

**London Borough of Barnet
Elections Project Review**

**Local Government Elections - 3 May 2018
Election of 63 Ward Councillors**

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1. Introduction

The scheduled Local Government Elections for the London Borough of Barnet were held on Thursday 3 May 2018. For the election of Councillors to the local authority, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) takes the role of Returning Officer (RO). The RO has a duty to comply with all relevant electoral legislation and is directly accountable to the Law Courts as an independent statutory office holder.

This internal review of the Local Elections project concludes that the process for the administration of the election ran smoothly across all Wards, with no major issues. The overall turnout across Barnet was 43.7% compared to London which was 38.9%. For these Elections 109,125 electors cast their votes, with 69.1% casting their votes across Barnet's 156 polling stations at 94 locations and 30.9% voting by post.

The next scheduled borough-wide elections that are due to take place in Barnet are on 7 May 2020 for the Greater London Authority and London Mayoral elections, and then the Local Government and UK Parliamentary General Election in May 2022. The learning and recommendations from this report will inform the planning and preparation for the next election.

2. Aim of the review

The aim of this Election Project review is to:

- Review the overall performance of the project that was undertaken to deliver the Local Elections within the London Borough of Barnet including:
 - The planning and preparations that were undertaken for the elections
 - Electoral Registration processes for electors to apply to vote or change voting arrangements
 - The effectiveness of the methods used to manage and work with partners and suppliers
 - The operation of polling stations (venues, staff, processes etc.)
 - Postal vote issuing, opening and verification processes
 - The counting of votes and the declaration of results.
- Identify the key lessons learnt and make recommendations to benefit future election projects.
- Highlight any actions that must, or are advised, be undertaken before the next borough-wide election is held in the London Borough of Barnet (currently scheduled to be the London Mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections on 7 May 2020).

3. Review Methodology

The Democratic Engagement Project Manager conducted this Elections Project review following the Local Elections in May 2018.

In order to develop this review and to propose its conclusions, a number of sources of information and feedback were utilised including:

- Feedback from members of the London Borough of Barnet's Elections Project Board and other key individuals from the project team.
- Responses received to the online election staff feedback survey that was sent to all staff that worked on the elections across a wide-range of roles and duties.

- Responses to the online survey that was sent to the Election Agents of all candidates that stood as for election in the 21 Wards of the London Borough of Barnet.
- A review of written and email contacts, queries and complaints that were received from residents, electors and other stakeholders both during and after the election period.

4. The Local Elections - Project Objectives

The core objectives of any borough-wide election project are similar, and to a large extent are set down by electoral legislation or under guidance from the Electoral Commission.

For the purposes of this review, the following objectives will be considered against all assessments of performance or proposed future activities and advice:

- a) All eligible electors are able to vote and in the manner in which they choose and know that their votes will be counted in the way they intend.
- b) People who want to stand for election are clear about how to get involved and what they have to do to comply with the rules.
- c) All statutory and necessary electoral processes are conducted in a consistent, professional and transparent manner, complying with legislation and statutory deadlines and take heed of relevant Electoral Commission guidance.
- d) The elections and subsequent results are delivered through processes that are secure and transparent and accepted as such by voters, candidates, staff and observers.
- e) Run the elections utilising an effective project management approach, ensuring that all necessary stakeholders within the organisation are effectively communicated with and have confidence in the progress of the project's activities.
- f) All necessary processes are carried out consistently and efficiently so that effective use is made of public money.

5. Project Resources and Methodology

The Local Elections project was managed utilising an approach which, whilst broadly based upon standard project management controls, also incorporated the experience of key project team members and good practice learned from previous election projects in Barnet.

As Returning Officer for the Local Government elections, with legislative responsibility for the conduct of the poll and the counts, London Borough of Barnet's Chief Executive Officer was the Project Sponsor and was responsible for directing and monitoring the progress of the project and with ensuring that adequate resources were made available to for the conduct of the election.

Project Management was provided by the Democratic Engagement Project Manager and the Head of Electoral Services, who were responsible for the planning, implementation and reporting of all activities required to deliver the project's deliverables.

5.1. Project Planning

The Local Elections Project Implementation Plan and full Project Plan outlined key activities with set timescales and milestones to ensuring a successful election.

The regular Election Project Board meetings chaired by the Returning Officer were key to the delivery of the project and communicating the progress. Throughout the year, the Returning Officer holds monthly meetings with the Director of Assurance and Head of Electoral Services, and from this meeting it was decided that the Elections Project Board would be established from December 2018 and meet regularly from thereafter. Key stakeholders were present at all

meetings, including Deputy Returning Officers (DAROs), Head of Electoral Services, Electoral Registration Manager, Elections Project Manager, Monitoring Officer as well as representatives from Communications Team, Customer Services Group and the Head of IT. This ensured that all key stakeholders were aware of progress, could contribute suggestions based on previous experience and offer solutions to any issues that arose.

In addition, the Democratic Engagement Project Manager led short weekly meetings with the core project team to review and update Project Plan ensuring that all activities were implemented.

5.2. Staffing

As for previous elections, the Electoral Services team was supplemented with additional members of full-time staff, who were seconded-in from across the Assurance Group (4). Utilising staff from within the council who had prior knowledge and core transferable skills was essential to enable robust delivery and resilience across all election project deliverables.

The full complement of staff was then split between a 'Electoral Registration Team' and an 'Elections Project Team' although a high degree of flexibility in temporarily moving staff members between these teams as required (e.g. to meet specific statutory deadlines etc.) was necessary to make best use of these available resources.

The following table outlines the key project individuals and their key responsibilities for the election:

Name and LBB Position	Project Role	Summary of Key Responsibilities
John Hooton Chief Executive	Returning Officer (RO) / Project Sponsor	To ensure that the election is administered effectively and that the objectives of the elections project are met.
Clair Green Assurance Director	Deputy Returning Officer (DRO)	To deputise for the RO and to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to the project as required. Also, Line Management of Head of Electoral Services.
Cath Shaw Deputy Chief Executive Mathew Kendall Adults and Communities Director Jamie Blake Commissioning Director	Deputy Returning Officer(s) (DRO) - Polling and Count	To deputise for the RO.
David Tatlow Chief Legal Advisor and Monitoring Officer	Monitoring Officer	Chief Legal Advisor
John Bailey Head of Electoral Services	Head of Electoral Services / Deputy Returning Officer	All project management duties, budgetary control and overall management for all electoral processes, staff and venues.
Emily Bowler Democratic Engagement Project Manager	Elections Project Manager	Responsible for project management: planning, implementation and reporting elections project activities, including quality assurance, and management and co-ordination of all internal and external

		communications.
Akhtar Ali Electoral Registration Manager	Electoral Registration Manager	All Electoral Registration duties, management and application of elections software (including statutory notices etc.). Project resources and quality assurance.
Robert Dunsford Senior Financial Fraud Investigation Officer	Logistics and Security Manager	Facilities and transport management for all polling and count venues. Recruitment and supervision of all security and marshalling staff.
Dave Rowe Head of Exchequer Services	Count Support Manager - Deputy Returning Officer (Count)	Provide additional preparation and planning for all Count processes. DAROs adjudication and processes. Project quality assurance.
Ken Argent Grants Manager	Postal Vote Verification Manager	Planning and management of Postal Vote sessions. Recruitment and supervision of all postal vote opening and verification staff.
Katie Mayers Interim Assistant Director - Strategy and Communications	Communications (Elector, Resident and Media Engagement)	Internal and external communications, media and PR management.
Bryan Webb Head of IT Adam Hussain Service Delivery Manager Kirit Patel Technical Manager	Election project IT support	Planning, management and support of all project IT requirements and systems.
Natasha Patterson Customer Services Group (CSG)	Customer Services Group (CSG)	Customer services relationship management and support.

The Customer Services Group were tasked with providing essential support through the implementation of a dedicated Elections Call Centre to ensure that all 'first tier' enquiries from electors, residents and other stakeholders (for example, straightforward and basic enquiries) were suitably responded to. They also added supplementary support to manage the email box along with the Electoral Registration Office.

In addition to the core Elections Project Team, there is a requirement to appoint over 700 people to fill polling and count roles. A key element is to ensure staffing levels were sufficient throughout and so 'over-recruiting' to key polling and count roles is important to successfully mitigate for inevitable late staff withdrawals and potential no-shows on the day of the Election.

Staff who had worked on recent previous elections were contacted to confirm their availability to work at the Local Elections. In addition, a recruitment campaign ran from January 2018 to increase the number of reserve staff available to work on the elections. The advert inviting new applications was included in Barnet First e-newsletter to Barnet residents, Middlesex University student newsletter and the councils internal staff newsletter. A stall promoting recruitment was held in the Atrium at North London Business Park on the 21 February 2018. Through this campaign we received 203 new applications, of which 154 were used to work on the Local Elections.

All key election staff (including Presiding Officers, Count staff, Polling Inspectors etc.) were trained and briefed by the Head of Electoral Services in preparation for the election.

6. Summary of the Project's Performance

The preparations in Barnet involved confirmation of 156 polling stations, the count venue, and the co-ordination of multiple statutory processes that involved over 700 staff across polling stations, security and logistics, postal voting and finally, the count and declarations. It also involved standing up additional resources to manage the typical surge in registration before an Election, as well as the preparation and issuing of polling cards, postal votes, proxy votes and so on.

6.1. Key headlines

- Following publication of the Notice of Election for the Local Elections, 221¹ successful candidate nomination forms were received
- There were 10,765 additions to the register, with 249,738 people eligible to vote in the May 2018 Local Elections of which 50,591 were registered to vote by post.
- At 43.7%, overall turnout across Barnet was 3.2% higher than that of the 2014 local elections (40.5%).
- On polling day, 75,412 electors cast their votes across Barnet's 156 polling stations at 94 locations, giving an in-person turnout of 37.9% (slightly lower than the London average of 39%).
- Postal voter turnout was at 66.6% which is especially significant given that Barnet has the largest number of postal voters in London.
- These figures make it clear that electors were able to cast their vote in the way that they chose and gives good assurance that there were no wide-spread issues that stopped eligible electors from either getting registered or casting their votes.
- The level of formal complaints and social media enquiries during the run up and on the day of the election was considerably lower than in previous years suggesting an increased level of customer satisfaction from the electorate.
- The Election Count held at Allianz Park ran without any issues, with the first of the 21 Wards declaring results by 3am and last by 9am.
- As a consequence of the very close results in High Barnet, East Barnet and Childs Hill, the Returning Officer agreed to conduct additional checking of the counted votes, by way of 'bundle-flicks' of block votes and complete cross-checking of the mixed vote count sheets. This resulted in the declarations for these wards not being made until all additional checks were finished and provisional results were accepted by all Election Agents.
- An online survey was sent all staff involved in administering all aspects of the elections, and the 386 responses were received were highly positive. To illustrate this, some key responses received were:
 - 96.8% of respondents want to work on future elections in Barnet (96.9% in General Election 2017)
 - 93.8% felt that the right number of staff were available for the processes (compared to 92.4% in the General Election 2017)
 - 95.3% stated that a good level of service was given to electors and candidates (93.2% in General Election 2017)
- An online survey was sent to all candidates' Election Agents. Overall, respondents gave positive feedback.

¹ One candidate withdrew their nomination before publication of the Statement of Persons Nominated.

- Of those respondents who attended the Candidates and Agents Briefing, 100% found it useful
- 83.3% found the process of submitting candidates forms accessible or very accessible
- 100% found the Returning Officer's Agents Briefing event useful or very useful
- 100% felt that Allianz Park was a suitable Election Count venue
- 100% felt that the Election Count processes were clear and transparent
- 100% felt that the election count was well managed.

7. Pre-election preparations

7.1. General Election - June 2017 – Review Recommendations

7.1.1. The review of the General Election held in June 2017 outlines a number of recommendations² following key lessons learnt. All 21 recommendations were implemented as part of the Project plan for the Local Elections.

7.2. Pre-election preparation

7.2.1. A large secure space with good access is required for all elections to prepare the 156 ballot boxes and facilitate collection in person by the Presiding Officers.

7.2.2. Due to the unavailability of BEST Hub it was vital to find an alternative venue for the pre-election preparation. The Gosford Room in the RAF Museum in Colindale was hired from Monday 9 April through to Friday 11 May and proved to be an ideal venue to facilitate the pre-election activities.

7.2.3. The cost for hiring the RAF museum was significantly higher than the BEST Hub, and although perfectly usable, work to investigate whether any alternative venues (that are still assessed as suitable) that may offer better value for money should be undertaken.

7.2.4. North London Business Park (NLBP) was used to brief Candidates and Agents as well as train all staff for their various election roles. With the imminent move out of NLBP, an alternative venue with adequate space will need to be found for the next election.

7.3. Polling Districts and Polling Places

7.3.1. The Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places³ is completed annually and is taken to Constitution and General Purposes Committee (previously the review was taken to General Functions Committee) to enable the committee to decide upon arrangements for polling places and polling districts in London Borough of Barnet.

7.3.2. The report from January 2018 included proposals to change five polling places and split one polling district to be used at all relevant future elections and referendums that take place within the borough. These proposals were approved at General Functions Committee and implemented for the Local Elections in May 2018.

7.3.3. 94 Polling Places accommodate the 156 Polling Stations for the Local Elections.

7.3.4. Barnet used 31 schools as polling venues (over third of all polling places), of which 29 are primary schools. Of these, 17 schools closed to pupils on polling day. We worked closely with Head Teachers during the run up to the Local Elections and schools continue to be

² See GFC November 2017, Item 7 <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=174&MID=9283>

³ See GFC January 2018, Item 7 <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=174&MID=9286>

accommodating. However, some Head Teachers are still concerned about disruption to education and to parents being unable to work due to having to provide childcare on polling day if the school is closed.

- 7.3.5. 12 Portable cabins are used as polling venues. As in previous elections, an additional portable cabin was hired on 'standby' to mitigate the non-availability of any other polling venues. Although this space portacabin was not required, we will continue to hire a stand-by portable cabin to mitigate business continuity risks.
- 7.3.6. The next Annual Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places will take place in the autumn 2018 and report to Constitution and General Purposes Committee upon its conclusion. This review will address any issues that arose from the Local Elections.

7.4. IT Infrastructure and Electoral Software

- 7.4.1. In addition to their attendance at the Project Board meetings, the Elections Project Manager and Head of Electoral Services held regular meetings with the key IT staff, including the Head of IT, were held from January 2018. The level of support from the council IT team was increased given the priority of the project.
- 7.4.2. As in previous elections, an initial 'change freeze' was agreed with IT colleagues to mitigate against any unnecessary IT issues. However, this period of change did not mitigate against BAU changes across the council which led to a number of IT issues period preceding the election that directly impacted the delivery of the Project.
- 7.4.3. For future elections, the Chief Executive has stipulated that the period of controlled change across all major council IT systems must be extended, starting earlier and widened to include non-election system changes to minimise any unexpected disruption.
- 7.5. Barnet Electoral Services have used Democracy Counts Ltd 'Elector8' Electoral Management Software System since April 2017. This system is integral to all registration and election activities and therefore Electoral Services worked closely with the supplier throughout the preparation for the Local Elections.

7.6. Communications

- 7.6.1. In preparation for the Local Elections, the dedicated web pages for Election on the council website had been significantly improved, considering customer feedback and learning from the previous elections. Including for example, including clearer information about the verification process from Gov.uk and updating the FAQs section.
- 7.6.2. To increase voter registration and to raise awareness of the Local Elections and encourage voting, a bright and bold Barnet Local Elections campaign brand was developed. This campaign brand included a logo and strap line which was used on all Barnet Local Elections material helping residents to identify information regarding the Local Elections at a glance.
- 7.6.3. The strap line "Make your voice heard. Make your vote count" was the main call to action throughout the campaign to encourage residents to take part in the democratic process. These call to actions appeared in speech bubbles throughout the campaign and was a rallying cry for residents to take action and register to vote. The artwork showed the voting journey of a resident registering to vote and then voting on polling day.
- 7.6.4. The Barnet Local Elections Voter Registration campaign ran from 19 February - 3 May 2018 and was split into three phases, providing over nine million 'opportunities to see':
 - Phase One - Household Notification Letter: 19 February-11 March

- Phase Two - Registering to vote: 3-16 April
- Phase Three - Voting: 17 April-3 May

7.6.5. The high profile Local campaign covered a range of different communication channels, including:

- Dedicated Local Elections webpage on the Barnet Council website - www.barnet.gov.uk/elections
- Bus shelter and six sheet high street posters
- Interior bus passenger panel posters (for phase one only)
- A4 information posters in GP surgeries and libraries across the borough
- Targeted digital advertising
- Social media posts (both organic and paid for)
- A press release
- Working in partnership with local community organisations, such as CommUNITY Barnet, to circulate voter registration information to our target audience
- Content within the Barnet First e-newsletter to 12,000 residents and an e-newsletter dedicated to voter registration, sent to residents a few days before the deadline.
- Advertising in the Barnet First residents' magazine, sent to all 140,500 households across the borough.
- Messages through the council's internal communications channels (First Team, Message of the Day, the Chief Executive's Weekly message and the Intranet).

7.6.6. In response to previous elections, specific focus was given to preparing a clear strategy for managing social media posts from Facebook and Twitter. Communications staff attended a briefing session with the Electoral Services team which ensured they were well equipped to deal with election related social media enquiries.

7.6.7. Compared to the General Election in June 2017, there was much lower engagement from people on social media on the day of the election. Only a handful of people submitted comments through Barnet Council's Twitter handle. These were straightforward enquiries that were all answered swiftly.

7.6.8. As in previous years, Barnet's Electoral Services (along with the vast majority of all local authorities) shares polling station location information with the national organisation 'Democracy Club'. Their website (www.wheredovote.com) was promoted on the council site, to enable residents to find their allocated polling station and candidate information. For the London Borough of Barnet, Democracy Club reported that there were 7523 postcode/address lookups and were able to show the polling locations for 7457 of those.

7.7. Access for people with disabilities

7.7.1. We aim to ensure that voters with disabilities in Barnet have choice and equal access to the democratic process, whether and however they choose to participate. It is an important human right that citizens can exercise their democratic right to vote and Electoral Services work hard to provide equal access to prospective voters with a range of disabilities to ensure that they are aware of the options available to them to register and to vote (in person, with support, by postal vote or by proxy).

7.7.2. Approximately 12% of Barnet voters identified as having a broad range of disabilities (sensory, learning, mental health and physical disability) and an ageing population, this is a responsibility we take seriously. Our aim is to promote choice and independence so

that disabled voters are encouraged to register to vote and can make the right choice for their particular circumstances in how they cast a vote.

- 7.7.3. As part of the ongoing Democratic Engagement, in partnership with Barnet Mencap we ran an interactive event in March 2018 for people with Learning Disabilities to promote voter registration and voting to this Under Registered Group. In addition, information on the Local Elections was included in local newsletters specifically for disabled and community groups in Barnet.
- 7.7.4. As in previous years, we widely circulated the Mencap and Electoral Commissions 'Easy Read Guides to voting in the Local Elections' resources to support people with a learning disability in the lead up to the General Election. The web content for the Elections was refreshed to make it easier for all residents to find out more about the elections processes.
- 7.7.5. Electoral Services addressed disability awareness in training for polling station staff to promote a better understanding of disability and improved customer service for people with disabilities. We advise our Presiding Officers (POs) to be disability aware to ensure that where a voter appears on the electoral register, the POs know to offer help and support to disabled voters and to act according to the person's wishes. For example, support to cast a vote, allowing the companion of a disabled voter to assist, including taking a ballot paper out of the station to an elector if requested to do so.
- 7.7.6. In preparation for the Local Elections in 2018, every polling station took account of wheelchair access requirements which also make it easier for parents/carers to vote with small children in prams and pushchairs. All polling station staff are trained in the use of a tactile voting device to support voters with visual impairments, which is displayed at every polling station to improve the independence and secrecy of the voting process for people with impaired vision. The availability of a loop system to support users of hearing aids is also fully communicated at stations where this is available. Where the polling station is a portable office we provide ramps which we recognise can pose a challenge for disabled electors and advise Presiding officers to see that the best possible access arrangements are in place at all locations. In addition, each station is inspected during the course of polling day and the Polling Station Inspectors' checklists review this as a part of their visits.

7.8. Election Call centre

- 7.8.1. As in previous years, arrangements were made with Customer Services Group (CSG) for the provision of a dedicated 'Elections Call Centre' to take and answer all first level telephone and email contacts (straightforward and basic enquiries) from the Electoral Registration Team.
- 7.8.2. The CSG Election Lead Officer attended 2 days training with Electoral Services on 21 and 22 March to refresh their knowledge of electoral registration processes and procedures, as well as providing input to the training materials for the CSG staff.
- 7.8.3. An Electoral Officer and representative from Democracy Counts (EMS software provider) provided training over 2 days at the CSG's Coventry offices to all 42 Elections Call Centre staff, including managers.
- 7.8.4. As in previous elections, all calls were answered directly by call centre agents without the use of automated phone menus (or IVR). This allowed the call centre agent to deal with

the customer enquiry more efficiently. The welcome message also included reference to the council web pages, directing callers to answers to frequently asked questions.

- 7.8.5. The Elections Call Centre went live from the Coventry office from Monday 26 March until Friday 4 May. During this period 4595 calls were offered and 4284 (93%) were answered. The council agreed performance target with CSG is 80% of calls are answered within 120 seconds.
- 7.8.6. On Election Day, the Election Call Centre was open from 6am-10.15pm and received 627 calls. On the day they achieved a service level of 99.2%.
- 7.8.7. Learning from previous elections, Electoral Services utilises an automated email response to frequently asked questions and an email filter system to effectively manage the expected increase in electorate engagement. From 26 March, the Coventry CSG team responded to 146 straightforward email enquiries. Electoral Services dealt with 5,249 emails from 1 March 2018 to 4 May 2018 that needed a more in-depth response.

7.9. Training and briefing sessions

- 7.9.1. The Head of Electoral Services and the Elections Project Team ran number of briefing and training sessions, with the Returning Officer or Deputy Officer present, to prepare staff and key stakeholders for the Local Elections.
- 7.9.2. A small team of experienced Trainers, led by the Head of Electoral Services, worked together to ensure that all training was consistent. In total, over 700 staff were trained in advance of the Local Elections.
- 7.9.3. Training for polling staff included:
 - Poll Clerk Training (9, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23 April)
 - Presiding Officer (7,14, 11 April and 2 May)
 - Polling Station Inspector briefings (27 April)
- 7.9.4. Due to the complexity of the Local Elections Count (split across 21 Wards - block and mixed votes), the history of high number of mixed votes and the closeness of results in 2014 Local Elections, specific focus was given to the count methodology with a number of development sessions with the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer prior to finalising the count process.
- 7.9.5. In order to ensure that the various prescribed count processes were understood and embedded, to compliment the training, short video clips of each element of the count methodology were produced, which were presented as part of the count training and briefing sessions. These video clips were also available on the council website for all count staff to review.
- 7.9.6. All staff involved in the election count attended count training including a mock count. Sessions included:
 - DARO and DRO Assistant Count briefing session (24 April 2018)
 - Table Supervisors Count Training (22 March 2018)
 - Count staff training (7, 10, 14, 21 April and 1 May 2018)
- 7.9.7. Staff involved in the postal vote verification sessions were briefed before each session between 26 April to 3 May. All DROs supporting the Postal Vote Verification were given written documentation outlining their roles and legislative duties and 1:1 training ahead of their first session adjudicating on Postal Security Statements.

- 7.9.8. Candidates and Elections Agents were invited to attend a number of briefing sessions including:
- Prospective Candidate and Election Agents briefing session (19 February 2018)
 - Candidates and Election Agent Briefing Sessions (16 April 2018)
- 7.9.9. Overall, we have received positive feedback back from both staff and key stakeholders on the training session with 88.1% of respondents to the online survey stating that they found training useful to undertake their role (compared to 78.3% for General Election 2017) and 100% of respondents to the Election Agents online survey found both Briefing Sessions useful or very useful.
- 7.9.10. Following on from learning on the election day, we will refresh the Polling staff briefing session to ensure that key elements of the role are adhered to, for example, Presiding Officers checking in before the Polling Stations are open to let the Election Project Team know that they are ready, and more information on packing instructions when the polls close.

8. Electoral Registration

8.1. Electoral Registration Levels

- 8.1.1. In London 5.9 million people were registered to vote at the Local Government elections. Over 171,000 applications to register to vote were made between 1 March and 17 April 2018 (the deadline to register to vote). More than 96% of applications were made using the online service, including 21,641 which were submitted on the last day to register to vote.
- 8.1.2. In Barnet, there were 16,525 online applications to register to vote. (See Appendix 1 for the full comparative data from London authorities). Between 1 March to 17 April there were 10,765 additions, 3,349 deletions, and 5,760 duplicate applications to the Register of Electors. The number of online applications received alone on the registration deadline (17 April) was 2,297.
- 8.1.3. The total eligible electorate on polling day was 249,738. The overall turnout in 2018 was 43.7%, an increase of 3.2% from previous Local Elections in 2014 which saw an overall turnout of 40.5%. Please see Appendix 2 for full voting results broken down into wards.
- 8.1.4. A decision was taken to issue a Household Notification Letter to all residential properties (157,753 households) showing who is registered to vote at that particular address. This process has a number of clear benefits, all of which contributed to helping Electoral Services ensure that the register was as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the local elections:
- It was a useful tool for prompting those who have not registered yet to do so before the typical election surge in registrations
 - It helped to identify those who have recently moved within or in / out of the registration area
 - It gave residents the opportunity to check that their details on the register are accurate.

Although the HNL necessarily overlapped with the election registration period, over 6000 household amendments (additions / deletions etc) were directly attributable to the HNL.

8.1.5. Overall satisfaction from the electorate, particularly in relation to registration and voting has improved, and can be evidence by the reduction of formal complaints and social media enquiries. Between April and June 2017, Electoral Services recorded 9 formal complaints (5 upheld and 4 not upheld), mostly focusing on issues with registration in comparison to the same period in 2018 where the team recorded 4 formal complaints from residents with just 1 partially upheld.

8.2. Absent Voting (Postal and Proxy Votes)

8.2.1. There are a number of different elements that must all perform to a high degree of efficiency to ensure that the votes of those electors using the available methods of absent voting are accurately and securely added to the final count whilst guarding against actual and perceived opportunities for electoral fraud.

8.2.2. The number of registered electors in Barnet opting to vote by post was 50,591 which represents over 20% of electors compared with the London average of 15.5%.

8.2.3. A total of 33,712 postal ballot packs were returned by 10pm on polling day, giving a turnout from postal voters of 66.6%. Overall a total of 90 replacement postal vote packs were issued from North London Business Park and Hendon Town Hall for lost, spoilt or non-receipt of postal voting packs.

8.2.4. Although handling of absent vote applications by political parties or their representatives is not against the law, the Electoral Commission have shared a code of conduct that all the main political parties have signed up to. The Electoral Commissions code of conduct set out clear guidance to candidates and their representatives on the handling of postal vote applications and postal ballot papers.

8.2.5. In the run up to the Local Elections, the Electoral Registration Office did receive a number of bulk absent vote applications handed in person and by post to North London Business Park in the lead up to absent vote deadline.

8.2.6. Absent vote applications submitted in this manner were recorded and logged for audit purposes. Random checks on applications were carried out by contacting the elector to confirm that they had completed the form. In all cases of the checks carried out, electors confirmed that they had completed the application form.

8.2.7. An experienced Postal Vote Verification Manager oversaw the postal votes opening and verification processes which took place from 26 April - 3 May at Hendon Town Hall.

8.2.8. Over 2000 Postal Votes were returned directly from polling stations on the day and subsequently brought to Allianz Park along with Ballot Boxes for process and verification at Allianz Park. In addition, three late batches (totally approximately 220) of Postal Votes were delivered from Royal Mail Sorting Offices at 9.30pm to Allianz Park.

8.2.9. To eliminate electoral fraud, postal voters must provide their signature and date of birth. These identifiers are matched against those provided at the time of postal vote application. As these Elections, Barnet rejected 890 postal vote packs due to missing or non-matching identifiers. This equates to 2.6% of all postal packs returned compared against the London average of 2.9%.

8.2.10. The number of registered electors opting to vote by Proxy was 210. Of these, emergency proxy voting arrangements were granted to 20 electors. (See Appendix 1 for comparative data for London authorities).

- 8.2.11. In many instances, because of the late nature of these applications, these needed to be called through to the polling stations on the day of the Election. Presiding Officers were provided with the latest version of the proxy voters lists which included Emergency Proxies. Emergency Proxies received on polling day were recorded correctly and communicated to Presiding Officers promptly.

9. Polling Day

9.1. Polling Stations

- 9.1.1 On polling day, 109,124 electors cast their votes across Barnet's 156 polling stations at 94 locations, giving an in-person turnout of 43.7%.
- 9.1.2 A number of new Polling Venues were used to the Local Elections following the Polling Place and Polling District annual review agreed in January 2018. As well as more focused engagement with these venues in advance of Election day, Polling Station Inspectors were allocated these venues as their first visit to ensure smooth start to the polls.
- 9.1.3 The polling stations were managed and delivered by over 500 Polling Station staff. The process to recruit staff was managed using the Elector8 staff portal. Following on from learning of recent elections, an increased number of 'reserve staff' were recruited to ensure that any staff dropping out could be replaced quickly.
- 9.1.4 More experienced Presiding Officers were allocated to preside at selected polling places that host two polling stations within a single hall. This has been shown to be a better allocation of available resource and allows better management of breaks and busier voting periods.
- 9.1.5 Feedback from polling staff and election agents was very positive stating that the process ran more smoothly in Barnet. Specific feedback on individual polling venues will be used to inform preparations for future elections.
- 9.1.6 Along with the scheduled visits of Polling Station Inspectors (who are allocated a specific area to oversee), the Returning Officer and Deputy ROs visited polling stations throughout the day.

10. Count and declarations

10.1. Venue

- 10.1.1 Allianz Park continues to be used to host the Election Count. The layout and the facilities available at the Allianz Park make it an entirely suitable and comfortable venue for the delivery of the count activities on the large scale of borough-wide elections within Barnet.
- 10.1.2 The Olympic Bar provides an excellent venue for the count given its size and dimensions. The Fez Club was used for Postal Vote Verification. This room was kept secure with access only to Postal Vote staff, candidates and postal voting agents. The Tulip Club was allocated for candidates and agents as well as press and media. This was also the room used for the declaration of the results.
- 10.1.3 As with all Election Counts, it is important to keep the venue secure. Allianz Park provided security on the door with 'bag checks' at the main entrance. Police also provided a presence at Allianz Park and across the borough polling stations during the day.

10.1.4 Due to the volume of candidates, media and other attendees authorised to attend the count, more rigorous arrangements for the reception desk were implemented with robust procedures for individuals to sign in. All attendees at the count were issued with a colour coded ID badge so all security staff and senior Count staff could easily identify individuals, their roles and which processes they were entitled to observe.

10.1.5 Learning from the issue with IT at Allianz Park at the General Election in 2017, a number of meetings were held with IT colleagues to ensure access to IT for both the Postal Verification and the count to run smoothly.

10.2. Media handling

10.2.1 As expected, there was considerable media interest in the Local Elections Barnet and particularly at the Count. More than 30 journalists attended the Local Elections count at Allianz Park ranging from local media, regional media to national media. There was a strong turnout from broadcast media. This included:

- Sky News
- BBC News
- BBC London
- Good Morning Britain
- BBC Sunday Politics Show
- LBC Radio

10.2.2 The council's Communications Team dealt with the media the evening of the count and overall was managed very well with no issues arising. They were open and transparent with the media concerning the elections process in Barnet, whilst also rebutting and resolving any inaccuracies. However, there were a small number of cases where journalists were filming and taking photographs on mobile phones in the count area, despite this not being permitted.

10.2.3 The team were able to provide real-time updates to media regarding voter turnout figures for respective wards provided to be popular with journalists.

10.3. Count Process

10.3.1 Due to the complexity of Local Elections Counts and the close results of 4 years ago, detailed planning and preparation for the count processes took place early on in the project.

10.3.2 Following a thorough review of known count methods (for multiple-member wards) and other London local authority practices, Barnet developed a bespoke count methodology (nicknamed the 'Barnet Giraffe') dealing with high numbers of mixed-vote ballot papers. The Barnet Giraffe proved effective in ensuring high levels of transparency and accuracy. It also proved effective when re-checking mixed vote ballot papers for accuracy.

10.3.3 As legislated, the count followed a number of different stages:

- Verification - checking the total number of ballot papers received in polling station and postal votes
- Count - recording the votes cast by each elector. This includes:
 - Block votes (3 votes for a single political party)
 - Mixed votes (votes made for different political parties or all 3 not used)
 - Doubtful votes for adjudication

10.3.4 The count process ran smoothly, with all 21 Wards completing the verification process by 2am.

- 10.3.5 Underhill was the first ward to be declared at approx. 3.45am and the final ward, High Barnet declaring just before 9am on Friday morning.
- 10.3.6 As a consequence of the very close results in Childs Hill, High Barnet and East Barnet, the Returning Officer accepted requests from agents to undertake additional checks of the votes counted in these wards. As a result, it took longer for these wards to proceed to their declarations. High Barnet ward was the last to be declared and took place shortly before 9am.
- 10.3.7 During the period when election results were being prepared for declaration, it was difficult for the Returning Officer to review the results with relevant candidates and agents with sufficient confidentiality. Inevitably, what happened in the large open plan hall was that during these discussions, the RO was crowded by other interested parties as these conversations were undertaken.
- 10.3.8 The count hall was arranged into 21 Ward specific Count Tables. Supporting the Returning Officer, there were four Deputy Returning Officers each responsible for 5 or 6 wards who were supported by two Deputy Returning Officer Assistants. Each Deputy Returning Officer was also supported by a Table Supervisor Manager who managed and supported their bank of Table Supervisors.
- 10.3.9 Each ward specific Count Table was allocated a Table Supervisor and 8 Count Clerks. This ensured that there was no downtime during the count, as 6 Count Clerks worked whilst other 2 were able to take a break. We will continue to review the approach staffing and breaks for future election counts to maximise efficiency.
- 10.3.10 Following the close of polls, Ballot boxes were returned by Presiding Officers to Allianz Park. The implementation of these processes enabled the receipt of all 156 ballot boxes, including a check on the accompanying paperwork, the ballot paper accounts and a verification of the unused ballot papers to be completed in less than two hours.
- 10.3.11 The number of postal votes received with ballot boxes and from the Royal Mail sorting office did have an impact upon the completion of the verification stage of the ward counts. For future Elections, Electoral Services will review the procedure for collecting postal votes that have handed in to polling stations later in the day. This will minimise any delay in postal vote verification processes being completed and postal votes being introduced to the election count.

11. Recommendations

The key learning and recommendations from this Election Project are listed below. Where relevant some of these can be actioned by Electoral Services in the short term whilst other will need to be revisited in preparation for the next borough-wide Election scheduled for 2022.

- 11.1 Ensure succession planning and knowledge sharing is in place for all key elections roles and responsibilities. This is especially important given that the next scheduled election is not for 2 years.
- 11.2 Continue to ensure the levels of resource (particularly seconded permanent staff) are made available and secured in advance of future elections, utilising where possible, existing staff with prior knowledge of the election processes.
- 11.3 Develop ongoing recruitment plan across the year to ensure good pool of staff available Review Presiding Officer training to ensure additional attention given to importance of 'call-in' process at the start of polling day and packing instructions after close of polls.
- 11.4 There were clear benefits to early training of count staff at all levels to ensure consistent count methods and ensure that processes were clearly prescribed. It is also recommended that the guidance for Table Supervisors on managing count staff is expanded.
- 11.5 Given the number of candidates standing in a Local Elections, review the resources available to process candidate nomination process with particular focus on proof checking.
- 11.6 Informing schools of the dates for next scheduled elections so they can plan dates for closing into their annual timetable.
- 11.7 Continue to send the Household Notification Letters at the beginning of the year to ensure Electoral Register is accurate and update to date in advance of any election, reducing the amount of amendments to the register during the compressed timescales running up to an election.
- 11.8 It is recommended that Electoral Services develop a portfolio of suitable venues in Barnet that is refreshed on an annual basis to mitigate the challenges of identifying and securing suitable venues to accommodate the statutory election activities (potentially at short notice).
- 11.9 Recommend that the period of control change is extended to 1 month before polling day, which includes all Business as Usual systems, web, and Electoral Management Systems.
- 11.10 Revisit the Postal Vote verification process on polling day.
- 11.11 Consider creating specific area in Count hall for Candidate and Agent provisional result discussions with the Returning Officer. This is particularly important at Local Elections when the Count hall becomes very busy.

Appendix 1 - Comparative data for London Authorities for Local Government Elections 2018

Borough	Online/ITR Applications 1/3 to 17/4	Online/ITR Applications on 17/4/18	Additions 1/3 to 17/4	Deletions 1/3 to 17/4	Duplicates 1/3 to 17/4	RM Sweep (total rec'd)	Postal Vote Reissues	Emergency Proxies	Electorate (polling day)	Eligible Postal Voters (polling day)	Time of first Ward Declaration	Time of final Ward Declaration	Avg % of mixed votes	Overall Turnout
Barnet	11,010	2,297	10,765	3,349	5,760	30	90	20	249,738	50,591	4.10am	8.50am	22%	47%
A	3,664	670	2,068	1,274	929	250	51	4	134,346	19,584	2.18am	3.07am	6%	Not reported
B	3,730	664	2,910	3,037	1,145	-	18	8	145,397	28,785	2.45am	7.45am	not reported	37%
C	7,367	947	8,453	5,664	971	275	103	6	188,059	26,815	3.45am	6.45am	31%	37%
D	6,283	839	3,195	3,764	1,725	261	36	5	240,271	37,296	11am (Friday)	3.15pm (Friday)	26%	40%
E	2,846	254	2,488	1,053	not reported	21	124	16	156,147	22,820	2.45am	1pm (Friday)	12%	37%
F	6,836	1,082	5,933	2,972	2,662	197	92	1	270,890	47,450	1.54am	6am	20%	38%
G	8,567	39	3,691	1,859	2,527	not reported	41	13	245,412	30,707	2.29am	3.59am	26%	42%
H	6,148	232	3,798	3,675	1,930	102	41	4	217,157	26,526	2.00am	7.30am	19%	38%
I	9,799	1,134	10,633	7,294	159	not reported	66	19	187,475	26,875	4:15am	6.25am	28%	36%
J	9,884	1,752	5,047	2,021	2,446	306	73	5	178,880	20,018	2pm (Friday)	4.30pm (Friday)	n/a	37%
K	2,363	269	2,216	1,597	1,160	217	35	3	192,362	28,519	2.30am	7am	32%	37%
L	5,234	999	3,380	1,198	1,536	270	58	18	202,888	28,941	1.12am	4am	not reported	38%
M	4,527	671	6,585	4,751	733	446	32	5	194,683	29,236	3.14pm (Friday)	6.54pm (Friday)	29%	37%
N	7,977	1,228	3,955	3,374	2,249	223	44	12	151,420	21,685	1.30pm (Friday)	3pm (Friday)	30%	38%
O	2,711	298	2,258	1,003	906	11	55	not reported	95,360	17,262	4.10am	6:20am	23%	40%
P	4,634	435	4,033	3,732	340	181	38	2	117,535	22,986	3.30pm (Friday)	5.45pm (Friday)	23%	47%
Q	8,958	1,101	5,461	6,648	3,065	41	55	21	227,555	27,998	2.10pm (Friday)	6.41pm (Friday)	34%	34%
R	8,305	1,539	6,738	2,577	1,912	181	72	3	199,555	25,983	2.30pm (Friday)	4.45pm (Friday)	not reported	37%
S	4,291	601	6,526	4,604	646	177	31	8	151,176	21,798	2.00am	5.30am	22%	41%
T	5,021	1,343	3,332	6,188	1,248	324	56	10	207,589	28,450	4.01am	8.03am	25%	39%
U	3,846	12	2,622	1,792	1,087	253	47	29	142,020	27,243	1.44am	6.01am	34%	51%
V	6,270	972	4,257	2,668	1,916	112	35	10	207,442	27,024	3.30am	5.03am	28%	34%
W	9,064	999	4,539	3,982	2,403	250	34	2	195,058	31,012	4.30pm (Friday)	2pm (Saturday_	not reported	42%
X	4,955	577	2,645	2,922	1,058	not reported	33	10	185,224	24,132	1.50am	3:20am	31%	38%
Y	13,626	2,018	9,467	7,500	4,397	137	118	19	233,837	47,907	2.03am	4:39am	not reported	43%
Z	3,404	12	6,091	3,583	505	50	48	15	134,386	21,407	1.30am	4.45am	5%	38%

Appendix 2 - Local Elections 2018 - Turnout by wards

Ward	Eligible Electorate	Postal Voters	Overall Turnout %	Postal Turnout%	In-Station Turnout%
High Barnet	11,578	2,157	55.0%	72.2%	51.0%
East Barnet	11,793	2,388	47.1%	70.2%	41.2%
Brunswick Park	12,116	2,323	45.5%	65.5%	40.7%
Coppetts	11,914	1,955	40.0%	61.5%	35.8%
Oakleigh	11,840	2,337	45.7%	68.4%	40.1%
Totteridge	10,350	2,354	46.5%	69.6%	39.6%
Underhill	11,794	2,346	43.0%	66.0%	37.3%
Woodhouse	12,538	2,405	42.4%	63.6%	37.4%
East Finchley	11,514	1,989	45.4%	63.4%	41.6%
Garden Suburb	10,822	2,232	48.1%	70.2%	42.3%
Childs Hill	12,839	2,579	44.7%	67.0%	39.1%
Golders Green	11,327	2,521	43.7%	69.3%	36.4%
Finchley - Church End	11,268	2,227	46.9%	69.4%	41.3%
West Finchley	10,833	2,092	43.6%	66.3%	38.1%
Hale	12,129	2,938	49.7%	70.0%	43.2%
Mill Hill	13,670	2,905	43.5%	67.7%	36.9%
Hendon	11,712	2,445	40.9%	65.9%	34.3%
West Hendon	11,601	2,402	41.7%	64.2%	35.9%
Colindale	14,457	2,759	31.4%	59.3%	24.8%
Burnt Oak	11,817	2,436	32.6%	60.6%	25.3%
Edgware	11,826	2,801	44.1%	68.3%	36.6%
Total	249,738	50,591	43.7%	66.6%	37.9%