

IER and GLA Update

Progress

Since the 2015 UK Parliamentary Election, a full review of how the election was organised and delivered has taken place. The lessons learnt and the feedback received has been analysed and changes put in place to deal with the shortcomings identified in the review.

Both the former Elections Manager, Deputy Manager and a Senior Elections Officer have since left the authority and a new management structure is being implemented. Currently an experienced Interim Head of Electoral Services is in post to coordinate the successful delivery of the GLA elections and ensure that the Electoral Register is robust and the provisions of Individual Registration are fully implemented.

A new Elections Manager started on 4 April and the posts of Electoral Registration Manager and Principal Elections Officer have also been recruited to.

Annual Canvas

The Annual Canvass took place between August and mid November 2015 when every household was sent a registration form to sign and return. New residents at the address had the opportunity to register online or by phone. Reminders were sent to everyone who did not respond to the first letter. A door to door canvass was used to collect any forms that were not returned from a known address.

Due to the large number of non-responding properties canvassers were given smaller rounds than in previous years but we doubled the number of canvasser's used. In addition we undertook a data mining exercise to identify residents who paid Council Tax and who were not registered to vote., this identified 11, 000 residents who were not on the electoral register. They have now been sent registration forms, which will be followed up with a reminder and a personal visit if they do not respond.

Electors who had not responded to a canvass for the previous two years and who were not individually registered were taken off the new register when published on 1 December. Around 30,000 electors were removed. Letters were sent to all these electors advising them that they had been taken off the Electoral Register. A high proportion of these letters have been returned as "not known at this address".

A registration form is now sent out with every new Council Tax account opened to capture new residents.

IER

The Individual Elector Registration implementation plan includes proposals to continue the canvass of non-responding properties throughout the year. It also includes proposals to visit all 6th forms and colleges to encourage the registration of 18 year olds. It identifies areas of low registration and outlines strategies to encourage hard to reach groups to register. This implementation plan is kept under regular review and greater use is also to be made of internal records to identify residents who are not registered.

Plans are in hand to collaborate with external groups to promote greater voter registration.

GLA Election - 5 May 2016

Planning for this election is well underway and feedback received following the 2015 Parliamentary Election has been reviewed.

A monthly Project Board chaired by the Returning Officer monitors the delivery plans and seeks assurance that election planning is on time, in accordance with legislation and Electoral Commission guidance and complies with any GLA Directions.

Staff allocation to polling stations has been completed and is in accordance with the Electoral Commissions ratios which relate to the number of electors assigned to a polling station. Appointment letters have been dispatched and an appropriate number of reserve staff identified. This is a fluid situation as staff regularly drop out and alternative staff need to be appointed and trained. Staff training dates have also been confirmed. All buildings to be used as polling stations have been established. Three buildings, in two wards used in May 2015 are not available for the GLA elections. The affected Ward Councillors have been advised.

Polling Stations have been inspected and issues identified in May last year have been reviewed and resolved.

An e- count will be held on Friday 6 May at Alexandra Place and staff attending the count have completed an online training module and a day's practical training.

Regular meetings are held with the Constituency Returning Officer and the Borough Returning Officers of the North East Constituencies.

Ongoing briefings take place with the GLA and London Elects.

We are complying with the Constituency Project plan and maintaining a risk register. All Directions have also been complied with.

By Elections

Plans are in place to deal with two by elections which, if contested will be held on 5 May.

EU Referendum – 23 June 2016

The government has announced that the Referendum for the UK's future membership of the EU will take place on 23 June.

The counting of the votes for the Referendum will take place over night into 24 June at the Britannia Leisure Centre.

Polling stations and the Britannia Leisure Centre have been booked and staff are in the process of being appointed.

The Notice of the Referendum will be published on 17 May.

The question to be posed at the Referendum has been agreed.

Plans are in place to process the expected increase in applications to go onto the Electoral Register and postal voting prior to the Referendum.

Due to the anticipated high turnout for the Referendum the number of polling stations used will be increased. A greater number of polling stations will be allocated as double rather than single with a smaller ratio of electors allocated to them, this will allow a faster turn around and should reduce potential waiting time for electors.

It is also planned to increase the number of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks used.