

Haringey Council

Agenda item:

[No.]

General Purposes Committee

On 23 September 2010[Date]

Report Title. Evaluation of Elections, 2010

Report of **Chief Executive / Returning Officer**

Signed :

14.9.10

Contact Officer : George Cooper

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **Non-Key**

1. Purpose of the report (That is, the decision required)

1.1. To consider the attached evaluation of the Parliamentary and Local Elections held in May 2010.

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

2.1. na

3. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and /or other Strategies:

3.1. The provision of high quality and efficient services.

4. Recommendations

4.1. The report is submitted for the consideration of Members.

5. Reason for recommendation(s)

5.1. Members may welcome perusal of a document designed to capture the “history” of the 2010 elections in a way which will help to inform future planning of the delivery of electoral services in the context of continuing changes and challenges to this particular service.

6. Other options considered

6.1. na

7. Summary

7.1. The Deputy Returning Officer/Electoral Services Manager has sought to produce, on behalf of and for the (Acting) Returning Officer, an evaluation of the extraordinarily large scale combined elections of 2010.

7.2. This is needed to inform future planning of electoral events.

7.3. Members may be interested in the evaluation and the thinking behind it as electoral processes are submitted to a continued programme of change.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

8.1. na

9. Head of Legal Services Comments

9.1. na

10. Head of Procurement Comments –[Required for Procurement Committee]

10.1. na

11. Equalities &Community Cohesion Comments

11.1. na

12. Consultation

12.1. na

13. Service Financial Comments

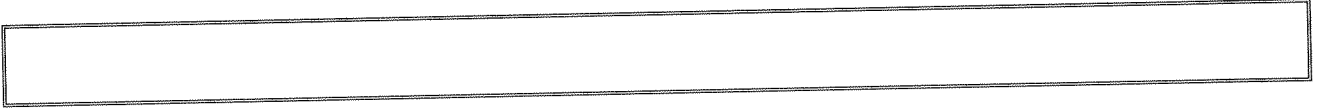
13.1. na

14. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs

14.1. na

15. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

15.1. Representation of the People Acts; PPER Act 2000; Electoral Administration Act 2006; and Regulations giving effect thereto.



Review of elections affecting Haringey 6 May 2010

Overview.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the experience of Haringey in the administration and delivery of the Local and Parliamentary Elections held on 6th May 2010, to assess what we do well and what we could do better in the future.

The context is hugely important as these elections were not of course unique to Haringey. Elections are rarely now a uniform experience for local authorities as several different types of elections are run to alternative timetables and so, although the Parliamentary General Election (PGE) was universal to the UK, it was not combined with the same type of local election across all parts of the UK. In London, for the first time ever, the PGE announced on 6th April coincided with all-out local Borough elections already scheduled for 6th May. Whilst our planning assumption had for long been that this was a likely possibility, it nonetheless meant that the two most challenging categories of election were being brought together for the first time, something which theoretically may not happen again until 2030.

This was also the first time that the consequences of the 2006 Electoral Administration Act were to be tested in an election where all 44 million electors were eligible to vote in at least one context, presenting particular challenges to the support and supply industries as well as to administrators.

Many of the challenges and difficulties of 2010 - the tidal wave of late registration and absent vote applications and the issues arising from running two different election timetables simultaneously, for instance - were predictable, but being able to predict accurately does not necessarily mean that the challenge once encountered was any easier. This paper will map out how we attempted to plan for and meet the challenges and juxtapose this with what actually happened on the ground. We will assess the issues according to the planning headings we use.

It is clear that many authorities faced problems and difficulties and the Electoral Commission has issued a special report on those areas which saw electors turned away at close of poll or through shortages of ballot papers. Many authorities found the combination of full local with Parliamentary elections presented especial issues.

Every election is different and presents issues of its own. There are still many lessons, however, which can be applied next time out and we shall seek to assess what may be applied to a scheduled timetable which, in London, looks like this:

May 5 th 2011	Referendum on the electoral system.
May 3 rd 2012	Mayor of London & GLA
2013	"Fallow Year"
May / June 2014	London Borough Councils and European Parliament*
May 7 th 2015	Parliamentary General Election.

* *The London Borough Elections would ordinarily be scheduled for May 8th, but in 2009, County Councils were given a one month extension to enable the poll to be combined with the European Elections which take place early in June. A precedent may thus have been set.*

Other significant electoral events in addition to the above timetable include a "fast track" parliamentary boundary review, the comprehensive refreshment of Postal Vote personal identifiers (February 2012) and the "speeded up" introduction of individual voter registration (IVR), though "speeded up " has not yet been defined.

The Resource framework for 2010.

The Ministry of Justice earmarked some £262,000 for Haringey to pay for the General Election, and Haringey allocated some £300,000 for the Local Elections, up from a spend of £270,000 in 2006, or 11.1% over four years. I had estimated that the *maximum* saving likely to be achieved from combining the elections was £80,000, but the MoJ allocation would automatically be reduced to some £212,000 in the event of a Combined election being called, so it was clear that most of any saving would accrue back to the MoJ.

The maximum spend for a combined election was, then some £512,000 and my planning assumption was still inside this.

Resource lessons.

Though pleased we are within budget, I have to be aware of continuing "cost push" initiatives emanating from Central Government at a time of very limited resources. On 15th July 2010, in evidence to the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee, the Deputy Prime Minister commented that the introduction of Individual Voter Registration, (IVR) as raised by the previous administration, would still go ahead but would be "expensive."

The MoJ share of resources for our postal votes was based on the total in 2008, (despite a subsequent election being held in 2009) and is now many more than this. Whilst the initial implementation of Postal Vote Statementing in 2007 was funded to a large extent by the MoJ, there is no indication that the statutory 2012 postal vote refreshment process will receive any central support at all.

One hopeful sign is that the Cabinet Office (to which the MoJ elections function has been transferred) has undertaken to collect actual 2010 cost data to help inform pricing the planned electoral system referendum, which would

have been in a fallow year. The actual funding outcome remains to be seen, of course.

As will be seen in the next section, we devoted considerable resource to winning the most accurate possible register in 2010 but the boundary review means that there can be no let up in determination. This in itself will have cost implications.

Register campaign and maintenance

As it became inevitable that both elections would be fought during 2010, the election office devoted extra effort to securing the highest possible register and tried several new initiatives in order so to do.

Firstly, the February Confirmation Letter campaign saw such letters sent out as individual household official letters, instead of under plain cover with *Haringey People*. The campaign was, however, still supported by advertising in HP but this time for two successive months (February and March) and a new “Some things are worth Talking About “ poster campaign was executed through all of Haringey’s Tube and Railway stations. Many more sites were purchased than hitherto and retained from February to April. The poster was used as a moving image as part of an LBV TV display in the Wood Green Shopping Mall, and in May Corporate Communications added a new lamppost banner exhorting the public to vote. Various outreach events also continued to take place.

The table below indicates the continuing growth of the electorate in Haringey – we are certainly not suffering depopulation. Further, this thirteenth set of London Borough Elections since the 1963 Act established the present Boroughs saw the highest-ever turnout. Obviously combination with the parliamentary election was a crucial factor in this but a high turnout is what tests the accuracy of a register and of course, there must be a good quality register to have a good turnout.

Election (Borough)	London Turnout	Haringey Turnout %	Haringey Local Electorate	Haringey Absolute Local turnout (thousands)
2010	60.7*	60.3	166,102	100.1
2006	37.9	35.8	155,230	55.5
2002	31.8	28.0	149,730	41.9
1998	34.8	30.5	145,012	44.3
1994	46.1	43.2	138,416	59.7

**provisional*

The above table, identifying turnout in the last five Borough elections, demonstrates the immense added dimension of 2010's local participation but in addition to the 100,000 local votes counted, the Parliamentary turnout was also the greatest since 1992.

The Confirmation letter campaign drew a much greater response than under the previous methodology, leading to over 4,000 register changes being made in March and this built up to over 5,000 in April. Some 3,400 were made in the corresponding period running up to the European elections so the difference was immense. Much of this may be put down to the added salience and inevitability of the General Election, but I have no doubt that the intensity of our campaign helped facilitate these changes.

They also meant that staff were working very much later hours over an extended period simply to amend the register. This work simply did not feature in electoral administration a decade ago, when the register was closed in February. Attention would have turned to completing organisation of the *election* as opposed to the *register* and in 2010 the Core team were typically working until 8pm for much of March and then 10 or 11 pm during the whole of April plus Saturdays and the Bank Holiday for some. This was generally the case across London.

Registration Lessons

This election has finally cemented the idea that the electoral register is open to alteration until the proverbial last minute. Although theoretically the London Borough Elections may not combine with a Parliamentary again until 2030, the cork of late registration cannot now be reversed unless an entirely different registration regime is introduced and it is likely that a large part of the Core team's team will be taken up with registration until polling day is beckoning. The confirmation letter campaign, and the continuing business of rolling registration forms received each month, also underlines the relatively rapid pace of change with registration in London Boroughs, and the impending Census, Referendum, and Parliamentary Boundary review demonstrate that the pressure must be kept up.

An application had been made for MoJ funding for the new style of confirmation letter campaign, but this was speculative as in practice MoJ were reluctant to help fund schemes based on previous practice, however tenuous the basis was. Such funding has now been withdrawn.

The Parliamentary Boundary review is intended for completion by the end of 2013 and theoretically, the overlarge size of Haringey's two parliamentary constituencies (resulting historically from the loss of the "third seat" in 1983) suggests that the proposed reduction in Commons seats from 650 to 600 should still leave us with two constituencies of average size. But there is already concern that the Review is being compacted into just two years (the

usual period is four to six). It is considered hugely important that our determinedly-achieved register returns remain so.

The Parliamentary Boundary Review is expected to raise the average Constituency Electorate from 69,000 to 76,000, and no seat – except in the Highlands and Islands – are expected to depart from this by plus or minus 5% as the Parliamentary Bill is presently drafted.

The review is apparently to be based on electorate predictions for 2015, and as we have 147,000 Parliamentary electors on a rising trajectory, the truly fair outcome is that we should retain two seats within our own boundaries, notwithstanding the slight breach of the 5% rule unless polling districts are used as building blocks instead of wards, which is innately undesirable.

Polling Stations and Station Staff

I was pleased that station appointment and management was a smoother process than in either 2008 or 2009, despite – or perhaps because of – the salience of these particular elections. The process is invariably characterised by some difficult discussions between private station providers and the office over hire costs, but this election was a welcome exception. We had put the message out that restraint needed to be shown and it was, and what is often a significant worry did not come to pass. We even made a saving by a relatively late and very successful substitution of a portable polling station, never very satisfactory, for a new community room in Bounds Green.

The staff of the Seven Sisters portable station came under some pressure over the large number of Proxies allocated to the station. Proxies seemed to expand quite markedly in these elections generally and I understand the Electoral Commission may be looking at the dynamics involved. One untold story about the “Volcanic Ash” cloud was that a number of people changed holiday, and hence voting arrangements, at the last minute. Seven Sisters, meanwhile, did receive good Police support and the Returning Officer included the station in his extensive tour of stations.

Throughout the election, we maintained good liaison with the Police “single point of contact” who did look actively at one complaint. As with all such issues, however, progress depends upon substantiation, witnesses and evidence. The Electoral Commission established the SPOC system and value it highly for both station and postal voting issues.

The station with the most difficult circumstances was again Hornsey Girls School, where for the second year running we were unable to use interior space. In 2009 a portable on the site was used at the expense of the BSF contractors, who on this occasion were using the old Caretaker’s House at the front of the site as an office and again vacated it to help us. The School had made it clear that the new building work was less suitable than hitherto for use as a polling station and were quite determined that we again come to a compromise arrangement with BSF. The House, however, is too cramped and is in any case likely to be unavailable in future.

One of the most important decisions taken in planning for these elections was to employ a third poll clerk in every polling station in the event of a combined poll. The Electoral Commission has already reported on the many urban areas where the station door was “slammed shut” in the face of queuing electors at 10pm and certainly queues were building up all over London around 8.15pm, including in Haringey.

But the work flow process devised in training for three Clerks meant that no doors were slammed in the face of Haringey Electors and we received particular commendation from none other than Radio 1 for this. Similarly, though some Presiding Officers expressed concern at the rate of Ballot Paper usage, we had printed a 100% run so no-one could or did run out at any stage, as the Electoral Commission indicated happened in some locations elsewhere.

The cost of the third clerks was considerable, and the decision not made lightly, but it was clearly the right decision in the light of the disappointment of so many hundreds of voters elsewhere as enunciated forcefully by the media.

During any polling day itself, some people are always turned away because they are not registered. There is a specific part of our training package about being absolutely sure that a name is not there, and what to do if it cannot be found, but there were two formal complaints about this and so this is a further learning point.

Polling Station lessons.

We will give more prominence to role play in polling staff training, with more scenarios. Local evaluations indicate that this is where Clerks have learning really reinforced.

It is hugely important to continue to think through the workflow of a polling station in each unique election to come up with the most cost-effective level of staffing whilst ensuring that everyone who is eligible and wants to vote does so.

The Hornsey Girls High School situation must be settled. We have scoured the polling district concerned but found nothing suitable. The optimum solution is to use the new IT/library to which access can be obtained without entering the “inner bailey “of the School. Many ESM colleagues identify huge pressure not to use schools but the AEA nationally, in publishing its own evaluation of the elections (21 July 2010) has made the point that there is a balance which has to be struck. We can't get plentiful and accessible community premises without using at least some schools. That said, the AEA believes that an RO should have greater powers to requisition certain other types of premise to extend the pool of locations available, which might in itself at least mitigate the need to use hard-pressed schools.

We should continue to use the new Bounds Green facility and look to replace Portables wherever possible, as these have high risk factors. We should at

least look again at reverting from the portable in Seven Sisters back to St Andrew's Church Hall, but all parts of the local community need to be involved in any such change.

Poll and Postal cards

These were delivered, and posted by our own staff, in a timely and efficient manner for the most part and no formal complaints were received. Some of the maps printed thereon were usefully updated where "defunct" features had appeared in 2009.

A small consignment were erroneously delivered by the printer's courier to Havering but these were re-delivered to us the same day.

Ballot papers including Postal Voting.

I have said above that we always planned for a 100% print run in these elections so no-one ran out of papers.

With effectively 21 separate contests involving 234 local candidates (second highest in the Borough's history) and 16 Parliamentary candidates, proof reading the papers was a time-consuming but hugely important task.

One early distraction was the desire of one candidate, with a newly registered political party, to use his own image as a party emblem on the ballot paper. This happened in only one other place in the UK and the advice of the EC was sought on the semiotic significance of this. Their view was that it was acceptable, but part of the problem was that it was not easy to reproduce. In the end a very good image was produced but this was a key example of how a time-consuming distraction can arise late in the day, and no amount of planning can predict what form such distractions will take.

With the decision to run a simultaneous issue of postal papers for both elections, the bulk of Postal ballots were prepared on Saturday, 24th April. A "combined issue" has many advantages for both the elector and the authority but it does have a timescale implication in that it waits upon the closure of Parliamentary nominations. The Cabinet Office may look at this, especially in the context of the fixed-term Parliament proposal.

A record number of postal applications meant that some 70 people were employed in the Wood Green Council Chamber and canteen to prepare the packs all day on the 24th. Parliamentary Nominations had closed at 4pm on April 20th (along with any changes to elector absent vote requirements).

Final proof-reading, printing, pack prep and delivery all had to be turned around in three days for the Saturday issue. Saturday was taken steadily with extensive and frequent batch checks to ensure accuracy of the 21 separate types of issue. The Packs were collected on the Monday morning by Royal Mail, but disseminated later and slower than in 2009 and 2008.

In the light of such immensely accurate and extensive proof-reading, it was very disappointing that a run of 749 “late application” postal ballots were printed for part of the Hornsey & Wood Green Constituency with accurate candidate details but a “Local” instruction to vote for no more than three candidates instead of one. These were printed after the weekend to cater for late application postal voters and the problem ones spread across four wards of the Constituency and were discovered after despatch of all 18,500 postal ballots had gone out. As a late run, printed on two machines in four stages and then put together in the week, the much more extensive QA procedure followed on Saturday wasn’t employed and the papers, issued face down, had been part of a run of 1,500, the first part of which were correct.

From about twenty customer calls (which varied from the mildly amused, through the helpful and sympathetic, to one especially abusive call from an anonymous caller) we were able to narrow down the problem and then, at the instigation of the RO, the printer was able to identify the specific batch run. This was the single most challenging situation which I have faced in an electoral management career of eight years but in a period of twenty-four hours we identified the specifics of the problem and devised and delivered a solution.

The essence of the solution was to immediately deliver fresh, accurate ballot papers with an explanatory letter. The instructions to vote had accurately asked for one, but the face of the paper had said three, and with an electoral system which has been in force since 1872 we knew that people are familiar with the system. But we felt it essential to get replacement papers out immediately. Volunteers from Urban Environment were on the streets that same afternoon and evening.

Following through the implementation of the solution as the papers came back was a much more extensive and time-consuming process right through to the Count itself, and was dealt with according to a protocol produced by the RO and agreed by him with the EC, agents and candidate legal advisors. The initial problem was obviously that we had encouraged over-voting but the compounded issue was the capacity to vote twice. The hope was that, by reacting with speed, very few people would innocently send back two returns and those who did (whether innocently or intentionally) would see one paper screened out by the system of new issue numbers – so every envelope had to be checked with immense care.

Of the original 749 papers issued, 600 packs were returned, an unsurprising typical postal return of 80%. Of these, 53 were duplicated and selection of the “right “paper made according to the protocol, face down and in the presence of the Agents at the Count. In all, 2 misprinted papers were rejected as voting for more than one, and one was rejected as void for uncertainty (wrote “no to all of them” on the paper.

Unpleasant as this incident was, turning a fault of 749 into 2 demonstrates the pace, corporate working and tenacity of our teams. I would have liked it to be zero, but to put the situation in context, some 263 other electors walked into

Haringey polling stations and, for whatever reason, chose to over vote on completely correct papers.

The final concern on Ballot papers was that, although we printed 100%, the tendered papers arrived at the last possible moment, on Wednesday afternoon eve of poll.

Ballot Paper and Postal Vote lessons

The highly specialised election printing industry was expected to be, and was, under breaking-point pressure in these elections. That said, it is clearly time to thoroughly refresh the supply, quality assurance and dissemination of all parts of the ballot paper and postal vote process. To this end, new tender documentation will be produced in Autumn 2010 with the help of Corporate Procurement. Though extensive, QA checks, despite the pressures of the timetable, will have to involve much greater sampling. There was a change in support personnel at Royal Mail and this will need to be addressed.

Finally, Government is reviewing the Election Timetable and a key feature of this is likely to be the postal vote timetable. We will need to adjust our plans accordingly. If the Referendum goes ahead, the question (already written in draft) will be known well in advance and I would plan to prepare packs ready for despatch as soon as the deadline for postal vote applications / changes passes.

Training Design and Delivery

Once again, extensive effort was put into the design and delivery of a training package for election staff. Chris McLean was retained for this specific purpose following her retirement and, in the light of the absence on maternity leave of two experienced staff who would normally have helped prepare materials, her help was invaluable.

Training Lessons

Chris undertook extensive pre-and post-election evaluation work, which combined with Station Log Books, gives us valuable intelligence on how to design and deliver future training.

The next electoral outing is likely to be the AV/Boundaries referendum, which on one level is a relatively simple poll to administer but on another presents staff with unique challenges. Evidence from other constitutional referenda is limited, but suggests that turnout in London will be low. The commentator Peter Riddell, giving evidence to a Lords Select Committee on this subject in July 2010), suggested it may be around 20%. The likely challenge for polling staff is likely to be the repeated question, "what's it all about?" We need to develop an impartial and objective answer, and have raised this with the Commission.

The approach of “small group” training has to be right, especially as one key message is that we should spend less time on the “lecture” and more on scenarios in the role play. Our aim must be that everyone feels fully confident about their role, even when polling for the first time.

Currently, EMT members train in pairs and split the sessions between them. This represents a major call on their time during an election period and we have to bear in mind that two very experienced but now retired operatives have taken many sessions. One suggestion is that other managers who conduct large volumes of training in their day-to-day role and who do other work on the election are drafted in to support the sessions as long as at least one EMT expert is “the other trainer.”

Another suggestion is that EMT be widened, but there is much merit in sticking to a hard core of a tight-knit team especially when resources are under such stress.

Finally, some areas are now offering training to count observers and agents. This should certainly be considered.

Room Bookings

This went generally well given excellent support from FM, good space in the Civic and Alexandra Palace and a valuable input from Ken Pryor on price of the latter. There were no problems in securing rooms for processing, preparation, training and counting.

One outstanding logistical point is that, for reasons of cost, security of data and connectivity, it has been the practice since the new postal vote legislation came into effect in 2008 that postal vote scanning of such papers handed in on polling day must continue to be dealt with in the Committee Rooms of the Civic Centre simultaneously with the main Count. I will deal with the implications of this below in the “Count” Section.

Room lessons

We are fortunate in having some good spaces available in the Civic Centre and Alexandra Palace and staff at both who understand our needs.

There is the concern, however, that the utilisation of Alexandra Palace is one of the very largest election costs and in a “cabinet office” funded election resources will not be made available to cover it.

In the European election of 2009, the cost effective solution which kept us within the (then MoJ) budget was to exploit the split verification / count scenario to use the much smaller Panorama Room.

This will be harder to reproduce for the referendum (and we do not yet know the count requirements the Electoral Commission, who are the “Chief Counting Officer”) but we will nonetheless explore it as a possibility along with

encouraging neighbouring authorities to consider “sharing” Alexandra Palace as they do in the GLA elections.

Staffing

The main distinctive challenge here came from appointing and managing a record number of polling, postal processing and counting staff and the inevitable chopping and changing which derives from employing five hundred persons. The direct link between EMT and HR in the person of Tina Charalambous was again critical in ensuring that the right people turn up to do the right thing at the right time.

One of the most important decisions taken by the EMT was to furnish an extra poll clerk at each station on the back of a turnout prediction of 55-65% and work flow test which demonstrated that queues might result otherwise. This decision cost over £20,000 and was not taken lightly because it was not funded by MoJ. But the biggest single criticism of the elections nationally, and the subject of a special Report by the Electoral Commission, was that electors were turned away at 10pm. In Haringey, queues did start to build at the very largest stations even with an extra clerk but they were managed and cleared.

Staffing lessons

Each election must be staffed appropriately to its type, and no polling station should serve more than 3,000 electors. The annual Leaders’ Conference in London, which sets polling staff pay rates, continues to be hugely important in achieving consistency of remuneration (and hence no poaching) across the capital.

Sundries and Ballot Boxes

As in 2009, much of the Presiding Officer Sundry pack was produced in-house by Colin Wilkins either from recycling existing stock or by producing material internally. At four pounds, the cost per pack was some way down on the eleven pounds a kit would typically cost to buy, a saving of about £700. Having done this twice however, much less usable recyclable material came back in 2010.

Election planning demonstrated that more ballot boxes would be required for a combined poll. With our Composite box having been discontinued by the manufacturer, the most cost effective “like” style was tested and then acquired from C. Bradbury, who still make the studs for the Composites. Given the two ballots and 65% turnout, most of the new boxes were indeed deployed.

Sundries and Ballot Box Lessons

As it is still possible to obtain security studs for the Composite Boxes, we should be covered for most eventualities but will always look at each election individually. In E-count Elections (London Mayor / GLA) the GLA usually provides bespoke card boxes.

In the likely referendum, we will recycle as much as we can but virtually all notices will have to be produced from scratch.

IT support

IT support from both eXpress and the Borough was exemplary especially as late Electoral Commission changes in reporting requirements necessitated several last-minute upgrades to be written and installed. Electoral administration is now dependent upon secure and fit-for-purpose IT systems and eXpress remains at the forefront of developments. Robustness was severely tested by rapid transactions over more than usual sustained periods.

There were some minor but time-consuming data-entry issues in the Elections Office, due to unfamiliarity with its ever-changing features.

IT lessons

There is a need for Elections staff to be kept up to date on eXpress features and I immediately went on two training courses in the aftermath of the election. I am conscious that Paul Brooker, one of the leading in-house experts in the software, (and the LLPG to which it links) is now on flexible retirement but this created no difficulty in this election.

The Count & Security

In terms of scale, this was both an exceptionally lengthy count but then there were record turnouts . The 196,000 ballot papers counted in Haringey in 2010 is second only to the 211,000 in the 15-hour e-count of 2008 (when turnout was 43% but each elector had three ballot papers.)

It was nonetheless much longer than it needed to be. Some 3,800 postal papers were returned on the day, compared to 1,000 (which was a record at the time!) in 2009, and the meticulous checking of envelopes, which, as identified above, really does need to be undertaken at the Civic Centre, entailed a significant hold-up.

It may have ameliorated matters to some extent if I had sought to have an announcement made about the nature of the problem. In the future, the balance of timing and support between the two venues will need more attention.

Door and entry Security, both for staff and observers, despite briefings and despite credentials, varied from the over-zealous to the patchy. This has to be organised in a completely different way. The timetable by which candidates and agents need to identify their count observers is unlikely to change, and in the Referendum this could prove especially challenging. There may not simply be a neat division of two camps, as might at first seem obvious.

This aspect of proceedings needs to be planned in a wholly new fashion, with better briefings and access arrangements for all concerned. As indicated above, the process may benefit from more formal briefings for agents. This, indeed has arisen from one particular complaint about the night. A variety of different ticketing options, especially in the context of a referendum fought between camps rather than an election fought between parties, must be looked at and more- much more - effort put into training and support for security staff, from whatever source they come.

Partner Performance

Electoral Commission

Some very good support is produced by the Electoral Commission, but many administrators and other stakeholders were still impacted adversely by surprising last-minute judgments on issues such as standard reporting formats and "dual party descriptions." More thought needs to be given to impact on the ground. The Commission ran quite a successful registration campaign on a social networking site, and the impact of this needs to be communicated in the future.

Printers

This is dealt with in sections above.

Twilley's.

Twilley's main role is to collect, deliver, and remove polling screens, assist with "difficult" access issues, and to arrange, in the presence of the DRO, confidential destruction at the appropriate time. A very professional and cost – effective service was received.

Polling stations suppliers

Very many fewer issues arose in 2010 than in 2009, which was particularly welcome under the circumstances.

Royal Mail

This was dealt with in the Sections above.

Feedback and Conclusion

Feedback may be said to include the formal (complaints, Presiding Officer Reports, spot surveys by the Electoral Commission, Wow nominations) to the informal in which individual comments are taken on board from the wide range of stakeholders. I have attempted to distil these in the above document, the primary purpose of which is to help improve future planning. The Commission states that ultimately, it is the voter who should be at the heart of the process.

The right to vote confers a particular, absolute equality on a citizenry which arguably exists in seldom other fields. This is what we seek to enact, and to honour.