

ORGANISATION AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL	DATE 13 March 2025	ITEM NO 7
SUBJECT Electoral Services Annual Report 2024	WARD (S) All	
CHIEF OFFICER Stuart Godfrey		
DECISION CLASSIFICATION Scrutiny Report		

SECTION I

1. Recommendations to decision maker:

- 1.1 To consider the Electoral Services Annual Report and make recommendations to the Executive, if necessary.
- 1.2 To agree that where appropriate, the report and any recommendations be submitted to the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 To note that where possible, the report and responses to the recommendations be presented at the next meeting of the Panel.

2. Links to Our Greenwich Missions

- The Electoral Services Department is the operational unit of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer and operates independently to the Council in order to remain politically neutral as required by law. On an operational basis and in terms of the services provided these link to the Councils missions as follows:
- We design our services around the needs of our residents – reference to the accessibility of the service
- Our Council is an adaptive organisation, enabling it to navigate the increasing number of challenges it faces while remaining financially sustainable – reference to service design

- Our Council works in the most efficient and effective ways possible – reference to internal digital products such as the new intranet
- Our Council is a great place to work, with a diverse workforce who have the right skills and are motivated and empowered to deliver –

3 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report was commissioned as part of the Organisation and Communities Scrutiny Panel's 2024-2025 work programme. The report seeks to provide updates on the performance of the Electoral Services Performance.
- a. This is the report on the activities and outcomes of the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer appointed by the Royal Borough of Greenwich during 2024 including the Mayor of London and Greater London Authority Elections; the General Election and five other electoral events and the electoral registration function supporting those electoral events.
 - b. In summary, 2024 was one of the busiest years in electoral administration due to the number of electoral events, the significant changes to electoral law and potential impact on voters as well as boundary and polling arrangements.
 - c. The year started with the implementation of the review of polling districts and polling places which was a statutory periodic review of all electoral arrangements which impacted on the electoral register that would be used though the year and the places at which in person voters would vote. In summary, the work undertaken by the team ensured that all electors were placed in the correct electoral areas and there were minimal issues with the places that were chosen for voting during the year.
 - d. The most significant change to the voting procedure in many years occurred in 2024 with the requirement for all in person voters to show photographic identification in order to obtain their ballot paper. The team worked closely with the communications team to prepare a project to ensure public engagement and minimise the numbers adversely affected by the change.
 - e. The team worked with partners including in customer services and RBG libraries to allow electors that needed the new free voter ID document to be able apply in person and locally if they did not use or have access to the internet. In summary, the numbers of voters who attended the

polling station without the required ID and the numbers who did not return and did not vote were very low and did not affect the outcome of any electoral event. The public engagement project can be seen as successful based on the numbers applying for the new ID document and the absence of electors making complaints that they were unable to vote due to this change.

- f. The Mayor of London and London Assembly elections otherwise the Greater London Assembly election took place on May 2024. These are completed elections due to several factors. The first is the electoral system needing three ballot papers, Mayor, local Constituency Member and then London wide Assembly Members to be elected. The most challenging is that the election is organised by several different Returning Officers with different levels of directional power. The Greater London Returning Officer is the Chief executive of the Greater London Authority and has overall responsibility for the election. The Constituency Returning Officer for our Greenwich and Lewisham Constituency is the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Lewisham and has responsibility for the election in our area. However actual delivery of the election in Royal Greenwich was undertaken by our team and by the Royal Greenwich Returning Officer under deputy powers. These separate responsibility points did cause some issues, most importantly the decision to count at Excel London at a later point than originally planned which led to reduced time to plan the count process than would have been ideal. The final major challenge was the move to a manual count, the first time since the Mayor of London position had been created that an electronic count was not used. In summary, the team worked well with our counterparts at the London Borough of Lewisham and we delivered a successful electoral event.
- g. As parliament entered the new year, 2024 was the year in which parliament was most likely to be dissolved and a General Election called by the Prime Minister (January 2025 being possibly but unlikely). However it was a surprising decision to call the election when it was and therefore the General Election can be classed as a snap election meaning that there was very limited time to complete the preparations required such as booking polling stations and recruiting the large numbers of staff and obtaining the contractors for equipment and services required. In all, there was just 30 working days for all arrangements to be made before polling day. For the General Election there were many factors that complicated the successful organisation of the poll. While many voters had now voted in person showing their photo-ID, the numbers voting at

a General Election are always significantly higher and include those who don't normally vote and would be affected by the photo-ID rules and therefore another public engagement project was undertaken with the Communications team and work with partners undertaken. A review by the Boundary Commission for England had changed the parliamentary boundaries for most constituencies. In our area we moved from being responsible for two constituencies to three and rather than 'giving away' a part of the north-eastern part of the borough to our neighbour we now 'took in' parts of Bexley and Bromley to form the three constituencies we were now responsible for which was the largest electorate the borough had run and led to the largest count we had run. The need to work closely and successfully with our neighbours and the logistics of the significantly larger count were notable challenges. The sheer number of staff required to be recruited was a significant challenge especially as an overnight count, as required by law, meant that staff could not be used as polling stations and then the count as was the case at the GLA election there was also a complication of significant numbers of staff agreeing and then pulling out for different reasons and having to be replaced. In summary, the General Election appeared to be successfully run with minimal issues or complaints.

- h. There were four Royal Borough of Greenwich Council by-elections and one neighbourhood plan referendum during 2024. These events impacted the preparation and post poll procedure processes for the main electoral events, the GLA and General Elections.
- i. A significant theme in the Electoral Commission report on the General Election was concern about levels of abuse and intimidation of candidates and of postal votes not being able to be returned from those living outside the UK. Neither of these issues appeared to affect our elections but we have close liaison with the police and with all candidates to assist with the first point and we recommend proxy voting for such electors in relation to the latter.

SECTION 2

4 Report

Introduction

- a. The Electoral Registration Officer is appointed by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and is the Chief Executive. She then carries out the legal duties of electoral registration according to law and guidance from the Electoral Commission in a separate legal capacity to her role as Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Greenwich. She is responsible directly to court and is subject to performance standards from the Electoral Commission. Any reasonable costs and resources needed for the duty to make and maintain the electoral register must be paid by Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- b. The Returning Officer is the Electoral Registration Officer and also acts in a separate legal capacity to her role as Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Greenwich.
- c. The separate legal position of the ERO and RO means that the role and delivery of Electoral Services is politically neutral and not subject to political direction.
- d. This report will present the work of the two functions that in reality are connected as a well-run election depends on the base of a good quality electoral register which is complete and accurate.
- e. 2024 was a significantly busy and difficult year for the Electoral Services team. There were no fewer than 7 electoral events including a new type of poll, a Greater London Authority election with significant later planning and delivery needs as well as the introduction of voter-ID as well as a snap General Election on all new electoral boundaries as well as four by-elections with minimum available planning time.
- f. The start of the year saw the conclusion and implementation as the statutory periodic review of polling districts and places and the end of the year saw the review of all EU national electors a process that will end on 1 February 2025 with the removal of newly unqualified nationals of EU nations from the register.
- g. The pressures on Electoral Services were many and significant both in electoral registration as well as the more visible electoral events but the team, both permanent staff and those working on a temporary and sessional basis delivered successful electoral events based on a high

quality electoral register and were successful in delivering the most significant change to the voting procedure, voter-ID, in generations with minimal barriers to those wishing to exercise their democratic right to vote.

The autumn 2023 annual canvass

- h. The annual canvass or audit of the register of electors in autumn 2023 required our contact by letter to every property in the borough. We matched our register with DWP and HMRC records to determine where there is likely to be change and only require those properties to actively respond to us.
- i. Those who do not respond must be personally canvassed. We used 26 canvassers to contact those properties door to door to assist the residents to complete the form. Reasons for non-completion range from English not a first language, disability affecting the ability to complete forms or returning them; not wishing to complete any forms for any reason; overlooking the need to return the form and other reasons. The canvassers provide an essential and legally required service to persuade completion and assist those who need it to ensure the register is as complete and accurate as possible.
- j. The start number, those who were required to respond but had not to our letters and emails, for personally canvassing was 20,407 properties. Of those, 8,584 properties responded which is a 44% return.

Electoral Registration

- k. During the 2024 electoral year as a whole there was a very large number of registration applications. The number of electoral registration application forms (unsolicited and responses to Invitations To Register - ITRs) was 38,914. Including those who applied completely unsolicited (the total applications were 39,911. In total we made 31,705 additions to the register. The difference being those who were not eligible or did not respond after being requested to provide more information regarding their incomplete applications. We also made 27,914 deletions to the register, those who moved internally or out of the borough and those who died during the year.

- i. In end of year statistics, the total Local Government electorate is now 192,050. Total registered for Parliamentary elections is 173,988. There are 277 17-year-olds who will become voting age before next republication. We have 1,353 Overseas Electors. The number of Crown Servants and Service voters is 76. There are 6 registered with a Local Connection to the borough (homeless or no fixed abode). We have 15 Anonymously registered electors and we work with domestic violence staff and refuges to offer this registration type as needed. There are 30,048 electors registered to vote by post.

The autumn 2024 annual canvass

- m. The 2024 annual canvass or audit of the register of electors was undertaken in autumn 2024 to January 2025. As there are no scheduled elections in 2025 we undertook a legal minimum personal canvass. The letters and emails encouraging return was the same as 2023 but the canvassers made one rather than a minimum of three door knocks (our usual standard) during the personal canvass stage.
- n. The number of canvassers used was 19 with a start number of outstanding properties being 20,856. The outcome was 5,520 responses which is a 25% return. This is a 19-point lower outcome based on our normal canvassing. This outcome should not be directly correlated to the completeness and accuracy of the register as many will register by other means. We conduct public engagement at other times of the year and we use data mining, for example by obtaining Council Tax records of new accounts and encourage new residents to register throughout the year. The autumn 2025 canvass will return to normal canvass processes.
- o. Personal canvassing remains difficult to undertake and is possibly more so every year. Difficulties include recruiting staff willing and able to go out in autumn and winter evenings and weekends and be willing to persuade residents to complete forms at the doorstep. They also find it increasingly difficult to gain entry to blocks and gated residential areas to do their duty. We have assisted by moving to tablet computer canvassing to avoid heavy paper forms that are affected by rain need to be kept in order and also by liaising with landlords and security staff to assist with getting the staff to doors.
- p. The 2024 canvass started with a data match process of the register against DWP/ HMRC records. Properties that match suggest there is no change and are designated for 'Route 1'. These get a single letter confirming the registration details at the property. 82,903 such

properties were in this route after the match and local data confirmation where we use Council Tax single person records to identify probable no change. There were 136,656 electors in these Route 1 properties.

- q. We tracked responses from these Route 1 properties and noted that we received 5,591 responses and a total of 2,096 major changes such as properties with new electors or an elector who was no longer resident and 1,724 minor changes such as name issues. A total of 4,010 additions and 6,330 deletions came from these Route 1 properties.
- r. We designate all other properties as 'Route 2' and these are subject to a similar canvass process as has been in place historically. They are required by law to respond and we send letters emails and a canvasser to knock on their door to obtain a response. There were 42,200 Route 2 properties and 41,906 electors in those properties.
- s. The Route 2 will include 'void' properties where there are no electors. Voids are most commonly where the residents are not eligible for electoral registration which is based on their nationality (British, Irish, qualifying EU or Commonwealth Countries only) and second homes which are mainly students who wish to be registered only at their family address. We do not ask and do not collect information on if a property is empty of residents, only empty of eligible electors. We will undertake the full process of encouraging a return to check if there is a change of residence or circumstance such as naturalisation.
- t. We received 26,545 responses from Route 2 properties which had 7,524 major changes and 4,509 minor ones and 14,512 reported no change. There were 4,783 additions to the register and 10,402 deletions from these properties this canvass.
- u. Route 3 properties are not standard properties and include care homes and block student accommodation. There were 474 such properties which our team process by special methods such as obtaining resident detail using the power to obtain any record held by any person, body or company. There were 8,851 additions and 17,109 deletions from these Route 3 properties.

Polling place and polling district review

- v. Electoral law requires a periodic review of all polling districts and polling places. That was required to be undertaken in late 2023 to late 2024. Due to the upcoming General Election, it was decided to undertake that review in late 2023 for implementation in early 2024 in order that the arrangements were in place for that General Election, especially as the parliamentary boundaries had changed.
- w. The review covered the 120 polling places that are used in the borough and considerations of their continued suitability and availability into the future.
- x. We also considered the polling district lines to match the buildings available for polling and the polling district divisions and naming to reflect the new parliamentary constituencies that were incoming. For the previous review, many small polling districts were required to be made as no decision had been made on the boundaries but now that the review of the Boundary Commission was complete, only those areas with divisions of wards across old and or new constituency lines needed to retain small polling districts.
- y. The review was a significant task, requiring appropriate consultation with interested parties and the public with the public consultation requiring consideration of representation before a final report could be put before full council.
- z. The approval of the review then led to the implementation phase with the new venues chosen being booked for future elections and the amendments to the register using specific mapping technology being required. A quality check was then undertaken to ensure that all properties and electors were placed in the correct new polling districts.
- aa. The register was then republished in February 2024 to reflect the new polling districts and renumbered polling numbers for all electors.
- bb. The result was successful in that we received no complaints from voters unhappy at their new polling stations being inconvenient for them or inaccessible / difficult to use due to mobility issues and there were no reports of electors in the incorrect electoral area.

Neighbourhood plan referendum

- cc. We conducted our first neighbourhood plan referendum in February 2024 after a local forum, the Lee Neighbourhood forum had proposed a plan in accordance with legislation. Unusually for this legislation, the area crossed borough boundaries and so both RBG and London Borough of Lewisham were required to review the plan and work with an independent planner to ensure the plan met the relevant criteria. Once that was confirmed, a poll was set for 15 February 2024.
- dd. The area was cross boundary and as more of the electorate in that area was in Lewisham, they were the Counting Officer. Royal Greenwich acted as the Deputy Counting Officer and organised the poll in the RBG area.
- ee. This was the first poll in the borough to require photographic identification in order to receive a ballot paper. To reflect this, a public engagement project was undertaken with Communications to make electors aware of the new rules.

Mayor of London and Greater London Authority Election

- ff. The 2024 GLA elections were the first cross RBG election to have Voter-ID as a requirement for station voters. The planning for this and outcomes are detailed later in this paper.
- gg. This election saw a change in voting process for the Mayor to 'first past the post' from the alternative vote system used before. The other contests for the Assembly remained the same with, constituency first past the post and a modified d'Hondt used for the London wide Members.
- hh. The particular modification to the d'Hondt uses standard d'Hondt for electing a number of Members proportionally to the number of votes given on that ballot paper but modified by how successful the party was at the Constituency elections.
- ii. The change to the Mayoral voting process was mentioned in our public engagement but our focus was on Voter-ID as the ballot paper was arguably self-explanatory shown by the minimal number of rejections of papers for being incorrectly marked.
- jj. A major administrative change was from electronic counts as all previous GLA elections had been, to manual count. This change saw a similar

process to typical counting procedures however as the Count was the responsibility of the Constituency Returning Officer who was the Lewisham electoral team, we were required to follow their instructions of the count method. A decision on the 2028 election count system, manual or electronic will be made around June 2025.

- kk. Manual counts meant a move from very granular results where the computer, which identified each ballot paper's polling station and could output results in ward easily to manual counting where only a single Constituency result could be provided. There have been calls for manual counting to provide ward based results. This is possible if legislation is changed but it would result in a longer count. There would also be a need to consider postal votes which are currently verified in one borough wide block and then mixed with polling station ballots so that no postal vote or polling station only results can be obtained
- ll. As the London Borough of Lewisham was the Constituency Returning Officer (CRO) this led to the need for close and co-operative working between them and ourselves who operated under Deputy powers. The Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO) was the GLA's Chief Executive who had direction powers over the CRO. There was a strong and co-operative working relationship between the two teams which ensured a successfully delivered election. However, the legal structure where one borough, in this case ourselves, operate in a legal grey area of Deputy Returning Officer under direction powers of both the GLRO and the CRO while in practical effect, being responsible for the election in our area creates risk. In this election the main one being the count venue which was decided by the GLRO should be a combined whole Constituency count. The preparations for this could only be started later in the planning which took significant planning resource during the project.
- mm. A significant issue we faced was the numbers of electoral staff who recruited but were subsequently unable to work at the election. We recruit early by asking existing staff that we wish to work for us again to save the date before firm recruitment much nearer the election. Others have to pull out due to other emergency issues and illness. In all 224 staff at polling stations alone pulled out and needed to be replaced. Replacements need to go through recruitment and identification checks, training and appointing to stations they can attend. This created a significant strain on the team's resource.

- nn. The count was undertaken at Excel London which was the venue for several other constituencies as well as no suitable single venue could be found available within the two boroughs.
- oo. The count was held over two days, Friday for the verification of ballot papers and Saturday for the sorting and counting. The count was successful and the two teams of Lewisham and Greenwich delivered an accurate count result faster than any other in London.

General Election

- pp. The prime minister announced on 22 May 2024 that a General Election would be held on 4 July 2024. This was a snap poll as shown by the period of 'wash-up' in parliament to complete business was the joint shortest since 1992 and only 31 working days in total from the announcement and polling day itself.
- qq. In the first few days of the planning we contacted all of our 123 polling places to book use of their venues as well as the Count Centre and secure the procurement of temporary polling stations including highways requirements for those and the equipment needed for polling day and the count. Also needed was immediate discussions with our colleagues in Bromley and Bexley on the implementation of our plans for the areas of their areas that we were running especially on venue bookings and staff availability.
- rr. The ceremonial Returning Officer at parliamentary elections is the Mayor of the Borough, Councillor Jit Ranabhat. The responsibility for delivering the election lies with the Acting Returning Officer, the Chief Executive, Debbie Warren. To ensure political neutrality, this is an independent role to that of Chief Executive and is not a Royal Borough function. Her role is covered by the legal requirement to deliver the election in accordance with law to avoid the electoral offence of breach of official duty. Her decision making can only be challenged in a special election court after an election petition. She can and did appoint Deputy Returning Officers to exercise her duties who also act impartially and are bound to deliver the process in accordance with law.
- ss. Working with Bromley and Bexley was required due to the recent review of parliamentary boundaries which had redrawn all the constituencies in the Royal Borough. Due to the electorate numbers and the new boundaries, we had been tasked by legislation to run three rather than the previous two constituencies. This created significantly

more administrative work with the largest electorate and largest count in the borough's history.

- tt. The boundaries meant that we acted as Acting Returning Officer for two Bromley wards and three Bexley wards. While we were responsible for the electoral process, the 'home' boroughs were still responsible for electoral registration for those wards. This meant that electoral registration, postal votes and proxies were made the home borough and the data from those applications needed to be sent to us to administer the polling stations and postal vote issue and opening.
- uu. We had organised several meetings with Bexley and Bromley over the period before the election was called and had a plan for dividing the tasks required such as how and when data would be supplied. We decided that there should be minimal variation between the constituency so we issued all poll cards and postal votes for the areas to our usual timetable and procedures. We also arranged for the home boroughs to use the staff who normally run and monitor the polling stations to continue to work there but they would be trained by us so that there was no variation between the constituency.
- vv. In all, there was very successful working between the three electoral teams with all three managers being very experienced and used to working well together which was key to a well run cross boundary election.
- ww. A General Election is a significant project in scope, variety and staffing needs. In all, around 1,000 staff were needed across the three constituencies in the 180 polling stations, postal vote issue and opening and the count of the votes. With the legal requirement to count overnight at General Elections, staff at polling stations could not work at the count to avoid them working for too long a period.
- xx. We created, proofed and sent poll cards to all of the 225,792 electors eligible to vote at the election.
- yy. We sent email polling station poll cards to 102,800 electors where we had collected their email address. This contained the important information from the posted poll card which they also received such as their polling station details, details on the new Voter-ID rules and how to get the free voter-ID or apply for a postal vote if they did not have the accepted ID documents.
- zz. There is a very large amount of electoral registration work during a General Election period which is required to be undertaken along with the election plan implementation. All of these applications require

manual processing by the team many of which require multiple manual processes such as matching applications to the correct address, identifying and resolving duplicate applications and requesting and dealing with documentary evidence requests when the provided information was entered incorrectly or not at all by the applicant or where there is no automated match.

Application type	General Election period applications
Registration	13,441
Postal vote	4,926
Overseas elector	692
Proxy	1,020
Voter-ID VAC	173

- aaa. This General Election was significantly different in that the level of applications is high as usual for the type of election but that the applications were mostly made by the new government online portal. While this did offer some practical benefits such as reduced typing from papers forms, the portal was not optimised for high numbers of applications and required scrolling and mouse clicking and manual checking of each application. In the future we hope to push the government digital service team to evolve the system to be more efficient to reduce the time required for each application.
- bbb. Another significant change due to the Election Act was the eligibility to be an Overseas Elector. Rather than needing to have been resident and on the register within the last 15 years, now any British Citizen could apply and register and vote no matter how long ago they had left the UK. Applicants needed to prove they last lived in our area to register here, for many this was difficult as they needed to provide documents from many decades in the past (some over 40 years) and we had many cases of return correspondence where applicants could not do so and needed to provide an attestation from another Overseas elector or a UK elector who can confirm they lived in the borough in the past.
- ccc. For the General Election and in a shorter period due to the snap nature of the poll, 177 polling station staff had to pull out for various issues and had to be replaced with new and inexperienced staff. Staff also had to be replaced at the count for similar reasons.

- ddd. The count was held at the Waterfront leisure centre. Electoral law requires an overnight count and we therefore planned the largest count using the largest area with the greatest number of counters in our history.
- eee. Our plan was to have maximum transparency with verified totals being immediately available after approval by the reconciliation team. It was not possible to provide a ward based count as so many wards are now split across constituency lines and the need to balance boxes from Bexley and Bromley that would arrive later due to travel time. In addition, postal votes are not divided into wards which means that a ward based sub result is not possible.
- fff. Postal votes do cause issues with getting a fast declaration. Voters are allowed to hand in postal votes at polling stations and many do so near the close of poll. We also receive a 'sweep' from Royal Mail who go through their delivery areas and look for postal votes and deliver them to us on polling day, just before the close of poll that would normally be delivered the next day. These postal votes must go through the same process as the others and be opened, batched, scanned and the signatures and dates of birth matched with the voter's application before the ballot paper can be counted into boxes and then brought to the count.
- ggg. The Royal Greenwich count process is designed to have maximum transparency and multiple levels of process to ensure accuracy with a maximum of speed while maintain that accuracy. All processes are undertaken in full view of the candidates and agents and staff double check each other's work before provisional totals are created with accountants or finance staff checking provided draft figures and checking the numbers for accuracy before a provisional result is concluded. The candidates and Election Agents have the opportunity to consider the provisional result before the Returning Officer makes the declaration of result.
- hhh. The count was successfully undertaken within a reasonable time especially considering there were three counts rather than the usual two and the candidates and agents expressed no doubts to the process undertaken during the night.

Voter-ID in stations and for postal voters

- iii. The most significant change to electoral law in some time saw the introduction of voter-ID being required for those voting in polling stations.
- jjj. Electoral Services worked closely with the Communications department to develop a plan that would inform the electorate of the new requirements and provide practical options for them to be able to vote.
- kkk. The campaign used a household notification letter in February to each household which both confirmed the electors in the property and informed them how to correct missing persons, where their polling station now was as some had changed and which new parliamentary constituency they now resided in subsequent to the changed parliamentary boundaries for Voter-ID the communication explain the new system and what documents were acceptable and how to obtain the free voter-ID document if they had none of those listed. It also suggested a postal vote as an alternative and for those away in May or when the General Election would be called.
- lll. The delivery of the plan also saw us work with the RBG contact centres so that electors could attend in person and make an online application. We were also pleased to work with GLL and libraries so that electors could attend major libraries to get their free voter-ID.
- mmm. We used other methods including large banners across the borough and an email poll card to electors that informed them of the new rule and link directly to the Voter Authority Certificate portal.
- nnn. The letter and other communications and work with partners meant that Greenwich had the highest number of Voter Authority Certificates applied for in London both as a total number, 173 (joint first) and as a percentage of the electorate (0.09%).
- ooo. Training was provided to election staff on top of their usual election training on how to deal with the new process. This was required as many staff had concerns of the impact in their stations and needed reassurance as well as making sure they took the same decision-making process such as flexibility where some photographs on IDs would be in excess of 10 years old and others would have significant appearance change and name changes. All matters were covered in training with the message that out of the ordinary cases could be referred to the Deputy

Returning Officer for advice so that all electors received equal treatment.

- ppp. The total number of electors who attended the polling stations, those who did not have the required ID, those who returned later with the required ID and those who unfortunately did not and shown here.

Election	Station voters	Issued ballot papers at stations	No Voter-ID	Returned with V-ID and voted	Attended with no V-ID and did not return
GLA 24	163,102	59,375	350 (0.6%)	247 (70.6%)	103 (0.2%)

General Election 24: Constituency	Station voters	Issued ballot papers at stations	No Voter-ID	Returned with V-ID and voted	Attended with no V-ID and did not return
Eltham and Chislehurst	60,053	33,340	175 (0.5%)	129 (73.7%)	46 (0.1%)
Erith and Thamesmead	66,715	32,108	189 (0.6%)	134 (70.9%)	55 (0.2%)
Greenwich and Woolwich	60,100	34,911	123 (0.4%)	73 (59.3%)	50 (0.1%)
Total	186,868	100,359	487 (0.5%)	336 (69%)	151 (0.15%)

- qqq. In their report on the election, the GLA Elections Review Working Group stated the “number of people who were turned away and did not return was low. However, anyone eligible and unable to vote due to voter ID is worrying for democratic participation. Moreover, the data likely underestimates the impact as we cannot know how many people did not attend polling stations in the first place as they did not hold a suitable form of ID.” We will continue to work with partners and build on the plans and outcomes of 2024 to minimise the impact of voter-ID for future electors at future elections.
- rrr. Postal voting also received a change to mirror the changes in station voting. New applicants needed to prove their identity by providing their national insurance number and date of birth when they applied. This was checked with the DWP database and non-matches required the applicant to provide documentary evidence of their identity to complete their postal vote application. This was accompanied by the introduction of an online portal for applicants to provide the new details and where they could take a photograph of their signature to attach to their online application. The signature would then be used during the election and paper forms were still available.

- sss. The new postal vote system created significant additional burden on the electoral team as all applications needed to be checked for their ID check success status and failed ID checks required an additional communication and immediate request to the applicant to provide the documentary evidence. In addition, paper forms needed to be scanned in by the team and all details manually entered in the online system.
- ttt. The government portal on which all postal vote applications must be processed required individual processing by the team through several steps including checking their linked electoral registration, the application details and the separate ID process and where the ID check failed, communication sent and later, the returned evidence matched to the application and considered for approval or rejection.
- uuu. A further new process and pressure on the team's resources was the new free voter ID paper for those without the 'accepted' ID documents. The Voter Authority Certificate process required the elector to go to an online portal or complete a paper application. The online portal appeared relatively simple but required the elector to provide their name, ID details including NINO and a passport like photograph that they could take by digital device such as their phone.
- vvv. Many applications did not have an acceptable photograph which required head and shoulders with plain background. Each application and photograph supplied had to be checked and approved by the team with the need for immediate request to the applicant to supply new photographs or identity documents to complete their application.

By-elections

- www. There were three Royal Greenwich Council by-elections during the year. The first due to the sad death of Cllr John Hills and then to due to the resignations of Cllrs Backon, Thorpe and Lloyd. Three of the four were in wards had a mix of party Cllrs. Two at the last local elections where voters had split their votes across party lines and one where the resigning councillor was now of a different political affiliation to the other in the ward. This meant that the elections were likely to be strongly contested and results could be close. This meant that while they were not of the level of organisation needed for a cross borough poll, the organisation and attention needed was high to ensure a well run electoral event with confidence in the result no matter how close the result would be.

xxx. We worked with the Communications department to ensure that there was appropriate public engagement with local residents on the upcoming polls and the key messages of how options for voting and continued need for Voter-ID.

yyy. The four by-elections were successfully run with no issues.

European Union Citizens Voter registration

zzz. The Election Act changed the franchise for voting at local government elections for those citizens from the European Union. The rules that allowed all citizens with a EU member state citizenship to vote in local elections (RBG and GLA) changed so that only those from certain nations and those from the other nations but who had lived in the UK before a certain date were to be eligible.

aaaa. Citizens of Cyprus and Malta (Commonwealth) and Ireland are unaffected and can vote in all elections. Those citizens, or those with dual citizenship of these or other Commonwealth nations, are excluded from this process as they will be registered with the nationality that provides them greater voting rights. They are not included in these statistics.

bbbb. The new rules are that citizens of those countries with reciprocating rights will be able to register as before. Those are where UK citizens living in that country can vote in their municipal elections so will have their citizens be able to vote in ours as part of unilateral agreements. This applies to: Denmark, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

cccc. In addition, those from the other EU member states and where before 31 December 2020 had permission to enter or stay in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man, or who did not need permission, and this has continued without a break are also eligible for electoral registration.

dddd. There are a significant number of EU citizens on the Royal Borough's register of electors. At February 2024 there were 21,984 such electors. During the busy 2024 election year with many new residents adding their names the project started with 22,519 such electors.

eeee. The electoral services team undertook the required process which was to confirm those citizens of the nations with reciprocating rights as eligible and contact them with that confirmation. We then undertook a historical check for the remainder, if the elector was registered continuously in RBG since 31 December 2020 we confirmed they were eligible and contacted them to confirm that.

- ffff. All others were then contacted by email and letter to request that they confirm if they met the new criteria or not. They could return a letter or complete an online portal. We made house to house visits to those that did not respond. Those who did not respond or responded that they did not meet the criteria were removed from the register.
- gggg. The conclusion of the main process was the publication of the February 2025 annual revised register. After the removal of those who had not confirmed their eligibility to continue their registration there was 19,429 such EU citizens on the register. This is a decrease of 2,555 electors from the same time a year before. The preferred comparison is the year before as the start figure will include those who have moved and who naturally are removed as part of the canvass process although the larger number formed the numbers subject to the review process.
- hhhh. There will be opportunities for any residents who are qualified but failed to respond to the letters, emails and person contacts or who moved in from another address as a continuing qualified person to register before the elections in May 2026. There will be a further canvass in autumn 2025 and a public engagement process prior to those next scheduled elections.
- iiii. This review project was an additional financial burden to the Electoral Registration Officer but an allocation was made by the government in direct grant format to the Electoral Registration Officer for the process.

Costs and finance

- jjjj. Electoral events are paid by the Returning Officer and then the costs reclaimed by the organisation which is being elected. The GLA elections will be paid by the GLA and the General Election by the government consolidated fund in a claim process administered through the Elections Claims Unit, which is part of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- kkkk. Electoral Registration is planned and delivered by the Electoral Registration Officer and any reasonable costs must be paid by the local authority. In an election year the increased costs of electoral registration and applications for postal and proxy voting must be paid by the Royal borough however an additional grant was provided to cover the additional burden of the Elections Act. The costs of public engagement for the Election Act burdens was covered by this additional grant funding.

Electoral Commission's General Election report

- llll. The Electoral Commission produced a report on the General Election as a whole and reported that the election across the country was overall well run. It stated that voters continue to have high levels of confidence and satisfaction in the polls.
- mmmm. Their main concerns were included electors not receiving postal votes in time to return them especially overseas electors. In the very short timescales of elections between the end of candidate nomination and polling day and with the time taken for international post to be delivered it is likely that postal votes will not be able to be sent and arrive in time. We advise all overseas electors to appoint a proxy to vote at their polling station or by post from within the UK.
- nnnn. Another concern they reported on was addressing the abuse and intimidation of candidates and campaigners. While robust debate and challenge is part of multiparty free and fair elections there is such concern regarding this issue at this, past and the possibility at future elections. We have a good relationship with all parties and campaigners at the elections and with the police locally and at Metropolitan Police HQ level. No such issues were apparent at these elections in our area.
- oooo. The Commission looked at the identity checking process at candidate nomination. We received a nomination from a person who had the same legal name at the point of nomination, as far as we were aware, as other people in 10 other constituencies. It was believed that some had recently changed their name ahead of this election. There was concern that voters may be confused by this action. The action we took in accepting the nomination was legally correct and in accordance with established case law. The Commission have suggested that candidates might be required to prove their identity. Such a process would be administratively unproblematic at General Elections but very burdensome for us and political parties at Local Elections with hundreds of candidates being nominated in a few days.
- pppp. The Commission also suggested improving the operation of the digital systems relied on by electoral administrators. With the sheer number of applications generally and specially at General Elections this is a suggestion we fully agree with.

5 Consultation

- a. No consultation was undertaken as part of this report/ and none is required.

6 Next Steps

- a. The Chair will set out closing remarks and make recommendations to the relevant decision maker as required at the meeting and these will be published as an appendix. The Relevant decision maker will respond to the recommendations in a separate published appendix and both will be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee/Panel.

7 Cross-Cutting Issues and Implications

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	The purpose of this report is for the Panel to consider the Electoral Services Annual Report. The report meets the commissioned brief and there are no legal implications directly arising from this report.	<i>Azuka Onuorah Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services 4 March 2025</i>
Finance and other resources	<i>This is an information report to the Organisation & Communities Scrutiny Panel on Election activity and Performance, and as such there are no direct financial implications arising from it.</i>	<i>Joanne Stark Head of Accounting & Business Change 27/02/2025</i>
Equalities	<i>The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no apparent equality impact on end users.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>

Climate change	<i>This report does not cover issues relating to the Greenwich Carbon Neutral Plan agreed by Cabinet on 18 November 2020.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>
Community Engagement	<i>As stated in the report, Electoral Services act independently to the Council and in accordance with legislation and lies outside the remit of the Community Engagement Pledge dated 24th July 2024.</i>	<i>James Pack – Head of Electoral Services and Registrars February 2025</i>

8 Report Appendices

- a. There are no appendices for this report.

9 Background Papers

- a. There are no background papers for this report.

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