

TITLE:	BOROUGH ELECTIONS 4TH MAY 2006 - COUNT
TO/ON:	THE CABINET 22ND FEBRUARY 2006
BY:	HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
STATUS:	FOR PUBLICATION

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report is for information and hopes to seek members' views on the timing and venue of the election count following polling on Thursday 4th May 2006. It will also update Members on the polling station review.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Cabinet considers the arrangements for the Count and informs the Returning Officer of its view.
- 2.2 That Cabinet considers the closure of Weavers Cottage Polling Station and informs the Returning Officer of its views.
- 2.3 That Cabinet notes the proposed location for the Count.

3. REPORT AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 3.1 Legislation currently going through Parliament will extend voting hours at local elections from 8.00am to 9.00pm to 7.00am to 10.00pm. This change is being made in order to equalise polling hours which is hoped to simplify the voting process for electors (the extended hours will result in the start of the election count being delayed by an hour).
- 3.2 At this year's local elections there will be approximately 6,000 votes cast by post. Because a significant proportion of postal votes are delivered to polling stations they can only be processed at the count venue which will delay the count process and election results. In order to maximise the number of postal votes included in the count a lengthy process of matching up is undertaken

involving any part-votes delivered (that is where the vote and declaration are not returned together).

- 3.3 It is therefore proposed to open and match postal votes on the evening of Thursday 4th May and hold verification of papers and the election count on the morning of Friday 5th May 2006. This time delay would allow for postal votes to be opened and matched up, employees to be rejuvenated which would in turn ensure accurate results.
- 3.4 Postal votes, once opened and processed, would be held in secure storage overnight along with ballot boxes returned from the polling stations.
- 3.5 In addition, elections officers traditionally experience difficulty in recruiting staff to the count because of the unsocial hours concerned and the nominal payment involved. Many counters have already worked on a polling station (or at their day job) which means many counters arrive exhausted and can result in errors, which in turn delay the results. These proposed measures would ease staff recruitment as unsocial hours would be minimised. It is therefore considered there are substantial benefits to holding the Count the day after polling.
- 3.6 The proposed location for the above count is Bacup Leisure Hall, Burnley Road, Bacup.

Alternative Venues for Polling Stations

- 3.7 With regard to polling stations to be used on 4th May 2006. It is proposed that the Weavers Cottage polling station is closed and the electors transferred to Kay Street Baptist Church. This closure would incur minimal disturbance to voters because of the proximity of the new station but will save the Council the fee for the hire of the building and also the wages for one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk.
- 3.7 The Polling Station Review will be completed after this year's elections. However if there are any other changes necessary for polling stations in May 2006 these will be fully consulted on with the leaders of each political party prior to implementation.

4. CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES

4.1 FINANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

An increase in take up of postal voting means that in many ways it is now like running two separate elections. Inevitably this has an impact on costs. In 2004 and 2005 this was masked as there were also national elections where the allocation of government funding was sufficient to cover the additional costs. In 2006 it will be different, as the cost of running the election must be met solely from local resources. However, this cost will be necessary whatever decision is taken regarding the timing of the count.

4.2 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS

None relating to this report.

4.3 HUMAN RESOURCES

If the report is supported, difficulties in recruitment of staff for the count will be minimised.

4.4 ANY OTHER RELEVANT CORPORATE PRIORITIES

None relevant to the report.

5. RISK

5.1 If the election count is held the day after polling as staff will be less tired and therefore more aware of possible risks.

5.2 The accuracy of the count is vital to the successful organisation of the election. If the proposal is not supported, recruitment difficulties will arise and greater pressure will be placed on counting staff. The additional polling hours means that the count, if held on the same day as polling will extend beyond midnight.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE REPORT

Whilst the location and timing of an election count is at the discretion of the Returning Officer any decision of this nature will include full consideration of the views of all interested parties.

7. EQUALITIES ISSUES ARISING FROM THE REPORT

None arising from this report.

8. WARDS AFFECTED

8.1 Eden, Goodshaw, Greenfield, Greensclough, Hareholme, Healey and Whitworth, Helmshore, Irwell, Longholme, Stacksteads, Whitewell and Worsley.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 Other North West Electoral Officers. Burnley Borough Council expects to hold their count this year on Friday 5th May.

9.2 Chief Executive

Background documents:

For further information on the details of this report, please contact:

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