

**London Borough of Barnet
Elections Project Review**

**Local Government Elections - 5 May 2022
Election of 63 Councillors across 24 Wards**

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1. Introduction

1.1. The 2022 Local Elections in Barnet ran smoothly and efficiently.

The London Borough of Barnet's Local Government Elections for were held on Thursday 5 May 2022. 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 administration of the elections ran smoothly across all wards and all processes, with no major issues. Overall turnout across Barnet was 37.9%, which was lower than in 2018 (43.7%), but was still higher than the average across London (35.2%¹). Postal Vote turnout remained high at 64.3%. In total at these elections, 97,480 electors voted, with 61,701 votes cast within Barnet's 143 polling stations (across 96 venues) and 35,779 votes cast by post.

Following the review of Barnet's electoral arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) that concluded in January 2020, electors in Barnet were voting to elect 63 Borough Councillors across Barnet's new arrangement of 24 wards (made up of 15 x three-councillor wards and 9 x two-councillor wards). To implement the new wards mandated by the LGBCE review, significant changes were required across all polling districts and places within the borough. Whilst there were a few challenges that arose and a small number of suggestions for future changes, the new arrangements operated exceptionally well and improved polling provision for a significant number of electors (and reduced the impact upon residents) across the borough.

1.2. There are significant challenges to be managed for future elections in Barnet.

The next borough-wide elections that are scheduled to take place in Barnet are for the Mayor of London and Greater London Assembly (GLA) on Thursday 2 May 2024. Based upon current election timetables, these will be the first elections to be held in Barnet that must comply with the significant changes to the conduct of elections that are being brought in by the Elections Act 2022 (EA22). The most high-profile of the changes to be brought in for future elections will be the requirement for all in-person electors to show photo-ID at the polling station before they are issued with a ballot paper. There are also key changes to the application process for postal votes and new restrictions on the handling and handing-in of postal votes at polling stations.

Another of the changes brought in by EA22 means that for the first time, the next Mayor of London will be elected under the 'first past the post' voting method². Due to this, the GLA have announced that the Mayor of London and GLA election counts in 2024 will be conducted manually³.

Perhaps the most significant challenge that may be faced in May 2024, however, is the prospect of the Mayor of London and GLA elections being held as a combined election with a Parliamentary General Election. For London in particular, this will present a set of challenges that have never been faced before. With new legislation to implement, the highest possible level of voter turnout and a manual count of four separate ballot papers (totalling circa 800,000 papers), as well as the different election boundaries and voter franchises, this would present the most complex set of elections ever conducted in Barnet.

¹ Data provided by 23 out of 32 London boroughs at date of report being written

² Until now the Mayor of London has always been elected using the 'Second Preference Vote' method

³ All previous Mayor of London and GLA counts have previously been 'electronic counts, with ballot papers scanned, counted and results collated electronically.

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 in the new 24 wards in Barnet
 - Electoral Registration processes for electors to apply to vote or change voting arrangements
 - The operation of the new polling arrangements (venues, staff, processes etc.)
 - The effectiveness of the services provided by partners and suppliers
 - 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 Mayor of London and Greater London Assembly elections on 2 May 2024).

3. Review Methodology

The Head of Electoral Services conducted this Elections Project review with key input from other members of the Elections Project Team and oversight from the Elections Project Board.

To evaluate the performance of the project and justify the proposed recommendations of this review, a variety of sources of information and feedback were utilised including:

- Analysis of the 'Lessons Learned Log' that was initiated and maintained throughout the delivery of the project.
- 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.
- 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.
- Benchmarking of data provided from election teams delivering the local elections at other London Boroughs (via the London branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators).

4. Objectives of the Local Elections Project

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

For the purposes of this review, the following objectives were considered when assessing the performance of the project and the electoral activities and processes that were delivered:

- 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) The election project utilises 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, whilst ensuring that effective use is made of public money.

5. Project Resources and Methodology

The Local Elections project was managed utilising an approach broadly based upon standard project management controls, but which 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, the 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.

Full project management controls were provided in collaboration by the Head of Electoral Services and the Assistant Director of Assurance, who were jointly responsible for the planning, implementation and reporting of all activities required to deliver the project's objectives. Integrated into the project's planning and activities were regular and ongoing checks and proofing processes to ensure comprehensive 'live' quality assurance on the project's progress throughout its duration.

5.1. Project Planning

Preliminary planning for the May 2022 Local Elections commenced in earnest following the GLA elections in 2021. This early work was primarily focused on any ongoing Covid19 requirements, creating and evaluating all new polling arrangements following the LGBCE review, and planning for a 24-ward local election count. Once the Election Project Board meetings commenced (from December 2021), a fully timetabled project plan and associated risk register were prepared, and these were presented at the Board meeting in January '22.

The regular Election Project Board meetings, chaired by the Returning Officer, were key to the delivery of the project and for communicating its progress. Membership of the Board was made up of all Deputy Returning Officers (DROs), the Head of Electoral Services, the Assistant Director for Assurance and Barnet's Monitoring Officer (also Head of Legal Services). Other members of the Election Project Board were the Head of IT, the Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing and key representatives from the Communications Team and the Customer Services Group (CSG). This ensured that all key stakeholders were aware of progress, could contribute suggestions based on previous experience and offer cross-cutting solutions to any issues that arose.

In addition, the core Elections Project Team held weekly meetings to fully review and update the 'live' project plan - ensuring that all activities were on-track, fully resourced and scheduled to be implemented successfully.

5.2. Project Staff Resources

As is now standard practice for elections in Barnet, four members of staff from the Assurance Directorate were seconded-in to supplement the Electoral Services team from approximately mid-March '22. These staff members all have extensive experience and prior knowledge of their specific election roles, which helped ensure robust delivery and resilience across the election project's activities. In addition, a member of Barnet's Graduate Trainee scheme also joined the project team as a Project Support Officer and quickly provided essential support to the project management element of the elections. This approach also ensured that all Electoral Registration activities were kept fully up to date during the typical pre-election surge of applications and enquiries (up to and including the various statutory deadlines and on polling day).

The full complement of Electoral Services staff and secondees were all based at the Colindale offices and were broadly split between a 'Registration Team' and a 'Project Team'. However, a high degree of flexibility was utilised, and staff members moved freely between these teams as required - whether to deliver cross-cutting activities, meet statutory deadlines or manage specific high-volume tasks (nominations, registration deadline days, staff contacts, ballot box preparations etc.).

6. Election Planning Activities (inc. pre-Project)

6.1. Recommendations from the May '21 GLA elections

6.1.1. The Annual Electoral Services Overview Report (Sept. 2021)⁴ contained nine key recommendations, based upon lessons learnt throughout the delivery of the Mayor of London and GLA elections in May 2021. Eight of these recommendations were successfully implemented ahead of (or within) the delivery of the Local Elections in May 2022. The one outstanding recommendation, (related to the procurement process for a new contract for the Electoral Management Software (EMS) system) is still ongoing as the current contract is still in force⁵.

6.2. Ward Changes and Publication of the Register of Electors on 1 March 2022

6.2.1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) completed a statutory review of the London Borough of Barnet's electoral arrangements in January 2020, that were legislated to come into effect at the Local Government elections on 5 May 2022. The LGBCE's final recommendations meant that:

- Barnet would continue to have 63 councillors.
- There was an increase in the number of wards from 21 to 24.
- Councillors were to be elected to 15 three-councillor and 9 two-councillor wards.
- The boundaries of all wards changed - none stayed wholly the same.

6.2.2. Due to the new warding arrangements, it was necessary that a complete new set of polling arrangements (polling districts and their polling places) were in place to administer the local elections across the 24 wards of the borough. The project to implement the new warding arrangements for the London Borough of Barnet included a key Electoral Services workstream. This work included the following:

⁴ [Item 7: Constitution and General Purposes Committee – 4 October 2021](#)

⁵ The decision to bring the services provided by Capita IT back in-house may well have a bearing on the outcome of the decision around the procurement (esp. timing of) of a new EMS contract

- Electoral Services assessed all existing polling places and every potential polling place that was identified or suggested as an alternative option.
- All polling place and polling district proposals were produced following detailed discussions with the Cross-Party Working Group (CPWG) and analysis of 'straight-line' and 'road network' distance for all electors to relevant potential polling places.
- A final full borough set of proposals being agreed at a meeting of the CPWG on 14 September 2021 for presenting to Constitution and General Purposes Committee on 4 October 2021 and subsequently used as the basis for the statutory public consultation that ran throughout October and November 2021.
- The final proposed polling arrangements of 96 polling districts - each with its own designated polling place were designed to offer a variety of benefits including:
 - Smoothing of elector numbers across many polling districts meaning that no polling place would need to contain more than two polling stations (previous elections had up to eight 'places' with three or more 'stations').
 - A reduction in number of schools used for polling from 31 to 15.
 - A reduction in the number of portable offices used for polling from 11 to 0 (enabling improved access for electors with disabilities affecting their mobility)
- Following the public consultation, final proposals for all 24 wards (incorporating amendments that Electoral Services and the RO made based upon responses to the consultation) were submitted to Constitution and General Purposes Committee for approval in January 2022.

6.2.3. The polling district and polling place arrangements for 17 wards were agreed at the meeting of the Constitution and General Purposes Committee on 6 January 2022⁶. The polling district and polling place arrangements for the final four wards were not agreed however and were referred for a decision to the Council meeting on 25 January 2022⁷. Following the final ward polling arrangement decisions taken at the January Council meeting, the work to fully re-compile the Register of Electors into the new polling districts commenced immediately. This required all residential properties in the borough to be allocated to their new polling district and for every elector's roll number to be appropriately re-sequenced.

6.2.4. Upon completion of this work, extensive proof checking (utilising GIS software alongside systematic 'human' audits based on system generated reports and external maps) was undertaken to ensure that no properties or electors were incorrectly allocated across the 96 new polling districts⁸ of the borough.

6.2.5. As the Register of Electors is organised and compiled according to the layout of polling districts, it could not be re-published in full (as is required by law each year following the Annual Household Canvass) until all polling arrangements for the 24 new wards of Barnet were finalised.

6.2.6. This work had to be completed ahead of the full publication of the Revised Register of Electors and this took place on 1 March 2022. It was critical to the election (including for

⁶ [Item 8: Constitution and General Purposes Committee – 6 January 2022](#)

⁷ [Item 12.3: Council Meeting – 25 January 2022](#)

⁸ As polling districts that make up the Register of Electors must, by law, be able to deliver a Parliamentary election, an additional 6 'child' polling districts had to be created in new wards that cross Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

candidate nominations) that the new Register of electors was published sufficiently ahead of the deadline for the publication of the 'Notice of Election' on 28 March 2022.

6.3. Electoral Registration

6.3.1. Between 1 January 2022 and 5 May 2022, there were 14,689 successful new applications to register to vote. In the same period, 12,561 electors were removed from the Register of electors and 4,064 duplication applications to register were reviewed and dismissed.

6.3.2. Over the same period, there were also 3,564 applications to vote by post (including 195 received on the PV application deadline day on 19 April) and 455 applications for a proxy vote arrangement. For these elections 55,670 electors had a postal vote and 705 proxy votes were in place.

6.3.3. A Household Notification Letter (HNL) was sent to all residential properties in mid-February. Each HNL details who is registered to vote and the voting arrangement in place for every elector at that address. HNLs deliver a number of benefits, all of which contribute to Electoral Services ensuring that the register is as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the local elections.

6.3.4. Whilst the HNL response period overlapped to some extent with the period ahead of the elections when electoral registration activities surge, over 10,000 properties responded directly to the HNLs with information about additions, deletions and amendments to the Register of Electors. Obtaining these responses helped to flatten the surge and allowed the Electoral Registration team to ensure that they were completely up to date with registration activities throughout the entire election period.

6.4. Public Awareness and Communications

6.4.1. Following the comprehensive changes to Barnet's wards and polling arrangements, the public awareness activities were designed to ensure that electors in Barnet had high levels of awareness that their ward and polling venue were likely to have changed.

6.4.2. Information about the changes to Barnet's wards, that referenced the May '22 elections, was regularly included in the Barnet First magazine and delivered to every household in the borough throughout 2020 and 2021. In addition, all of Barnet's social media channels were utilised regularly throughout the same period.

6.4.3. The HNL sent to households in mid-February included a colourful, branded four-page booklet explaining the ward changes and encouraging residents to be ready to vote on 5 May 2022. This booklet included information on how to register, how to request a postal vote and also explained that elector Poll Cards would clearly show where in-person electors would need to go to vote.

6.4.4. Further information about the ward changes was again provided to all households, via a direct mailing when Council Tax bills were despatched in March. Along with a Barnet First magazine delivery also in March, this meant that all households in Barnet received direct messaging about the 5 May 2022 elections on three occasions across a five-week period.

6.4.5. All known election agents, former independent candidates and other interested parties were contacted (where appropriate details were held) in January 2022 and invited to a 'Prospective Candidates Briefing' held online on 2 February 2022. The session was also promoted online and via social media, encouraging interested residents to participate. This session provided details of the nominations criteria and processes, so that individuals could assess whether they were eligible to stand as a candidate at the election. In addition, election timescales and certain specific dates (with particular reference to the

forthcoming new ward arrangements and subsequent new elector numbers that would be created) were also shared.

- 6.4.6. To support the direct communications and further raise public engagement, high-profile on street (Clear Channel) advertising was used across two separate periods:
- 14 – 28 February, to highlight ward changes and support voter registration by encouraging residents to look out for their HNL delivery
 - 28 March – 11 April, to encourage voter registration ahead of the registration deadline (14 April) and support the delivery of Poll Cards to electors
- 6.4.7. In addition to the specific communications outlined above, a campaign of co-ordinated communications activity was used to further enhance resident and staff awareness of the elections as well as Barnet's new ward and polling arrangements. The campaign utilised a range of communication channels, including:
- Dedicated Local Elections webpages on the Barnet Council website - www.barnet.gov.uk/elections
 - Schedule of regular social media messages, utilising both Electoral Commission and Barnet Electoral Services branding and graphics
 - Communications shared through Barnet Homes and local community organisations (such as CTN bulletin, Barnet Together networks) to circulate voter registration information to a variety of targeted audiences
 - Regular content within the Barnet First e-newsletter sent out to over 37,000 residents, encouraging voter registration and reminding electors to check their polling station venue
 - A3 information posters despatched to GP surgeries and libraries across the borough
 - Internal messages through the council's staff and partner communication channels (inc. First Team, Chief Executive's Weekly message, etc.).
- 6.4.8. As at previous elections in recent years, Barnet's (along with the vast majority of London authorities) polling venue information was shared with the national organisation 'Democracy Club'. Their website (www.wheredolvote.com) shows individual electors where their polling station is and how to get there from their home. It was promoted on the council's website and via social media, to further assist residents in finding their allocated polling station and seeing information about the candidates in their ward.
- 6.4.9. As has now been established for a number of years, the CSG Call Centre provided additional essential support with direct enquiries into Electoral Services (both by telephone and email) by standing up a dedicated Elections Call Centre.
- 6.4.10. Following training provided by a Senior Electoral Services Officer, the Elections Call Centre went live on Monday 21 March 22 to coincide with electors receiving their polling cards across the borough. This arrangement has matured during the delivery of elections over recent years and ensures that all 'first tier'⁹ enquiries from electors, residents, or other stakeholders are quickly and suitably responded to. Any enquiries that are more complex or require a more detailed knowledge of elections or electoral registration are quickly escalated to core Electoral Services officers for resolution.

⁹ First tier enquiries are generally those that are most frequently asked and can be answered promptly by a call-centre agent with limited access to electoral registration data (e.g. 'am I registered', 'how do I register', 'how do I get a postal vote', 'which candidates are standing in my ward' etc.)

6.5. Election Processes, Staffing and Training

- 6.5.1. The Notice of Election was published on Monday 28 March 2022 and the Nomination Period opened on Tuesday 29 March 2022. Appointments for the informal checking of candidate's nomination papers were booked for Election Agents and independent candidates across the period to 4pm on Tuesday 5 April 2022. The Head of Electoral Services and Assistant Director of Assurance carried (acting with delegated powers from the Returning Officer) carried out validity checks upon 100% of the nominations submitted before the statutory deadline. In total 207 candidates were accepted as validly nominated to stand for election across the 24 wards in Barnet.
- 6.5.2. Beyond the preparatory election project work, to deliver the most critical election activities, namely postal vote verification, polling and the election count, requires more than 700 staff to be recruited, trained and managed. To ensure such high staffing levels can be met for such a short employment period, it is necessary to 'over-recruit' to mitigate inevitable late staff withdrawals and potential no-shows on the days that the specific election activities must be delivered. The ongoing prevalence of COVID19 continued to make this an issue of much higher likelihood and impact than at elections held prior to the pandemic.
- 6.5.3. Initially, staff that have been employed at previous elections were contacted, along with those people that, since the GLA elections in May '21, have submitted an application form to work on an election in Barnet. This approach, supplemented with a few internal messages to Barnet staff detailing the opportunities to work on an election, has proven successful in providing adequate quantity and calibre of staff for elections over several years now.
- 6.5.4. A comprehensive training programme was then implemented to ensure that all election staff are trained in their respective roles ahead of delivery. This includes all Presiding Officers and Polling Inspectors, as well as all Count Clerks and Count Supervisors attending training that is delivered by the Head of Electoral Services. All Postal Vote staff (including those involved in the verification of returned postal vote packs) were trained by the Postal Vote Manager.
- 6.5.5. All polling staff were trained via online training sessions that took place at the weekend and on evenings. All Presiding Officers and Polling Station inspectors attended training sessions conducted by the Head of Electoral Services and the Assistant Director of Assurance. All Poll Clerks were trained by experienced senior elections officers.
- 6.5.6. The Postal Vote opening and verification sessions were conducted across five days in the Halton Gallery at the RAF Museum in Colindale. The various processes employed to ensure that all statutory checks are completed (all postal votes must be verified to ensure that they have been used by the intended elector before being included in the election count) were reviewed and enhanced from those used (for the first time) for the Mayor of London and GLA elections in May 2021. The change in Covid restrictions allowed for more staff and increased capacity to be introduced.
- 6.5.7. Postal vote verification processes on count night (held in the Fez Room at StoneX stadium) were reviewed and amended in an effort to ensure that there were minimal delays to individual ward counts. Due to the high number of postal vote packs that are typically returned on polling day and the need for all 'local election' postal votes to be sorted into the 24 wards, scanning processes at the count inevitably create a bottleneck in the process that can cause significant delays. Due to this a 'manual verification' process

was introduced and was largely successful – lessons learned will enable further improvements and speed benefits at future elections.

- 6.5.8. The increase in wards and new mix of three and two member wards brought new complexity to the election count. Along with the existing challenges of multiple member ballot papers (meaning that a high proportion of ‘mixed’ votes must be anticipated) and the history of close results in Barnet, it was clear that the count would be the most challenging faced at a local election in Barnet.
- 6.5.9. The local election count requires a process that accurately allocates votes recorded on any ‘mixed vote’ ballot papers (i.e. any ballot paper where the elector has not used all of their available votes for candidates of the same political party). Based upon the transparency and accuracy of the local election counts in 2018, Barnet’s bespoke mixed vote counting sheet (known as the ‘giraffe’) was again utilised to excellent effect.
- 6.5.10. All count staff were required to attend in-person training, that included a practical ‘mock count’ exercise, held in the Dermot Boyle Hall at the RAF Museum. This training was held across three dates and was conducted by the Head of Electoral Services, with practical assistance from Table Supervisors and Senior Count staff.
- 6.5.11. The Returning Officer and DRO’s also attended further briefing sessions to review and sign off processes, to ensure that complete consistency was maintained across all aspects of the management and delivery of the elections, both across the borough in polling stations and across the various ward tables at the election count.
- 6.5.12. In order to maximise the number of count clerks and help ensure that all ward counts could proceed to a result as quickly as possible, the 24 ward count tables were split across two floors at the count venue (East Stand, StoneX Stadium, Saracens Rugby Club). 18 ward counts were held in the Olympic Hall on the ground floor and 6 ward counts were held in the Tulip Room on the 1st floor. The declarations for the results in all 24 wards took place in the 100 Club on the 1st floor.

7. Summary of the Project’s Performance

The delivery of the Local Elections in Barnet on 5 May 2022 was highly successful. Voters from across the borough were able to cast their votes in the way that they intended. Although there were a small number of significant challenges, all issues were swiftly resolved, and the delivery of all the key election activities were carried out in a transparent and secure manner. No complaints have been raised following the election and the results across all wards were accepted by candidates and electors as accurate and fair.

To deliver these elections, the May 2022 Local Elections Project prepared and published all necessary statutory notices and managed all processes to enable 207 candidates to stand for election. The project recruited and trained over 730 staff and booked, opened and administered 143 polling stations (inc. sourcing and preparing all required materials and equipment) across 96 new polling districts. The project also verified over 36,000 returned postal vote packs at the Halton Gallery at the RAF museum, and conducted 24 individual ward election counts and declarations, at the East Stand of Saracen’s StoneX Stadium overnight on 5 May 2022. Alongside all these activities, the surge in registration activity always seen before an election was managed and controlled, a continuous communications campaign was delivered and the preparation and issuing of elector poll cards, postal votes and proxy votes was also completed.

7.1. Key Headlines

Following publication of the Notice of Election on Monday 28 March 2022:

- 207 candidates were successfully nominated across Barnet's 24 wards
- There were 4,498 additions to the register, meaning 256,974 people were eligible to vote in the May 2022 Local Elections
- There were 3,052 new postal vote applications, meaning 55,672 electors were registered to vote by post
- On polling day, 61,701 electors cast their votes across Barnet's 143 polling stations, giving an in-person turnout of 30.7% (down by 7.2% compared with 2018)
- A total of 35,779 electors voted by post, giving a PV turnout of 64.3% (down by 2.3% compared to 2018)
- Across the borough, overall turnout was 37.9% (down by 5.8% vs. 2018 when turnout was 43.7%). Turnout ranged from 46.3% in High Barnet ward, down to 25.1% in Colindale North ward¹⁰
- The ward election counts held overnight following the close of poll at the Saracen's StoneX Stadium ran without any significant issues,
- The first ward result (Colindale North) was declared at approx. 1.40am and last (Barnet Vale, following some recount activities) just before 7am.
- An online survey was sent all staff involved in administering all aspects of the elections, and the 261 responses received were highly positive. To illustrate this, some key responses received were:
 - 96.6% of respondents would like to work on future elections in Barnet
 - 92.7% felt that the right number of staff were available for the election processes that they worked on
 - 96.2% stated that a good level of service was given to electors
- An online survey was also sent to all Candidates and Election Agents and although the received responses all gave very positive feedback, the total number of responses was very low and came largely from a single political party. For this reason, they cannot fairly be considered representative and so are not referenced in this report.

8. Recommendations

The key recommendations, based upon lessons learned from this Election Project, are listed below. It is critical that these recommendations are reviewed ahead of the formal start of future election projects for borough-wide elections in Barnet. Some of the recommendations require continued action to be taken by Electoral Services during non-election periods (or at appropriately scheduled times), to give enough time for the recommendation to be implemented and to ensure that a high level of preparedness is maintained in case of any short notice elections.

- 11.1 Implement a series of quarterly 'Electoral Services Update' meetings to ensure that the impact of the new requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 are comprehensively prepared for. These meetings, chaired by the Head of Electoral Services, should be attended by all key (existing and proposed) Elections Project staff, including those that are seconded in at election times. These meeting will be tasked with ensuring that there is widespread knowledge and understanding of the new legislation and in addition, with undertaking any relevant preparatory actions (procurements, training,

¹⁰ See attached **Appendix A - Local Elections 5 May 2022 - Turnout by ward**

system upgrades etc.) in advance of the commencement of future election projects. Amongst the various areas that the meetings can review are:

- Familiarisation with new electoral processes as introduced by Elections Act 2022 (details and timings to be announced by DLUHC and brought in via secondary legislation)
- Training requirements for Electoral Services core staff and those seconded to the Election Projects and more widely for elections staff – specific to relevant election roles and processes
- Identification and review of potential venues for the range of election activities (including polling, preparation, PVV and count etc.)
- Review of relevant Electoral Services contracts and any future procurement activities

11.2 Ongoing work must continue to identify and secure suitable venues for critical electoral activities to be delivered effectively. Alternate venues, whether used or not, are needed to add resilience to election planning and mitigate against potential temporary or permanent loss (including at short notice) of first choice venues.

- The procurement of suitable venues is increasingly fragile and expensive. Securing availability of the venues for periods needed adds a further challenge (and especially so in the case of short-notice elections).
- In many areas, the availability of suitable polling stations is extremely limited, and in a few areas, virtually non-existent. Offering good access to electors with different forms of disabilities and being sensitive to restrictions that may affect electors of various faiths further reduces the number of venues that might be considered suitable.
- Across the borough, there are currently no (known) venues that offer better facilities than those currently used for; election preparations, postal vote opening sessions and the count. Venues need to provide large spaces (e.g. 'count hall' size) that are secure and have appropriate facilities for the staff and other attendees.

11.3 Sufficient staff and other relevant resources must continue to be provided to the Electoral Registration Officer (and when relevant, the Returning Officer). Robust resilience planning and knowledge sharing needs to be in place for all key election roles and responsibilities. In addition, to meet the new requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 (over the next 6 to 18 months or so) the resilience of future election delivery will require that all staff seconded to elections have a good degree of knowledge and understanding to successfully deliver their short-term role.

- The late surge of registration and absent voting applications ahead of elections will inevitably continue, but the pressure that this period places upon the electoral registration team will increase, as the challenge of dealing with applications for the new 'voter authentication certificate' will be added at the same time¹¹.
- Given the new requirement (from May 2023 onwards) for electors voting at a polling station to show an acceptable form of photo ID, there will be a need for an

¹¹ DLUHC have confirmed that the deadline for applying for a Voter Authentication Certificate is to be set at 5pm on the sixth day before polling day in the EA22 secondary legislation.

extensive and high-profile public awareness communications campaign, to ensure that voters are fully aware of the new requirements before going to vote.

- Other elements of EA22 mean that the delivery of future elections will require additional polling staff to be recruited and trained even more extensively than at present. New processes around postal vote applications and new rules relating to the handling and handing in of postal votes will also make this area more complex.
- Adequate staffing levels and high-quality training will be especially important in the event that the Mayor of London and GLA elections scheduled for May 2024 are (as is a significant possibility) combined with a Parliamentary General Election.

11.4 Whilst already included within the presentation to Candidates and Election Agents, information about the relevant statutory processes that the RO and ERO must follow to resolve issues of reported 'non-delivery' of Postal Vote Packs, should be more comprehensive for future elections. Despite a relatively small number of reports that some electors had not received their Postal Vote Packs, a disproportionate level of officer (including DROs and RO) time and focus was diverted from other critical project activities to answering enquiries and demands from one or two candidates at these elections.

11.5 Electoral Services (on behalf of the ERO) should continue to send out Household Notification Letters to all residential properties around February or March each year. The primary benefit of this activity is to reduce the impact of the traditional pre-election 'surge' that occurs in the immediate run up to borough-wide elections. More generally, HNLs help to maintain the Register of Electors in as accurate and complete a manner as possible.

11.6

It is proposed that the recommendations listed above are reviewed on a quarterly basis at the monthly Electoral Services meetings, chaired by the London Borough of Barnet's ERO and RO (i.e. the Chief Executive) and attended by the Head of Electoral Services, the Assistant Director of Assurance and the Executive Director of Assurance.

Appendix A - Local Elections 5 May 2022 - Turnout by ward

Ward	Eligible Electorate	Overall Turnout %	In-Person Voters	In-Person Turnout%	Postal Voters	PV Turnout%
Barnet Vale	11,968	42.4%	9,413	37.2%	2,555	68.5%
Brunswick Park	11,585	41.4%	9,119	35.1%	2,466	64.6%
Burnt Oak	13,436	27.4%	10,777	17.9%	2,659	59.1%
Childs Hill	12,558	35.9%	9,801	28.2%	2,757	63.4%
Colindale North	7,289	25.1%	5,953	18.2%	1,336	55.8%
Colindale South	11,305	27.7%	9,046	21.0%	2,259	54.4%
Cricklewood	6,154	30.6%	5,009	24.6%	1,145	56.9%
East Barnet	12,351	42.6%	9,719	35.7%	2,632	68.0%
East Finchley	11,025	43.7%	8,916	38.3%	2,109	66.2%
Edgware	13,456	37.7%	9,895	27.8%	3,561	65.2%
Edgwarebury	8,279	43.6%	6,246	36.2%	2,033	66.5%
Finchley Church End	12,991	40.5%	9,984	38.8%	3,007	65.8%
Friern Barnet	12,622	36.6%	10,481	25.4%	2,181	63.9%
Garden Suburb	9,015	42.7%	6,765	37.5%	2,250	66.8%
Golders Green	8,621	36.8%	6,610	25.3%	2,011	65.1%
Hendon	13,484	34.3%	10,660	31.5%	2,824	62.7%
High Barnet	8,754	46.3%	6,879	33.2%	1,875	67.4%
Mill Hill	12,489	35.7%	9,530	27.5%	2,959	61.9%
Totteridge and Woodside	10,367	40.0%	7,873	31.9%	2,494	65.7%
Underhill	8,641	43.4%	6,788	36.2%	1,853	69.5%
West Finchley	12,536	44.7%	9,861	38.0%	2,675	69.3%
West Hendon	10,638	31.8%	8,348	24.0%	2,290	60.4%
Whetstone	7,923	43.3%	6,119	35.9%	1,804	65.6%
Woodhouse	9,447	36.5%	7,512	30.2%	1,935	63.7%
Totals:	256,974	37.9%	201,304	30.7%	55,670	64.3%