

Agenda Item 8.

TITLE	Report of the Returning Officer – Parliamentary, Borough and Parish Elections 7 May 2015
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 21 May 2015
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To inform Council of the process and the results of the recent Borough Council elections.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council notes the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

On 7 May 2015 elections were held for the Borough Council, town and parish Councils and the UK Parliament election for the Wokingham Constituency.

Planning for the elections this year was made more complex due to cross boundary issues with the Parliamentary elections, the combined elections, and also the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.

Overall, the processes run by Wokingham BC were undertaken efficiently and effectively. There were some concerns raised by Wokingham Borough residents residing in parts of the Borough where the Parliamentary elections were administered by other Councils.

Feedback has been received at most stages of the elections process which will be reviewed and, where appropriate, built into the planning for future elections.

Background

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 7 May 2015, multiple elections were held for the Borough Council, town and parish Councils, and the UK Parliament election for the Wokingham constituency.
- 1.2 90 candidates contested 18 seats on the Borough Council in 18 wards. Of those the representation of the various parties was as follows:
 - 18 Conservative
 - 18 Green Party
 - 17 Liberal Democrat
 - 18 Labour
 - 2 Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts
 - 17 UKIP
- 1.3 Elections were also held across 24 wards for Earley Town Council, Wokingham Town Council, and Woodley Town Council.
- 1.4 UK Parliamentary Elections are held every 5 years. There are four constituencies within the Wokingham Borough:
 - Wokingham
 - Bracknell (administered by Bracknell Forest BC)
 - Maidenhead (administered by Royal Borough Windsor & Maidenhead)
 - Reading East (administered by Reading BC)

Each constituency returns one MP to the House of Commons.

2. The Election Process

- 2.1 Planning for elections takes place many months in advance of election day. This year, the planning process was made more complex due to cross boundary issues with the Parliamentary elections (see paragraph 1.4 above), the combined elections and also the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration.
- 2.2 The nomination arrangements were complex. However, the procedure ran smoothly overall with positive feedback from some quarters.
- 2.3 A major impact this year was the number of late registrations and also the numbers of postal votes requested and the associated verification processes to confirm voter identity. Significant numbers of postal votes were issued and returned. Whilst there were no major problems, the volumes caused a significant call on resources with verification of personal identifiers taking place for the two weeks prior to polling day.
- 2.4 On the day of the poll 67 (in the Wokingham constituency) polling stations were in use during the polling hours of 7am to 10pm. Visiting/inspecting officers attended all polling stations to ensure that all statutory procedures were adhered

to under the Representation of the People Acts, and also that access arrangements were adequate for disabled voters and that health and safety aspects were covered. Feedback from this process will be used to help improve further the arrangements for future elections.

2.5 The counts for the elections took place in one centralised location at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre. On Thursday 7th May the verification of all ballot boxes took place followed by the Wokingham Parliamentary constituency election count. The result was declared at 5.45am on 8th May. On Saturday 9th May the count for the Borough and Parish elections took place. Both counts were undertaken with no major problems. Again, all feedback received about the venue and count process is being taken into account to improve future processes.

2.6 At the elections in May 2015 over 550 casual election jobs were staffed and I would like to thank all Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks, counting and postal vote opening staff, supervisors, and the Electoral Services team who carried out this important task.

3. Election Results

3.1 Full details of the Borough election results, including the turnout figures in each ward, are set out in Appendix A.

4. Conclusion

4.1 The election process was dealt with both effectively and efficiently. The election process was made more complex as a consequence of having to run the UK Parliamentary election alongside the local elections, as the UK Parliamentary election had to be given priority.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	There are no financial implications associated with this report		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no other financial implications associated with this report.

List of Background Papers
None

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