

London Borough of Barnet Election Project Review

European Parliamentary Elections – 23-26 May 2019 Election of 8 Members of the European Parliament to represent the London region

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1. Introduction

The European Parliamentary Elections were held on Thursday 23 May 2019. Electors in the London Borough of Barnet, along with electors from all other London boroughs, voted to elect 8 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to represent the London region.

Following the EU Referendum in June 2016 (and the subsequent triggering of ‘Article 50’ in March 2017), the United Kingdom was scheduled to leave the European Union on 31 March 2019 and was not expected to participate in these elections. However, on 14 March 2019 the UK Government and the European Council agreed to delay British withdrawal (i.e. extend Article 50) until either 22 May or 12 April 2019 - dependent upon whether the ‘Withdrawal Agreement’ was accepted by Parliament. The Withdrawal Agreement did not pass through Parliament and on 10 April 2019, Article 50 was further extended until 31 October 2019.

Whilst it was then the default position in (UK and EU) law that the EU Parliamentary elections would take place in the UK on 23 May 2019, the UK Government stated that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU could still occur before the date of the election.

Although the Cabinet Office gave official permission for spending on preparations and arrangements for the elections on 8 April 2019, it was not until 7 May 2019 (several weeks after the Notice of Election was published on the 15 April 2019) that the UK government formally announced that the EU Parliamentary elections would indeed take place in the UK.

Throughout the period of political uncertainty preceding the ‘official’ start of election preparations (outlined above), Barnet’s Electoral Services maintained and implemented a responsive set of contingency plans and activities. Although no money could be spent (that might subsequently be reclaimed from Cabinet Office), it was necessary for venues and staff availability to be carefully monitored and responded to quickly once certainty around the elections was established.

Not surprisingly, given the uncertainty surrounding whether these elections were going ahead, this (essentially ‘snap’) election still presented significant logistical challenges for election teams and Returning Officers across the country. There were fewer than 7 weeks in which to complete all election preparations and in addition, EU citizens already on the Register of Electors needed to submit an additional declaration form (commonly referred to as an EC6 form) in order to be eligible to vote in the UK at these elections.

For European Parliamentary Elections, legislation designates the London Borough of Lewisham’s Returning Officer (Janet Senior – Chief Executive Officer of Lewisham) as the Regional Returning Officer (RRO) for the London region. All other London borough Returning Officers take the role of Local Returning Officer (LRO) for their voting area. Therefore, Barnet’s LRO (John Hooton – Chief Executive Officer) had a duty to comply with all relevant electoral legislation (being directly accountable to the Law Courts), and to liaise with and comply with certain directions issued by the London RRO.

The London Borough of Barnet reviews every borough-wide election held and the learning and recommendations from the reports of these reviews help to inform and improve the planning and preparation for future elections in the borough.

At present, the next scheduled borough-wide elections due to take place in Barnet are the London Mayoral and Greater London Authority (GLA) elections on 7 May 2020. Local Government and UK Parliamentary General Elections are then scheduled in May 2022.

However, there remains speculation that an earlier short-notice (or ‘snap’) UK Parliamentary General Election and/or a further EU Referendum could be held sooner.

2. Objectives and Methodology of the Review

2.1. The objectives of this Election Project Review are to:

- Review the overall performance of the project that was undertaken to deliver the European Parliamentary elections within the London Borough of Barnet including:
 - All planning and preparation activities that were undertaken for the elections
 - Electoral Registration processes for electors to vote or change voting arrangements (including requirements for EU Citizens to vote in the UK at these elections)
 - The effectiveness of work with partners and suppliers
 - The management and 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).

2.2. Review Methodology

The Head of Assurance and Business Development and the Head of Electoral Services conducted this review following the European Parliamentary Elections in May 2019.

A number of sources of information and feedback were utilised for the review including:

- Results and statistics from the election in Barnet and (where available) in comparison with those from across London and the UK
- 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 (sent to all staff that worked on the elections across a wide-range of roles and duties).
- A review of all written and email contacts, queries and complaints that were received from residents, electors and other stakeholders both during and after the election period.

3. The European Parliamentary Elections - Project Overview

3.1. Project's Objectives

The core objectives of any borough-wide election project are similar, and to a large extent are set either by electoral legislation or from guidance published by 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 can vote, using their preferred voting method and know that their vote will be counted in the way that they intended.
- b) 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.
- c) The elections and subsequent results are delivered through processes that are secure and transparent and accepted as such by voters, candidates, staff and observers.

- d) The elections are implemented 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.
- e) All processes are carried out consistently and efficiently and in such a way as to offer best possible value and effective use of public money.

3.2. Project Planning and Methodology

Throughout the year, the CEO holds monthly Electoral Service meetings with the Director of Assurance, the Head of Electoral Services, the Head of Assurance and Business Development and the Electoral Registration Manager. These meetings are an effective way for the CEO to ensure that his responsibilities as Barnet's Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Returning Officer (RO) are met. In addition, the meetings allow forward planning to be agreed and for the key Electoral Services stakeholders to confirm that preparations are as relevant as needed in case of short notice elections and to respond to other electoral events¹ as they arise.

The European Parliamentary Election 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 LRO for the European Parliamentary elections, with legislative responsibility for the conduct and compliance of the election processes, polling and the count, the London Borough of Barnet's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was the Project Sponsor and was responsible for monitoring the progress of the project and with ensuring that adequate resources were made available for the conduct of the election.

The Head of Electoral Services directed the timescales and activities of the Election Project and further project management was provided by the Head of Assurance and Business Development, who was also responsible for communicating and reporting on all activities required to deliver the project and for all external public communications during the election period.

Due to running preparations agreed during the monthly meetings with the CEO, a complete election project plan was rapidly developed once the election was certain. This project plan outlined all known activities, with set timescales and milestones and was key to ensuring a successful and legally compliant election. Amongst the documentation supporting the project plan were a full and maintained risk register, an issues log and business continuity plans to be invoked in case of unplanned (emergency) loss of key staff and/or venues.

An Elections Project Board was established following instruction from the CEO on 29 March 2019 and weekly meetings were held thereafter. Chaired by the CEO (as LRO), the Election Project Board meetings were key to the delivery of the project, to communicating the progress and ensuring the quality of the project.

Key stakeholders were present at all meetings including: senior council officers that would be acting as Deputy Local Returning Officers (DLROs), the Head of Electoral Services, the Head of Assurance and Business Development, the Electoral Registration Manager and representatives from the Communications and Strategy Team, Customer Services Group and Capita-IT. This ensured that all key stakeholders were aware of progress, could contribute suggestions based on previous experience and offer solutions to any issues as they arose.

¹ For example; the recent Electoral Review of Barnet that was conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England or the forthcoming change in legislation to the Annual Canvass for Registering Electors.

3.3. Staffing arrangements

As for previous elections, the Electoral Services team was supplemented with four additional members of full-time staff, seconded-in from across the Assurance Group. Utilising staff from within the Assurance Group who have prior knowledge and core transferable skills is a proven and highly effective way to ensure robust delivery and resilience across all election delivery and electoral registration activities.

This increased complement of staff was then broadly split between into Electoral Registration and Election Delivery teams - although a high degree of flexibility in moving staff members between these teams was utilised as necessary (e.g. to meet specific statutory deadlines) to make the most effective use of available resources, experience and knowledge.

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

Name and LBB Position	Project Role	Summary of Key Responsibilities
John Hooton Chief Executive	Local Returning Officer/ Project Sponsor	Ensure that the election is administered legally and effectively. Ensure that the objectives of the elections project are met.
Clair Green Assurance Director	Deputy Local Returning Officer (DLRO)	Deputise for the LRO and to ensure that appropriate resources are available to the project
Cath Shaw Deputy Chief Executive Jamie Blake Executive Director, Environment	Deputy Local Returning Officers (DLRO) - Polling and Count	To deputise for the LRO – specifically on polling day and at the election count.
David Tatlow Chief Legal Advisor and Monitoring Officer	Monitoring Officer	Chief Legal Advisor
John Bailey Head of Electoral Services	Head of Electoral Services / Deputy Local Returning Officer	Responsible for project management and delivery, budgetary control and overall management and compliance of all electoral processes, staff and venues. Responsible for all election staff training.
Emily Bowler Head of Assurance and Business Development	Elections Project Manager / Deputy Local Returning Officer	Core 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	Electoral Registration duties, compliance and reporting. Training and oversight of Elections Call Centre Direct contact with electors and residents. Publication and supply of electoral registers. Oversight of Data quality and proofing of printed election items.

Robert Dunsford Senior Financial Fraud Investigation Officer	Facilities, Logistics and Security Manager	Management of all facilities, logistics, security and transport needs for all polling and count venues and equipment. Recruitment and management of all security and facilities staff.
Mandy Marchant Electoral Officer	Election Staffing: Recruitment and Allocations	Management of election (polling and count) staff recruitment and location assignments.
Ken Argent Grants Manager	Postal Vote Verification Manager	Management of Postal Vote sessions. Recruitment and supervision of all postal vote opening and verification staff.
Gareth Green Media and Transformation Communications Manager	Communications (elector, Resident and Media Engagement)	Internal and external communications, media and PR management.
Kirit Patel IT Technical Manager Bryan Webb Head of IT	Election IT delivery and support	Planning, management and support of all election IT requirements and systems.
Natasha Patterson Customer Services Group (CSG)	Customer Services Group (CSG)	Customer services and call centre relationship management and support.

In addition to the core Electoral Services and Election Project Team, as is required for all borough-wide elections, over 700 election staff were recruited to fill the vital polling station, postal vote and election count roles, as well as for numerous other critical associated electoral activities (e.g. delivery of polling equipment, preparation of election materials and stationery, management and security of collection and delivery processes etc.).

All key statutory election staff (including Presiding Officers, Polling Inspectors, Postal Vote Adjudicators and Count Supervisors etc.) were trained and briefed on their election duties by the Head of Electoral Services within the preparation period for the election. Particular attention was paid to the training of Polling and Count Staff as, due to the unusually long ballot paper², some processes needed to be amended significantly in comparison to other elections. Key examples were the instructions given to polling staff for folding and unfolding ballot papers before they were handed to electors and for many of the processes involved in verifying and counting the ballot papers at the count, as they had to be redesigned to deal with such a long ballot paper.

Additional election training (for Polling Clerks, Call Centre Agents, Security staff and other ancillary staff etc.) was delivered by members of the core Electoral Services team. By the date of the election, more than 20 separate training sessions had been conducted that covered all aspects of the statutory election process.

Training for the staff seconded into the Electoral Registration team (particularly in relation to the requirement for EU Citizens to submit a ‘UC1’ form in order to be eligible to vote in the UK at these elections) was delivered directly by the Electoral Registration Manager throughout the various stages of the election’s statutory registration timetable.

² The RRO’s team at Lewisham dealt with the nominations process for all Parties and Independent candidates that wanted to stand at these elections. By the time of publication of the Statement of Persons Nominated there were 10 Parties (each with multiple candidates on a ‘party list’) and 11 independent candidates validly nominated to stand. Relevant election law dictates such things as spacing and font size on the ballot paper, which resulted in a ballot paper over 80cm (31 inches) in length.

3.4. Election Venues and Accommodation

The preparations for these elections in Barnet involved booking, confirmation and preparation of 156 polling stations across 94 different venues. Included within these polling stations were 13 that were contained within portable offices ('Portacabins' that must be ordered and delivered to site, where further work is undertaken to prepare them for use before polling day), 50 that were located across 31 Barnet schools and even three that were housed within a temporary marquee, situated on the public tennis courts in Princes Park within Golders Green ward.

In addition to the polling stations, further venues that were used for the election and required booking and preparation included; North London Business Park for the majority of the election staff training sessions (including practical 'mock' count training sessions), Hendon Town Hall for Postal Vote opening and verification, the RAF Museum in Colindale, that was used for secure preparation of ballot boxes and polling materials and Allianz Park (home of Saracens Rugby Union Club) in Mill Hill, that was used for the Election Count on Sunday 26 May 2019.

3.5. Electoral Registration

3.5.1. Household Notification Letters:

Prior to the election being confirmed and as has been the case for the previous two years, Electoral Services sent out 'Household Notification Letters' (HNLs) to all Barnet households in late March. HNL's provide up-to-date information to residents about who is registered to vote from their address and offer an opportunity for residents to easily (i.e. either online or by telephone/email) provide information to Electoral Services so that they can update or amend this information. Over the past few years, the use of HNL's has had a positive impact on the accuracy of the register of electors in the period immediately before an election period begins and have reduced the number of contacts, enquiries and amendments that have occurred during the following election period. Due to the timing of the election confirmation from government, responses to the HNLs inevitably overlapped with the busy election registration period. However, over 6,000 registration amendments were provided by residents in response to the HNL this year.

3.5.2. Applications and Amendments to Electoral Register:

Despite the HNL being a success, between the publication of the 'Notice of Election' on 15 April 2019 and the deadline for registering in time to vote at these elections on 7 May 2019, there was still a surge in registration activity and over 5,000 applications to register to vote received by Barnet's Electoral Services team. Of these, 4,605 applications were made via the government's online registration portal³, including 1,494 applications made on the registration deadline day itself. Subsequently, between 15 April and 7 May there were 5,498 additions to and 573 deletions from Barnet's Register of Electors.

3.5.3. Absent Voting Arrangements:

As per any borough-wide election, there was also a typical surge in the number of registered electors requesting postal or proxy voting arrangements. During the period from the publication of the Notice of Election on 15 April 2019 to the Postal Vote registration deadline (5pm on 8 May 2019), over 2,200 applications for postal votes were processed. In addition, by the deadline for Proxy Vote applications (5pm on 15 May 2019) over 530 applications for proxy voting arrangements had been processed. In total 46,442 Postal Voting Packs were despatched to eligible electors (including 73

³ www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

replacement Postal Voting packs that were ‘re-issued’ due to being lost, spoilt or not received) and 1,798 electors had a proxy voting arrangement in place by polling day.

3.5.4. EU Citizens Eligibility to Vote:

Specific to these elections was the requirement to have arrangements and processes in place to deal with the eligibility to vote in the UK for EU Citizens (even when already on the Register of Electors). To vote in the UK at the European Parliamentary elections, EU citizens (except those from Ireland, Cyprus and Malta) had to complete and submit a declaration form - called a ‘European Parliament voter registration form’ and generally known as either a UC1 or EC6 form - by the registration deadline day on 7 May 2019.

At the time that the election was confirmed, there were almost 31,000 EU citizens on Barnet’s Register of Electors and approx. 26,000 of these were not eligible to vote in the EU elections (approx. 5,000 of Barnet’s EU citizens from Ireland, Cyprus and Malta were automatically eligible to vote).

In anticipation of the elections going ahead, Electoral Services had undertaken some preparatory work for contacting EU citizens regarding their need to submit an EC6 form. Due to this preparatory work, Electoral Services were able to despatch communications (comprising an explanatory letter and a personalised EC6 form) to all EU citizens already on the register on Friday 12 April 2019 by email (where such details were held) or letter. A second communication was sent to all EU citizens on the register on 26 April 2019. A total of 6,517 EC6 forms were received back, by email and post, by the registration deadline date of 7 May 2019 and the EU citizen was given eligibility to vote at the election. A total of 422 EC6 forms were received after the deadline and in response, these applicants were sent a letter explaining that as their form had been received late, they were unfortunately not eligible to vote in the UK at these elections.

3.6. Postal Vote Opening and Verification

To guard against (both actual and perceived) electoral fraud, the opening and verification of returned Postal Voting packs involves many highly regulated processes that must be carried out before a postal voter’s ballot paper can be forwarded for inclusion in the election count. As Barnet has such a high number of postal voters (the highest in London by both quantity and percentage of electorate), the overall operation for effectively and compliantly managing incoming postal votes requires a high degree of planning and control.

In total, seven days (between 16-24 May) of postal vote opening and verification sessions took place at Hendon Town Hall and access to the sessions was monitored throughout. An experienced manager oversaw the Postal Vote Opening and Verification sessions and was supported by experienced IT staff that ensured that the electronic scanning and verification of the Postal Vote Security Statements (that include the personal identifiers provided by postal voters and which compared with those held on record) was smoothly implemented. In total, more than 40 staff were involved across all the Postal Vote Opening and Verification sessions.

3.7. Election Call Centre

As at previous elections, the Customer Services Group provided essential support through the implementation of a dedicated Elections Call Centre. This was to ensure that, given the inevitable surge in contacts, all ‘first-tier’ enquiries from electors, residents and other stakeholders were suitably responded to as quickly as possible. The Election Call Centre also provided supplementary support to manage first-tier enquiries received via the Electoral Registration Office’s standard email account.

Due to ongoing pre-election engagement with CSG and the experience and knowledge retained within CSG staff from recent elections, it was possible to quickly implement a fully trained and prepared Elections Call Centre within the short notice period for the election.

Key to ensuring that the Election Call Centre could operate effectively was the training provided by an Electoral Officer onsite at CSG's Coventry offices. Direct training on how to handle the specific nature of all first-tier enquiries was therefore provided to all Elections Call Centre staff, including managers on the 24 April 2019. This included a full suite of FAQ responses, call scripts and a basic overview of statutory election and electoral registration processes.

4. Project Performance

4.1. Overall Assessment

This review of the project to deliver the European Parliamentary elections within the London Borough of Barnet's voting area concludes that, despite the preceding uncertainty and short notice that they would go ahead, the elections on 23 May 2019 were delivered very successfully.

All the project's objectives (as set out at **3.1**) were met⁴ and both polling day and the election count passed without major issues. The focus on preparatory activities (referred to at **3.2**), carried out and maintained prior to formal confirmation of the election going ahead, proved well founded and undoubtedly helped to ensure that the election project could start from a strong position.

Key to this positive assessment of the election project's performance is the following information:

- Overall turnout across Barnet was 42.5% which compares positively versus London-wide at 41.3% and UK-wide at 36.9%. Turnout in Barnet was also 2.7% higher than at the last EU Parliamentary elections, held in 2014 (when the election was combined with Barnet's Local Government elections).
- In Barnet at this election, 97,267 electors cast their vote – of this figure, 67,824 electors cast their votes in-person across Barnet's 156 polling stations and 29,442 voted by post⁵.
- In an online survey of all of Barnet's election staff, conducted for this review, 96.2% of responders either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the overall experience for electors in Barnet was positive (i.e. electors could vote securely and privately and/or votes were counted accurately)

This information gives a clear indication that electors were able to cast their vote, in the way that they chose and confirms that there were no wide-spread issues that stopped eligible electors from either getting registered or casting their votes.

4.2. Postal Voting

The most significant issue that had to be resolved during this election project was the need to urgently re-issue postal voting packs to all 198 postal voting electors that have a 'Signature Waiver' arrangement in place. Despite fully audited proofing processes being followed and recorded within Electoral Services to review the production of the postal voting packs (including electronic sign off of 'Live' proofs and personal visit by a team of four to the Print Supplier to randomly open and proof over 400 live postal vote packs before they were despatched), it was

⁴ Although 75% of allocated funding is provided from Cabinet Office in advance, the final claim for the election costs to be reimbursed (that goes to the Cabinet Office's 'Elections Claims Unit') to LB Barnet has yet to be submitted (deadline is 21 November 2019) and, based upon recent election claims, is unlikely to be finally settled until approx. mid 2020

⁵ Turnout from 'In-Person' voters was 37.14% and turnout from Postal Voters was 63.50%

quickly reported, from an elector that had received their postal vote pack and had a Signature Waiver arrangement, that the corresponding ballot paper front was entirely blank (i.e. no candidates details had been printed upon it).

The Print Supplier quickly established that due to an IT issue at their production facilities, the ballot papers included in all 198 Signature Waiver postal vote packs were indeed blank. An immediate recovery process was agreed between the Print Supplier and Electoral Services whereby all 198 affected postal vote packs were re-printed and delivered to Barnet the following morning (Saturday 11 May 2019). Following this, Barnet election staff hand-delivered all re-printed postal voting packs (along with an explanatory letter) on that same day. All affected postal vote packs were therefore delivered within 24 hours of the issue being identified. Evidence from the postal vote opening and verification sessions, the election count and from contacts into Electoral Services shows that no electors were unable to vote due to this issue, or felt that they had been disadvantaged due to it occurring.

As outlined in **3.6** above, there were seven days of postal voting opening and verification sessions held at Hendon Town Hall. More than 2,000 Postal Votes were returned directly from polling stations on polling day, however, as the election count was being held on Sunday 26 May 2019, there was no requirement for an Opening and Verification session to be ongoing at the same time as the count commenced. All postal vote packs returned on polling day (including approx. 220 from Royal Mail at 9.30pm) were processed in a session held on Friday 24 May 2019.

To eliminate electoral fraud, postal voters must provide personal identifiers (their signature and date of birth), which are matched against those provided at the time of postal vote application. Trained 'PV Adjudicators' reviewed any identifiers that could not automatically be matched by the IT system and all rejections upheld by the PV Adjudicators were then reviewed again by Deputy Local Returning Officers with appropriate powers delegated to them by the LRO. At these elections, Barnet's DLRO's rejected a total of 932 postal vote packs due to missing and/or non-matching personal identifiers.

4.3. Polling Day

Although contact was made with all polling places early in 2019 (to check availability 'should' any elections be held in spring or early summer), due to the short notice of this election, two polling places informed the LRO that they were not available, for reasons outside of their control, to be used. In response and following rapid review of all possible alternatives, two emergency Polling Venues were identified and used for these elections. The first was an additional portable office that was placed at the Mount Pleasant roundabout in East Barnet to replace the use of the New Bevan Baptist Church Hall. The second was a large temporary marquee that was erected on the public tennis courts at Princes Park in Golders Green instead of the hall at St Mary and Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church Hall (this polling place houses three polling stations, a 'triple-station' polling place).

Despite all the short-notice planning for these locations being fully achieved, experienced Polling Station Inspectors were allocated to these venues from 6.30am to assist the Presiding officers in the initial set-up and opening of polling at 7am. According to feedback from the polling staff and senior visitors throughout the day, both polling venues were met with approval from electors (with the marquee actually being preferred to the usual venue by the majority of voters).

Across Barnet, polling stations and voting processes were managed and delivered by over 500 Polling Station staff. Following on from learning of recent elections, an increased number of 'reserve staff' were recruited to ensure that any staff that dropped out at late notice could be replaced quickly. As in previous elections, more experienced Presiding Officers were allocated to

preside at selected polling places that host two polling stations within a single hall. Over several elections, this has been proven to be a better allocation of available staff resource, as it reduces areas of duplicated work and allows an increase in poll clerks. This improves the performance of polling stations during busier voting periods and enables better management of staff breaks within these polling places.

Along with the scheduled visits of Polling Station Inspectors (who are allocated a specific group of polling places to oversee), the Local Returning Officer and Deputy LROs visited polling stations throughout the day. In addition, as agreed with the Borough Police ‘SPOC’⁶, police constables and PCSOs visited all polling places at least twice during the day.

As the count was not being held until Sunday 26 May, after the close of polling at 10pm, ballot boxes were returned by Presiding Officers to North London Business Park. Here they were checked in and then securely stored until being moved via a secure process to Allianz Park on the morning Sunday 26 May.

4.4. Election Count

Following on from polling and the final postal vote opening and verification session at Hendon Town Hall, the Election Count held at Allianz Park from 9am on Sunday 26 May 2019 was conducted in a calm and efficient manner and no issues were encountered. Despite the very long ballot papers, the comprehensive staff training and logistical and security planning undertaken proved effective. All ballot papers were verified quickly and verification figures were submitted to London’s RRO by 12:30pm. The nature of the count allowed for a lunch break to be given to all staff simultaneously and upon their return, the sort and count of ballot papers was commenced. To accommodate the processes designed for sorting and counting the long ballot paper, and as the count did not need to be structured across the borough’s wards, a total of 18 count tables were used across three ‘mini-count’ areas, each overseen by a separate DLRO. All count processes proceeded efficiently and the provisional results from Barnet were transmitted to the London RRO at 6.10pm. The delivery of the count processes proved to be accurate, with a final ballot paper variance (total ballot papers verified versus total ballot papers counted) across the whole count being minus one (-1).

Although these results were ‘provisionally’ accepted by the RRO, electoral law specific to the European Parliamentary elections prohibits the declaration of even local results until 10pm, so a small core of staff were retained on-site, along with the LRO, until this time to complete the declaration and publication of Barnet’s voting totals. The declaration of which candidates had been become London’s MEPs was made by the RRO in City Hall shortly before midnight.

4.5. Stakeholder Feedback

Whilst different elections naturally have varying levels of engagement from the general electorate, it was evident that the level of comment and enquiries received via social media during the run up to and on the day of the election was lower than at recent borough-wide elections. In addition, only 5 complaints were received from the residents, suggesting that ‘customer’ satisfaction with the conduct of the elections was very high.

Further to this, staff that worked on the election were also highly satisfied, with 99.2% of respondents to the all staff survey wanting to work on future elections in Barnet and 96.8% stating that they would recommend working on a Barnet election to their colleagues, friends and family.

⁶ Police ‘Single Point of Contact’ (SPOC)

5. Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The key learning and recommendations from this Election Project are listed below. Whilst all the action points are designed to improve good practice at future scheduled elections, due to the current uncertain political landscape, a number require more urgent action to ensure that critical resources are available to enable the delivery of any short notice general election.

Barnet's Electoral Services have conducted reviews of all borough-wide elections delivered held since May 2012. The recommendations from these reviews are then carried forward to be actioned or to inform the work to plan and prepare for following elections. The review of Barnet's May 2018 Local Elections⁷ contained 11 recommendations. All 11 recommendations were reviewed and implemented as part of the project plan for the June 2019 European Parliamentary elections.

5.1. Election Venues

- 5.1.1. As most council staff have now moved out of NLBP (and less of its space(s) are available to the council) – it is necessary to identify that alternative venues with adequate space and availability (at short notice) to accommodate some key election project activities. In particular; staff training (esp. for count training), short-term secure storage and project space.
- 5.1.2. Despite having been contacted as part of the Nov/Dec 2018 'Interim Annual Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts' and included as part of pre-emptive communications sent to polling places in January 2019, two polling places only informed the project team that they could not be used for the May elections, once the election had formally been called.

However, Electoral Services should continue to conduct annual 'Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places'⁸ as has been the case since 2014. Taking an annual review to Constitution and General Purposes Committee does assist election preparations and helps to ensure that arrangements (and contact details) with the various organisations and groups from which polling places are hired are current and up to date.

- 5.1.3. When it is available, Allianz Park should continue to be used to accommodate Barnet's borough-wide election counts. It has now proven over many elections to be an entirely suitable and comfortable venue for the delivery of the count activities on the scale required within Barnet.

However, there is an urgent need to identify suitable alternative count venues, and possibly alternative count arrangements (e.g. holding counts for different borough wards or Parliamentary constituencies in different venues), that can be used should Allianz Park not be available. This is a very real concern should a short-notice general election take place in October or November 2019. Whilst Electoral Services remains in ongoing communication with Allianz Park, there are a significant number of 'possible' election dates when the venue would not be available for use as an election count venue.

- 5.1.4. Similar to the situation outlined above, there is also an urgent need to identify alternative polling preparation venues. For the past two elections in Barnet, this critical activity has been conducted in a secure area at the RAF Museum in Colindale. However, as with

⁷ Taken to CGP Committee 22 Oct 2018: <http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=174&MId=9502&Ver=4>

⁸ See GFC January 2019, Item 12 <https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=174&MId=9503&Ver=4>

Allianz Park, there are some specific time-periods within October and November 2019 when the venue cannot be made available for the purposes of election preparation.

- 5.1.5. Over the longer term, it is recommended that Electoral Services consider developing a ‘portfolio’ of suitable election venues across Barnet, that is refreshed on an annual basis, to mitigate the challenges of identifying and securing suitable venues to accommodate statutory election processes.

5.2. Election Staffing and Training

- 5.2.1. Over the past few elections, a small number of staff from within the Assurance Group have been seconded into the elections project and electoral registration teams. It has been of benefit as the experience and knowledge of these staff has grown, as they have become more effective within their seconded election roles. However, it will also pose a threat to the conduct of future elections should these specific staff not be available. It is therefore recommended that additional staff (likely from within Assurance, but also potentially the wider council) receive some preparatory training and briefing sessions on the activities required to deliver elections and the use of the ‘Elections Management System’ (EMS) software. In addition, arrangements to secure the availability of these additional staff should be put in place, so that future elections (especially those at short-notice) do not start from a position of weakness regarding election project and electoral registration staffing.
- 5.2.2. Outside of the core Elections Project Team, there are several key election roles that have been successfully delivered by individual members of Barnet (or partner org.) staff over a number of years. It is necessary to ensure that robust succession planning and knowledge sharing is in place to cover these key responsibilities. Should these regular members of staff not be available, either for a short-notice election or more long term for scheduled elections, there will be an additional pressure on the election being well delivered. Particular areas that should be reviewed immediately to ensure suitable contingency arrangements are in place include: Postal Vote Opening and Verification sessions, Logistics and Security and Elections IT Delivery and Support.
- 5.2.3. Although the count for the European Parliamentary elections required a number of relatively unique arrangements and processes, numerous benefits of having trained all count staff across all roles were evident. The consistency in the applied count processes and overall accuracy of the count demonstrated that the training had been effective and that staff were clear about the processes that they were delivering. It is recommended that full count training be delivered to all staff ahead of future borough-wide counts. It is also recommended that further training be given to all Table Supervisors and senior count roles, to improve the management of those elements beyond the actual process of counting ballot papers and votes (e.g. staff management, break management, use of count paperwork and IT, processes for doubtful ballot papers etc.).

5.3. Electoral Registration

- 5.3.1. It is recommended that the ERO should continue to send the Household Notification Letters (HNLs) in early spring (ahead of the most typical election period). The use of this ‘confirmatory process’ over the past three years, and especially the decision to go ahead with HNLs in March this year (before it was confirmed that the European elections would take place), has two significant benefits. Firstly, it improves the accuracy and completeness of the Register of Electors in the period immediately leading up to borough-wide elections and secondly, it reduces both the number of enquiries into, and

the workload upon, the electoral registration team during the extremely busy pre-election period⁹

5.4. Proofing Processes

- 5.4.1. Learning from the issue that affected Signature Waiver postal vote packs (detailed in **4.2**), it is recommended that Electoral Services engage with the contracted Print Supplier to understand the supplier's proofing processes more fully. In addition, the Electoral Services proofing process needs to have an additional step introduced, which ensures that a live check is made of each different type of postal vote pack during the pre-despatch, live proofing. This is likely to require that the Print Supplier (and any future print supplier) makes an explicit extraction of each type of postal vote to facilitate this and may incur some additional costs. For every other printed election item (e.g. poll cards, ballot papers etc.) a similar approach - ensuring that each different type of said item is checked - should also be introduced.

⁹ It is possible that the intended legislation to change the process of the annual canvass (known as 'Canvass Reform' and due to come into effect before the annual canvass in 2020) may have an impact upon this recommendation – this should be monitored by the ERO and Head of Electoral Services as the legislation is enacted.