

Title of Report: **Report of the Returning Officer**

Report to be considered by: Council on 19 May 2015

Forward Plan Ref: C2988

Purpose of Report: To inform Council of the process and the results of the recent elections.

Recommended Action: To note the attached report.

Reason for decision to be taken: To report back on the elections that took place on the 7th May 2015.

Other options considered: N/a

Key background documentation: N/a

Published Works: N/a

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy principle:

☒ **CSP8 - Doing what's important well**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy principle by:

This report is a statutory requirement

Contact Officer Details

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Implications

Policy: This report will not require any policy changes.

Financial: Budgetary provision of £120,000 has been set aside to fund the costs of this District Council election. The cost of the Town/Parish elections will be recovered from the respective Councils. Funding will also be available from the Cabinet Office to recover costs associated with the Parliamentary Election.

Personnel: N/a

Legal/Procurement: Ensuring that Elections are conducted in accordance with Representation of the People Act and the EAA 2006.

Property: N/a

Risk Management: Insurance cover taken for Election. Indemnity to Returning Officer in respect of the policy excess.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at http://intranet/EqIA			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Three elections were being held on 7th May 2015 which created a major logistical exercise for the Returning Officer and his staff. Such an alignment is unlikely to occur for another 20 years but the exercise has provided a number of useful learning points for the future.

1.1 *Parliamentary Election*

There were 8 candidates who contested the Newbury Parliamentary Seat. Candidates represented the following parties:

Conservative
Liberal Democrat
Labour
Apolitical
Independent
UKIP
Green
Patriotic Socialist

1.2 *District Election*

160 candidates contested 52 seats on the District Council in 30 Wards. Of those the representation of the various parties was as follows:

Apolitical Democrats: 3
Conservative: 52
Green: 11
Liberal Democrat: 51
Labour: 36
Patriotic Socialist Party: 1
UKIP: 6

1.2 Of the 30 wards there are:

10 Single Member Wards
18 Two Member Wards
2 Three Member Wards

1.3 *Parish/ Town Council Elections*

Elections were only held in 16 parishes or parish wards. There were a total of 466 candidates contesting 492 seats.

2. The Election Process

2.1 The conduct of three separate Elections on May 7th created a unique challenge for the Returning Officer and his staff. The Election was followed by several verification exercises and three separate counts on consecutive days. The demands on certain

key staff were significant alongside the need to find sufficient staff to do all that was needed.

- 2.2 Eight candidates contested the Newbury Parliamentary seat. For the District election 160 candidates contested 52 seats on the District Council in 30 wards. There were 16 parish/parish wards with elections – 7 wards in Newbury and 4 wards in Thatcham and 5 other parish councils. Three parish councils, however, did not have sufficient members to form a Council, and a further election will be held.
- 2.3 The nomination arrangements were complex but the procedure ran smoothly and compliments were received from those involved in the nomination process.
- 2.4 The number of postal votes remained high in the 2015 election. At the 2000 election approximately 1,900 postal votes were requested. In 2003, this rose to 7,700. In 2007 this again increased to 14,745 and in 2011 a total of 24,013 people asked to vote by post. This number slightly decreased in 2015 to 23,131 postal votes. A total of 10,507 postal votes were issued for parish elections which had to be sent out separately.
- 2.5 In the 2015 election, for the first time, voters were able to make use of emergency proxy votes should they be unable to vote due to unforeseen work or medical circumstances. This caused the Electoral Registration Office to receive a high number of telephone calls on the day of the election.
- 2.6 On the day of the poll 133 Polling Stations, held 133 District Ballot Boxes, 133 General Election Ballot Boxes (99 of which were Newbury Constituency, 20 Reading West and 14 Wokingham) and 48 Parish/Town Ballot Boxes. All Stations were open between 7am to 10pm. Visiting Officers attended all stations through the day and a revised check list was issued to each Officer to ensure not only that notices required under the Representation of the People Acts were in place, but also access arrangements were adequate for disabled voters and health and safety aspects were covered.
- 2.7 The votes cast for District and Parish elections within the Reading West or Wokingham constituencies were verified by that constituency and delivered to Newbury Racecourse on Friday 8th May 2015.

3. Issues Relating to the Count

- 3.1 The Parliamentary count began at 10.00pm on Thursday 7th May 2015 at Newbury Racecourse.
- 3.2 The District count began at 10.00am on Friday 8th May 2015 at Newbury Racecourse.
- 3.3 The Parish/ Town Council count began at 10.00am on Saturday 9th May 2015 at Newbury Racecourse.
- 3.4 Verifying three separate sets of ballot papers on Thursday night/Friday morning was a very major task and took longer than anticipated. Along with much of the rest of the country this delayed the declaration of the Parliamentary election until around

5.30am on the Friday morning. The need for further verification for the District and Parish/Town elections also made Friday and Saturday long days.

- 3.5 Whilst such a series of elections are unlikely to occur for another 20 years there is a need going forward to give more thought to the time required for verification so that candidates are not left waiting for the Count to start. It is also the Returning Officer's view that conducting counts on successive days should be avoided in future since it places too much pressure on the limited number of staff able to support the election process.
- 3.6 I would like to thank all of the staff involved in the election whether counting postal votes, working on the Polling Station or at the Count. My particular thanks to the Election Team without which none of this would have been possible. My thanks too, to the Election Agents who helped ensure a long and, at times, difficult Count, flowed as well as it could.

4. Election Results

- 4.1 Full details of the election results including the turnout figures in each ward are set out in appendix 'A'.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The election process was dealt with both effectively and efficiently. There were naturally problems that were experienced as a consequence of having to run the Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town elections concurrently.

Appendices

Appendix A – Election 2015 Results (to be tabled)