

# **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 10 July 2007**



**Portfolio:** Leader's Portfolio

**Subject:** Elections - May 2007 - Views of the Constitution and Members' Services Scrutiny Standing Panel

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## **Recommendations:**

To note the following matters which will be considered by the Returning Officer in addition to those outlined in the report to the Panel:

- (a) future use of Theydon Bois Village Hall as a Count Centre;
  - (b) the possibility of future counts being split with some taking place at the close of poll and others the following day;
  - (c) the count being available to a wider audience through webcasting;
  - (d) a programme for the counting of wards;
  - (e) laying out of bundles of counted votes to enable candidates, agents etc to witness the progress of a Count.
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## **Introduction**

1. The Constitution and Members' Services Scrutiny Standing Panel considered the attached report at their meeting on 21 June 2007. The Panel raised some additional matters which are summarised below.
  - (a) **Count - Venue**
2. Some members of the Panel indicated a preference for future counts to be held at the Theydon Bois Village Hall. They acknowledged the concerns expressed previously about this venue, i.e. not large enough for a centralised count without the use of the side hall for the counting of certain wards which is not ideal.
3. However, the members suggested that the use of the Xpress software enabling up to the minute information about wards being counted and results being displayed continuously on screens would overcome the problems previously experienced of lack of knowledge of what was taking place in the other hall.

4. The members also felt that the benefit of the Theydon Bois Village Hall was the availability of adequate on-site parking facilities.
5. The Returning Officer agreed to consider the suggestion but pointed out that the use of the Theydon Bois Village Hall would be dependent on the availability of suitable IT links with sufficient capacity to run all of the necessary systems.

**(b) Count - Timing**

6. Some members supported the views expressed by some of the election agents for the count to commence immediately after the close of poll.
7. The Returning Officer confirmed that, except for Parliamentary elections, his preference was for the count to commence the day after the poll. However, he agreed to consider the views of members including the possibility of a split count, e.g. district wards to be counted at the close of poll/parish and town council elections to be counted the next day.

**(c) Count - Information/Publicity**

8. Members praised the use of the display screens and looked forward to further developments at future elections. They considered that the image on the screens produced by projectors was satisfactory and that emphasis should be placed on the positioning of screens to ensure maximum visibility.
9. Members also requested that consideration be given to the count being shown to a wider audience through webcasting. The Returning Officer agreed to investigate this possibility but pointed out that a decision had yet to be made on the long-term future of webcasting and that webcasting the count would require additional resources.
10. It was suggested that a programme for the counting of wards be produced and published in advance so that candidates/agents etc would have some idea of when particular counts would take place. The Returning Officer agreed to this suggestion but cautioned that it would not be possible to be precise about timings.
11. One member expressed disappointment that on many count tables the previous practice of laying out counted bundles of 50 votes for each candidate had not been followed so that the excitement of the contest had been lost. The Returning Officer agreed to instruct senior counters to follow this practice in future.

**(d) Postal Votes**

12. The Returning Officer confirmed that agents had been advised of the times of postal vote openings and that some agents had attended and had been able to oversee the signature/date of birth verification system.
13. Attention was drawn to an out of date version of the postal vote application form on the Council's website. The Returning Officer acknowledged and apologised for this error.