

Item No.
8

**(Revised 27 November)**

**City of Westminster**

<b>Committee:</b> General Purposes	<b>Date:</b> 11 <del>July</del> <b>December</b> <del>2002</del> <b>2024</b>	<b>Title of Report:</b> Electoral Issues
<b>Classification:</b> For General Release		<b>Report of:</b> Director of Legal and Administrative Services
<b>Wards involved:</b>	All	
<b>Policy context:</b>	Not applicable	
<b>Financial Summary:</b>	Budget provision in the Business Plan for the City Council Elections in May 2002 is <del>currently</del> £145,000	

**1. Summary**

~~4.1.1.~~ This report updates the Committee on a number of electoral issues.

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~~4.2~~The report also informs the Committee about a number of recent changes affecting the Register of Electors.

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**~~5.2.~~ Recommendations**

~~(1)(i)~~ That the Committee agrees to apply to repeat the extended hours and electronic count pilots at future City Council elections;

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~~(ii)~~ That the Committee notes the remainder of the report.

~~(2)~~That the Committee considers whether it wishes to forward any further views on possible options for future parliamentary constituencies for the City of Westminster to the Assistant Commissioner of the Commission for England following the recent Public Inquiry.

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~~(3)~~That the Committee notes the remainder of the report.

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**3. City Council Elections: 2 May 2002**

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**(A) Electoral Pilots**

**(a) Background**

3.1 The City Council participated in two electoral pilots:  
- extended voting hours  
- electronic counting

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3.2 The Electoral Commission is carrying out an evaluation of all the electoral pilots conducted by the 30 local authorities who participated this year. The evaluation reports are not yet available, but once issued each local authority must publish the report on its pilots by 1<sup>st</sup> August.

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~~3.3~~

~~5.4.3.3~~ A total of 2,698 electors voted in the two extra voting hours. This represented just over 2% of the total electorate and over 8% of those choosing to vote in person on the day. Attached, as Appendix "A" to this report, are the results of the questionnaire issued to those voting early. This shows that the adoption of extended hours - and so standardising the hours to be the same as apply at a General Election - was appreciated by those electors who voted during the extra two hours, including a significant number who would not otherwise have voted. Without the extended voting hours overall turnout could have fallen by about another 1%.

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~~3.4~~ The electronic count went well, produced accurate results and the declarations were made much earlier than usual. It is estimated that the time saving was at least two hours. About 3% of the votes cast were not counted by the scanners (mainly due to the ballot papers being folded) and so had to be viewed on the PCs and processed individually. The layout of the count hall can be improved on for the future, in particular to provide more space and seating for candidates and agents and to avoid the Returning Officer and election agents having to move across the hall from the adjudication area to a podium to announce the results.

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~~3.5~~ The cost of the supply of the counting equipment was met out of a special Government fund for the electronic electoral pilots. Some modifications had to be made to the Sports Centre's electricity supply and there was a standby generator in case of power failure. Even with these additional fit-up costs there was a saving on staffing the count, as far less count staff were required than would have been employed for a manual count.

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There is a range of possibilities. The pilots can be single or in combination. Any additional costs will have to be met by the City Council, except for the costs of providing the technical equipment for e-voting or e-counting. The range of options includes:

- ~~-All postal voting~~
- ~~-Early voting~~
- ~~-Week-end voting~~
- ~~-Extended polling hours~~
- ~~-Mobile ballot box~~
- ~~-Electronic voting~~
- ~~-Voting at any polling station~~
- ~~-Telephone or Internet voting~~
- ~~-Electronic counting~~

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## ~~(B) Turnout (b) Turnout~~

~~3.6~~ ~~3.~~ Turnout at City Council elections is now an Audit Commission Performance Indicator (PI). Turnout at elections in Westminster 4 ~~There continues to is a general decline and has nationally in turnout at elections. Turnout at City Council elections is now an Audit Commission Performance Indicator (PI).~~

~~3.5~~ Westminster's turnout at local government elections has in recent elections been declining at a faster rate than the average in Greater London.

Year	Westminster %	Greater London Average %
1990	51.5	48.4
1994	46.4	46.4
1998	32	34
<u>2002-7</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>32</u>

3.7 ~~3.6~~ Only 45 other London Boroughs (compared to 5 in 1998)-had a lower turnout than Westminster in 2002-7~~1998~~. ~~Islington Barking & Dagenham (275.4%), Lewisham Kensington & Chelsea (268%), Southwark Newham (268.4%) and Barking & Dagenham, Lewisham (23%) 9.7% Westminster (as in 1998) is in the middle band of Inner London Boroughs and Haringey (30.5%) for the purposes of the Audit Commission's PI for electoral turnout.~~ (The sources for this data are the LRC Election Results 1990-1998 and the ALG London Bulletin Election Results 2002).

3.8 Turnout did vary considerably by ward – the highest being Tachbrook on 37% and the lowest Knightsbridge & Belgravia on 22%. Questionnaires are being issued to a random sample of electors on the Electoral Register to help identify any ways in which changing how elections are administered might help to improve turnout.

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3.9 The overall fall in turnout was despite extended hours voting; an increase in the number of polling places (to improve their accessibility); and an increase to nearly 7,000 in the number of postal voters. The % of postal voters voting is generally higher than those voting in person – 58% of postal voters in Westminster voted, i.e. over twice the % who turned out to vote in person.

### **(C) New Wards, Polling Districts and Polling Places**

3.10 The new ward and polling district boundaries were used at these elections for the first time. In a few cases a number of properties and electors had been included on the wrong ward register. A correction was made before the election to those electors affected on the Westbourne/Harrow Road boundary. This change did cause some confusion for a few voters on the day. A few other errors of border properties on ward boundaries (West End/Marylebone High Street and Churchill/Knightsbridge & Belgravia) also came to light and have now been corrected.

3.11 Due to the new ward and polling district boundaries, a significant proportion of the electorate was voting at a different polling place than in the past. The new locations were included on the poll cards and a note and map were included on the accompanying (yellow) information leaflet delivered with the poll card asking electors to check the poll card and map in case their polling place had been moved. A number of electors still went to the former location and were either redirected by polling station staff (where the place was still in use as a polling place) or by a notice showing the new location (where the polling place was not being used any more). In a few instances these redirectional signs proved inadequate. A number of electors complained about the polling place being changed, particularly a number of electors in the former Lord's ward who had been transferred into the newly extended Regent's Park ward. Their new polling station at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue is now further away than their previous polling station at St John's Wood Synagogue (now in Abbey Road Ward) for a number of electors. However, for the vast majority of electors in what is a new RPC polling district, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue is much nearer.

3.12 Sixteen of the sixty locations were being used for the first time at these elections as polling stations. Many replaced schools which would otherwise have had to close on polling day. All the new locations worked well except for two. St. John's Wood Library was cramped for space and the internal polling place layout will need to be changed next time. The use of two rooms at Paddington Station was not satisfactory due to the decorative conditions of the rooms and space constraints. However the use of these rooms was a temporary stop-gap for these elections only, pending the completion of building works currently in progress at St James's Church, Sussex Gardens in 2003 at which point the polling place will return to its established location.

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~~3.123.13~~ There are complaints at every election from electors that they have not received a poll card. Such complaints are now fewer than in the past as the poll cards are mostly delivered by staff who have canvassed the area.

**(D) Website**

~~3.133.14~~ For the first time information about the election and past election results were posted on the website.

~~2.4~~The Public Inquiry was centred around two alternative counter proposals for pairing Boroughs put forward by the Conservative Party and Labour Party for all of the Boroughs covered by the Public Inquiry. A considerable range of issues was covered in the Inquiry.

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~~2.5~~The counter proposals for pairings were:

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~~Conservative:-~~

~~City of Westminster and City of London  
Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea  
Brent and Harrow  
Camden  
Hillingdon and Hounslow~~

~~Labour:~~

~~City of Westminster/City of London/Kensington & Chelsea  
Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow  
Brent and Camden  
Harrow and Hillingdon~~

~~2.6~~Any suggested further pairing of the City of Westminster and the City of London with either Brent or Kensington & Chelsea will result in constituencies in excess of the average electoral quota. The growth in Westminster's electorate at the current rate will over time considerably increase the disparity between electorates and the quota.

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~~2.7~~There were objections for a raft of reasons from all quarters to the proposed pairing of the two Cities of Westminster and London with Brent. If Westminster's electorate continues to rise at the current rate, it is unlikely that such a pairing will be sustainable beyond the next review as by then the electorates will have reached a level far above electoral quota.

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~~2.8~~Whilst retaining the current grouping of the two Cities of London and Westminster with Kensington & Chelsea (i.e. retaining the two current constituencies) results in being close to the electoral quota based on 2000 electorates, a growth in

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~~Westminster's electorate at the current rate will also result in the pairing being considerably in excess of electoral quota over time.~~

~~2.9 Of those Boroughs considered at the Inquiry, the parliamentary electorates of Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham all grew at 6% over the period 1991-2000. This was considerably faster than the average 3.5% increase for this grouping of Boroughs as a whole. Whilst a pairing of Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea would now be below quota based on the 2000 electorates, their pairing will gradually move closer to quota as their electorates rise. This pairing of Boroughs is therefore more sustainable in the longer term.~~

~~2.10 As any further pairing of the two Cities of London and Westminster is unlikely to be sustainable for long because of growth in electorates, officers would suggest that Westminster's position remains "that there is no realistic alternative" to its original submission.~~

#### ~~5.4~~ Register of Electors

~~4.1 The current ~~new R. Register of Electors~~ was first published on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2001, based on a 74% return from households canvassed at that stage. In previous years the Register had been published in mid-February (10 weeks later), by when the response was over 92%.~~

~~4.2 The response by post to the delivery of the initial registration form and to the subsequent reminders are much lower in Westminster than in other authorities. There is therefore more reliance on door-to-door canvassing than elsewhere to bring the response rate up. Staff working for the National Census have similarly had more difficulty obtaining responses from households in Westminster than elsewhere.~~

~~4.3 The canvass in Westminster stretches into the New Year whereas in other London boroughs the canvass may finish as early as November. Bringing forward the publication date of the Register impacts the Audit Commission PI on the % of registration forms returned at publication. As at December 2001 the % response was 74% placing Westminster in the bottom quartile of Inner London Boroughs. The response rate achieved by the top quartile of Inner London Boroughs at that stage was 90% - 95%.~~

~~4.4 However because Westminster's canvass continues into the New Year the response rate reached 83% by January, 2002 and 92% by March, at which point the response was then about the London Borough average.~~

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- 4.5 In the forthcoming 2002 canvass the Government is proposing to legislate so that electors will be able to choose to opt out of having their name included on the edited version of the electoral register sold for commercial purposes. The complete version of the Register will then be reserved for electoral and other defined purposes (e.g. law enforcement and detection of fraud, including credit referencing).
- 4.6 To try and encourage an increase in the % of forms returned this year attempts will once again be made to strengthen the canvass team. The registration form and accompanying notes are also being redesigned to improve clarity.



- 4.7 Officers are also investigating piloting telephone registration. This was tried last year in two London Boroughs (Haringey and Hammersmith & Fulham). It allows those households where there is no change on their registration data to telephone and register a return by 'phone rather than having to send back a form. This service is available on a 24-hour basis and provides an alternative for those who prefer to use the 'phone rather than use the post to return their form.

## 5. Review of Parliamentary Boundaries

- 5.1 On 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001 the Policy and Resources Committee agreed to object to the Boundary Commission for England's (BCE) provisional recommendations for parliamentary constituencies in the north London Boroughs. The BCE's proposals were that Westminster and the City of London should be paired with Brent.
- 5.2 The Committee agreed that the City Council's preference was to revert to two constituencies of the "Cities of London and Westminster" and "Westminster North." The main ground for this case was that under the BCE's own criteria the combined electorates of the two cities already met the electoral quota requirements for being entitled to two constituencies without being paired further and Westminster's population and electorate are increasing much faster than elsewhere.
- 5.3 The City Council's case was put to a Public Inquiry in October/November 2001. The BCE has accepted the Assistant Commissioner's recommendations to revert to the two constituencies option.
- 5.4 The new parliamentary constituencies will not take effect until after the next General Election (at the earliest) as the national review of all parliamentary constituencies has to be completed first.
- 5.5 The new constituencies will be:  
**Westminster North** (Abbey Road, Bayswater, Church Street, Harrow Road, Lancaster Gate, Little Venice, Maida Vale, Queen's Park, Regent's Park and Westbourne wards).  
**Cities of London & Westminster** (the City of London, Bryanston & Dorset Square, Churchill, Hyde Park, Knightsbridge & Belgravia, Marylebone High Street, St James's, Tachbrook, Vincent Square, Warwick and West End wards).

It is being published aing e

~~5.3 Elector cards will not be issued until late January/early February so that the January and February updates are incorporated. This will still give sufficient time for anyone who is missing to register with Electoral Services by Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March in time for the City Council elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2002.~~

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~~5.4 A recent High Court judgement involving the Electoral Registration Officer for Wakefield and the Home Secretary has ruled that the long-established practice of selling names and addresses from the electoral register for commercial purposes is unlawful without the individual's consent.~~

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~~5.5 The Representation of the People Act 2000 legislated for the introduction of two versions of the Register. A complete version of the Register (for electoral and law enforcement purposes, public inspection and credit referencing) and an "edited" register omitting the names of those who have asked to be excluded (which will be for sale to anyone).~~

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~~5.6 Whilst it was the Government's original intention to publish Regulations in time to introduce these two versions of the Register this December (i.e. by this autumn's canvass) they were deferred until next year. The December Register has therefore been compiled as in previous years.~~

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~~5.7 Pending further guidance from the Electoral Commission, no copies of the Electoral Register are being sold.~~

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## 6. Financial Implications

~~6.1~~ All the costings are not yet in. ~~6.1~~ Although there was a saving on the count staffing costs, the overall cost of the elections will exceed the budget provision, although it is not yet possible to determine by how much.

~~6.0~~ Government will meet the costs of any equipment used in approved e-voting or e-counting pilots. However any other costs will fall to the City Council. An all postal vote election could prove to be cheaper to administer than hiring and staffing polling stations.

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## 7. Staffing Implications

~~7.1~~ ~~7.1~~ Not applicable.

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## 8. Ward Member Consultation

8.1 The report is being sent to all councillors to provide an opportunity for them to comment on the administration of the City Council elections.

~~7.2~~ small Electoral Services staff team would need to draw on IT and other specialist advice if the decision is to apply for any e-voting or e-counting pilots. A decision to apply for a City wide postal vote election would require the services of a specialist mailing house.

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If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect one of the background papers please contact Nigel Tonkin on  
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## Background Papers

None

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2. LGA "Elections — the 21<sup>st</sup> century model: an evaluation of May 2000 electoral pilots"

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**APPENDIX "A"**

**EXTENDED POLLING HOURS  
RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Numbers voting**

2,696 voted during the extended hours – 1,286 in the first hour and 1,410 in the last hour. This represented 2% of the total electorate, 8.3% of those voting at polling stations during the day and 7.4% of total turnout.

48% of the total of 2,696 voted in the first hour and 52% in the last hour.

1,631 questionnaires were returned (60.5% of the total voting in the two hours). 45% of the responses were from the early morning voters and 55% from the late evening voters.

**Knowledge of Extended Hours**

51% knew that the polling hours had been extended and 49% didn't. 45% of those voting late in the evening were unaware that the hours had been extended and would otherwise have turned up too late to vote.

Of those who did know, 61% found out about extended hours from the poll card, 10% by word of mouth, 9% from a political party, 6% from a newspaper, 5% from the Returning Officer's leaflet (issued with the poll card), 1% from the City Council's website, 5% from other sources and 3% didn't know.

**Travelling to or from work**

54% were on their way to or from work when they voted.

**Voting Intentions if the hours had not been extended**

If the voting hours had not been extended 49% said they would still have voted at the polling station, 16% would probably have voted, 16% would possibly have voted and 19% would not have voted.

Of those who would not otherwise have voted at the polling station on the day, 52% (188 respondents) would definitely not have voted at all, 20% would have chosen to vote by post or proxy and 28% were not sure.