately following the completion of the UK Parliamentary count
2. Later in the day on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May
3. Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May
4. Early in the week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> May

### Analysis of Pros and Cons

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivers results as early as possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accuracy of results</li> <li>• Difficulty securing sufficient count staff</li> <li>• Most Councillors would need to take a further day off from work.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results declared day following election</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Councillors would need to take a further day off from work.</li> <li>• Difficulty securing sufficient count staff</li> <li>• Possible that all counts would not be completed (if we start at say 2pm on Friday) – Parish counts are most complex as they are multiple seats.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Councillors would not have to take additional holiday from work</li> <li>• Accuracy of results</li> <li>• Availability of count staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results declared two days after election</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accuracy of results</li> <li>• Availability of count staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Late delivery of result</li> </ul>

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	**	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	**	Yes	Revenue

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
** The costs of elections are not separately broken down within the service budget for Electoral Services.

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services and priorities?)
Many parts of the Council are involved in ensuring the elections are operated effectively and efficiently e.g. provision of poll clerks.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
Not applicable

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None

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