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Title of Report:	Review of May 2015 Elections
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Meeting:	15 September 2015
Forward Plan Ref:	

Purpose of Report: To review the effectiveness of the Parliamentary and Local Elections held on 7 May 2015

- Recommended Actions:**
1. That a more detailed and robust Project Plan is developed six months prior to the Election Count.
 2. That project management principles are used to oversee, review and refresh the Project Plan and its implementation. In particular regular meetings are put in place involving the Returning Officer, the Elections Team and senior managers in Strategic Support to review implementation of the Plan.
 3. That greater attention is paid to the future resourcing of Elections, in particular where their scale to going to require a much wider engagement of staff beyond the immediate Elections Team. Those resourcing requirements including a detailed assessment of 'who does what', should form part of the Project Plan development.
 4. That, in future, a detailed "Frequently Asked Question" sheet be prepared so that the first port of call for any phones calls about basic election enquiries should be the Contact Centre which would then allow the Elections Team to focus on the more complex enquiries
 5. That a communications plan needs to be developed as part of the overall Project Plan which identifies complex or unusual aspects of the process which may need explaining to the voting public beforehand.
 6. That a review of the way in which Elections Agents are briefed is undertaken with a view to minimising nomination forms being returned at the last minute.
 7. That, in future, detailed discussions be held with the delivery company to ensure that they are clear on the number of screens to be delivered to each polling station location
 8. That, should there be a requirement for the Council to manage three election processes (Parliamentary/District and Town and Parish

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Councils) in future (2035), that the individual counts be undertaken as follows;

- (i) Parliamentary – the day of the Election and running into the next morning.
 - (ii) District – Saturday
 - (iii) Town and Parish Councils – Sunday
9. A core team of staff need to be selected to undertake Election Count duties. The emphasis should move away from seeking staff as and when Elections occur. Staff should be kept on the books and trained on an ongoing basis particularly given Elections are now taking place on an annual basis. The selection of a core team of supervisors is seen as particularly important
10. Supervisors should attend standardised training delivered by an appropriate outside body. This should take place at least annually.
11. Supervisors should be selected against a recognised and agreed person specification. The role does not suit everyone.
12. The role of the Returning Officer and his staff in relation to the Count needs to be reviewed. A much greater emphasis needs to be placed on oversight and supervision by key senior elections staff.
13. Additional senior staff are required to support the Control Table. This needs to include staff able to utilise the required ICT to support the process and thereby enable the required checks and balances to be put in place an election count finish later than expected “reserves” could be called in at late notice.

Reason for decision to be taken:

To improve the management of Electoral Registration and Elections.

Other options considered:

N/A

Key background documentation:

Association of Electoral Administrators – Elections and Individual Electoral Registration – The Challenge 2015

Published Works:

Include legislation or confidential or exempt information here.

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The proposals contained in this report are not associated with any of the Council Strategy aims and priorities but will help to ensure more effective support to the election process in the future.

Portfolio Member Details

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Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	4 September 2015

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Implications

Policy: N/A
Financial: N/A.
Personnel: N/A
Legal/Procurement: N/A
Property: N/A
Risk Management: N/A

Corporate Board's Recommendation:

To be completed after the Corporate Board meeting.

NOTE: Strategic Support is not able to accept your report without the following section being completed and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) being attached where required. For advice please visit <http://intranet/EqIA> or contact the Principal Policy Officer (Equality & Diversity) on Ext. 2441 or Team Leader/Solicitor - Corporate Team on Ext. 2626.

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"/>

NOTE: The section below does not need to be completed if your report will not progress beyond Corporate or Management Board.

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: X
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 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 type="checkbox"/>

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Executive Summary

2. Introduction

2.1 This report is a detailed review of the elections held in West Berkshire on 7 May 2015. The Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town elections were all held on the same day for the first time. In the past the Parish/Town elections would have been deferred for three weeks. The same combination of elections is unlikely to occur again for another 20 years namely, until May 2035.

2.2 The report deals with all aspects of the elections, including;

- (1) the planning and preparation for the elections;
- (2) how the plans were executed on the day of the Elections
- (3) what lessons need to be learned

2.3 In addition the following requests were raised at the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and are dealt with in the report;

- (1) the level of understanding and operation of the postal vote process;
- (2) the impact of the requirement for Individual Electoral Registration;
- (3) accessibility of polling stations (for both staff and the public);
- (4) how the count was conducted;
- (5) how ballot paper verification was carried out;
- (6) how the number of votes cast tallied with ballot papers issued;
- (7) guidelines to assess reasonableness of results.

2.4 Each phase of the Election process is reviewed in turn, with key issues highlighted and recommendations for the future.

2.5 Whilst much of the Election process was run in an efficient and effective manner, there were a number of significant issues. To avoid a recurrence the following recommendations are being made;

- (1) to introduce more robust project planning and better resource management. An over reliance on the small Elections Team needs to be addressed;
- (2) greater use is made of the Contact Centre to field queries;
- (3) the development of a communications plan and improving the way in which Election Agents are briefed;
- (4) that more time is allowed for counts when multiple elections take place to ensure staff are rested;

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(5) the recruitment and training of staff is improved, the role and responsibilities of the Returning Officer and his key staff reviewed, alongside the functioning of the Control Table;

(6) ICT is fully utilised.

2.6 In general the election process was dealt with effectively. However, there were problems that were experienced as a result of having to run the Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town elections concurrently. This was a consistent theme nationally. These are explored later in this report.

3. **Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes**

3.1 This item is not relevant to equality.

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Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) following concerns raised at the Election Count for the District Council Election on 7 May 2015. These were subsequently reported to the Electoral Commission who have also reflected their concerns.
- 1.2 In addition, the report will review the effectiveness of the elections held in West Berkshire on 7 May 2015. The Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town elections were all held on the same day for the first time. In the past the Parish/Town elections would have been deferred for three weeks. The same combination of elections is unlikely to occur again for another 20 years, namely, May 2035.
- 1.3 The report deals with all elements of the election, including
 - (1) The planning and preparation for the elections
 - (2) How the plans were executed on the day
 - (3) What lessons need to be learned
- 1.4 The management and operational aspects of elections are dealt with by the Electoral Services Team who are part of the Strategic Support Unit. However, the Chief Executive is the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer and therefore responsible for the overall management of the Elections and the Electoral Registration process.
- 1.5 There are three core members of staff who deal with elections and electoral registration the Elections Manager, Electoral Services Officer and Elections Assistant. During busy periods they are supported by other staff within Strategic Support and more widely across the Council and outside.
- 1.6 Given that there are three Parliamentary constituencies this necessitated the Elections team in having to exchange significant telephone calls and election data to facilitate the three Parliamentary Elections.
- 1.7 This report looks at the various workstreams leading up to the three elections and the pressures placed on individuals and Strategic Support in general.

2. Pre Notice of Election Workload up to 23 March 2015

- 2.1 In 2014 the Government introduced Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and required all Councils to start working on implementing the new system on 10 June 2014 following the completion of the European Elections.
- 2.2 The new IER process required the Council to deal with the production of data files for Household Enquiry Forms and Invitation to Register Forms. The Council was also required to register/confirm registration on the internet/telephone and by text.
- 2.3 This was a major piece of work which culminated in the publication of the new register of electors on 1 December 2014, which was then distributed in accordance with legislation. There were in excess of 14,801 changes made to the register.

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- 2.4 The Elections Teams also managed the Purley By- Election held on 28 January 2015.
- 2.5 In February 2015 the Government introduced a requirement on the Elections team to send Household Notification Letter (HNL) to all properties to ensure that as many people as possible were registered to vote. A review of the personal identifiers for all postal voters whose applications were more than five years old was also undertaken in January 2015.
- 2.6 Planning for the three elections commenced immediately following the European Elections in June 2014. Regular meetings were scheduled with the Returning Officer to deal with all aspects of the elections process. A Project Plan was also put in place.
- 2.7 It was agreed at an early stage that the counting of votes would take place over three days.
- (1) The Parliamentary Count immediately following the close of poll – a statutory requirement.
 - (2) The District Count on Friday 8 May commencing at 11.00am.
 - (3) The Parish/Town Count on Saturday 9 May commencing at 10.00am.
- 2.8 At this early stage in the planning process it was envisaged that the verification would be complete by 01.00am and the Parliamentary Count concluded by 3.30am at the latest which is why it was proposed to conduct the Parliamentary and District Counts on the same day, namely 8 May 2015. All of the counts were undertaken in The Grandstand at Newbury Racecourse, which had been used as the count venue in May 2012 although discussion also took place regarding using St Bartholomew'
- 2.9 The Council is required to undertake a review of Polling Districts and Polling Places in advance of Parliamentary elections and a review was accordingly undertaken in the autumn of 2014 which concluded with a report being agreed at Council on 11 December 2014. This report recommended a number of changes to polling stations and action was undertaken to implement these recommendations in advance of the elections in May 2015. All Members were consulted as part of this review and any comments received were used to inform the final recommendations. A particular problem which was identified through the review process was finding a suitable location in Burghfield Village for a Polling Station. St Mary's Church was later identified as the most suitable Polling Station.
- 2.10 Other work which had to be undertaken in the lead up to the Elections included the following:
- (i) The engagement of suppliers to print poll cards, postal votes and ballot papers.
 - (ii) An audit of election equipment. This audit identified a need to purchase an additional 150 ballot boxes.
 - (iii) The production of new signs for Polling Stations

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- (iv) The appointment of staff to various items of work (mainly Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and Counting staff). In total over 747 roles were identified which needed undertaking to support the three elections.

2.11 Given the number of Elections to be managed and the Returning Officer's stipulation that no member of staff could support more than 2 Counts, there was a need to employ a significant number of staff. This was achieved although it was necessary to recruit many new staff, most of whom were drawn from the Council's Resources Directorate.

Issues

2.12 At this stage in the process it became evident there was insufficient capacity within Strategic Support to deal with the volume of calls, manage the more complex election enquiries and undertake the necessary preparation for the election count. An additional temporary member of staff was subsequently employed to try and assist with the large volume of calls.

2.13 Whilst a Project Plan was put in place to oversee the process, the Election Programme was not really driven by it. The Project Plan lacked detail and the underlying approach adopted was that used in previous Elections, namely relying on a small number of highly experienced individuals who had carried out similar work for many years

Recommendations

1. That a more and detailed robust Project Plan is developed six months prior to the Election Count.
2. That project management principles are used to oversee, review and refresh the Project Plan and its implementation. In particular regular meetings are put in place involving the Returning Officer, the Elections Team and senior managers in Strategic Support to review implementation of the Plan.
3. That greater attention is paid to the future resourcing of Elections, in particular where their scale is going to require a much wider engagement of staff beyond the immediate Elections Team. Those resourcing requirements including a detailed assessment of 'who does what', should form part of the Project Plan development.

3. Post Notice of Election 23rd March to 6th May 2015

Context

3.1 The Notice of Election for the District and Parish/Town elections was published on 23 March 2015. Notice of Election for the Parliamentary Election was not given until 1 April 2015 as it was necessary to receive the Writ before this could be issued.

3.2 As soon as the Writ was received poll cards were issued. The Council did receive a number of complaints from electors who claimed not to have received a poll card however the number of complaints was no higher than in previous years.

3.3 There were eight nominations for the Newbury Parliamentary Seat, 160 candidates were nominated for the District Council and 466 nominations for Parish/Town

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Councils. The date for District/Parish Council election nominations opened on 23 March and closed on 9 April 2015. The date for the Parliamentary election nominations opened on 1 April and closed on 9 April 2015.

- 3.4 Although an Election Agents' briefing took place on 12 February 2015, the Elections Team received a large number of District/Parish Council nominations in the last two days. All of these nominations had to be hand delivered to the Elections Team by law for them to check before they could be signed off. This was compounded due to the fact that the Easter Holiday fell in the middle of the nomination period. This placed significant pressures on the Election Team.
- 3.5 During this period the Elections Manager and Electoral Services Assistant moved to the Members' Boardroom in order that the nominations received could be managed in a confidential manner.
- 3.6 Two key dates in the build up to the Election were 20 April which was the last day on which applications to apply to vote at the Election on 7 May could be made, and 21 April which was the final day for applying for a postal vote. High volumes of applications were received on both these days. The Postal Vote data was sent to the printers within one hour of the deadline for applications.
- 3.7 A number of applications were received after the two deadlines which were rejected.
- 3.8 Ballot papers were then printed for inclusion in postal vote packs. The Head of Strategic Support and the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager visited the printers in Dagenham to undertake random checks on postal packs. No issues were identified as part of this process.
- 3.9 The Council issued 23,131 postal vote packs for the Parliamentary Election and the District Elections and a further 10,507 for Parish/Town elections. These packs contained a total of 47,809 votes. It was not possible due to printing constraints, to include three ballot papers in a single pack. Voters did receive two sets of ballot papers which led to some confusion. Better communications could have helped to explain the reason for the two packs.
- 3.10 In addition to postal votes, a total of 1,244 proxy votes were granted many of which were submitted in accordance with the new emergency proxy arrangements. This meant that proxy arrangements could be granted up to 5.00 pm on the Election day itself. This arrangement did cause a number of logistical and staffing issues, as staff at polling stations had to be advised that the proxy had been approved.
- 3.11 Once the postal votes had been despatched a small team were employed under the supervision of the Principal Policy Officer (Executive Support) to open the votes. This process worked well and reduced the pressure on the Elections Team. The number of postal votes processed by this Team was around 40,000.
- 3.12 In the three days prior to Election Day and in the three days following, polling screens were delivered to and collected from polling stations by a local company. There were also a range of training courses held for staff associated with the elections. Some earlier training was done with key staff. Training of Polling Station Inspectors, Election Control Staff, Count Supervisors and Ballot Box Reception

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Team was also undertaken. Training for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks was completed online.

- 3.13 Ballot Boxes were prepared on Saturday 2 May by a small team of officers so that they were ready for collection by Presiding Officer's on Tuesday 5 May. Ballot Papers were not delivered to the Council until 8.30 am on Sunday 3 May and this resulted in the Elections Team having to work on the Sunday too. A project plan which was shared across the wider Unit would have enabled this task to have been delegated and started earlier.

Issues

- 3.14 Strategic Support continued to receive significant numbers of phone calls from people about general election queries and also from people expressing concern that they had not received their postal votes, particularly those living abroad. Replacements were however issued in all cases. A number of complaints were also received from electors about the complex nature of completing and returning postal votes. The process for completing and returning postal votes is one laid down in legislation so there was little the Council could do to placate these voters. Nevertheless, greater efforts need to be made in the future to explain the Election process, particularly where it is complex or out of the ordinary.
- 3.15 The biggest problem experienced with postal voting, by all Councils, was in relation to 'overseas' electors. In the lead up to the election the Council received over 350 applications from overseas electors. These applications take a considerable amount of time to process, as historic registers have to be inspected to ensure that the applicants have been previously registered in West Berkshire in the preceding fifteen years. The issue faced by the Elections team was that the majority of these applications were made via the Government Digital Service and electors wrongly assumed that once their application for registration had been approved they would be granted a postal vote. However, this was not the case and a separate application had to be made to the Council. The Cabinet Office has now acknowledged that their information was not as clear as it should have been and appropriate changes have now been made to their website.
- 3.16 When the Elections Team opened the ballot papers it was apparent that whilst the number of ballot papers delivered was correct the numbering was not in accordance with what was previously agreed. This was a significant issue as the ballot paper numbers appear on a number of election documents. Attempts were made to alter the numbers in the election management system so that documents could be reprinted but this was not possible.
- 3.17 As a result of this some documents had to be amended manually and contact made with the software company on Tuesday 5 May to see if the numbers held within the system could be amended. The problem was compounded by the fact that Monday 4 May was a Bank Holiday.
- 3.18 Ballot Papers for the Reading West Constituency were not received until 1.30pm on 5 May which caused a minor problem as Presiding Officers had already started to collect ballot boxes from 2.00pm.

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Recommendations

4. That, in future, a detailed “Frequently Asked Question” sheet be prepared so that the first port of call for any phones calls about basic election enquiries should be the Contact Centre which would then allow the Elections Team to focus on the more complex enquiries.
5. That a communications plan needs to be developed as part of the overall Project Plan which identifies complex or unusual aspects of the process which may need explaining to the voting public beforehand.
6. That a review of the way in which Elections Agents are briefed is undertaken with a view to minimising nomination forms being returned at the last minute.

4. Election Day

Context

- 4.1 Because of the complexity of the day an Election Control Desk was staffed from 6.30am to 10.00pm so that any problems/queries raised by electors and polling station staff could be managed effectively. This enabled the Elections Manager and the Electoral Services Officer to focus their attention on more complex issues.

Issues

- 4.2 It became apparent early on Election Day that despite having a detailed schedule, the delivery company had delivered insufficient polling screens to a number of locations. The Council had to use its own resources and deliver screens to a number of polling stations.
- 4.3 There was also a large volume of calls received by the Elections Team on the day from both polling station staff and electors. In addition, staff were also heavily involved in issuing replacement lost/spoilt postal votes and emergency proxies, some of which involved liaising with both Wokingham and Reading Borough Councils.
- 4.4 The Elections Team also identified an issue with the software system, where in a very few instances, new electors had applied online, but had mistakenly been merged with another elector in the same property. This was a problem experienced by all users of the Xpress software system.
- 4.5 There were last minute issues around the car parking arrangements put in place by the Racecourse management for people attending the count. The Returning Officer and Head of Strategic Support had to meet with the Racecourse management early evening in order to improve the elections signage and to agree new parking arrangements for people attending the count.
- 4.6 There were no specific issues raised about any of the Polling Stations used on the day.

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Recommendation

7. That, in future, detailed discussions be held with the delivery company to ensure that they are clear on the number of screens to be delivered to each polling station location.

5. The Counts

Context – Parliamentary Count

- 5.1 As previously stated it had been agreed that the three counts would be spread over a period of three days. This was based on an assumption that the Parliamentary Count would be completed by 3.30am at the latest on 8 May.
- 5.2 Count teams had been appointed for all Counts and Supervisors appointed. As there were three Counts it was necessary to appoint more Supervisors than would normally be required. This meant that some Count Supervisor staff were undertaking these roles for the first time. Supervisors were employed on the basis of previous experience or perceived ability to undertake the role.
- 5.3 The layout of the Count Room at the Racecourse including, refreshments and signage and the associated communications (screens and Televisions etc) was the responsibility of the Head of Strategic Support supported by the Policy Officer (Executive Support).
- 5.4 Improved communications were seen as essential given the complexity of the three Counts and online progress of the various Counts was also provided via the Council's website. A communication team was put in place to manage this aspect of the count. The layout of the room and the improved communications were viewed as having worked well.
- 5.5 A team had been appointed to deal with the arrival of ballot boxes and other equipment from Presiding Officers, This team was located on the ground floor where all equipment was stored and sorted with the exception of the ballot boxes which were taken to the count location on the second floor. This process worked extremely well as members of this team have considerable experience in undertaking this task.
- 5.6 The first process that had to be undertaken was the verification of the ballot boxes to ensure that the number of ballot papers in the boxes agreed with the number issued by the Presiding Officer.
- 5.7 It was necessary to open the ballot boxes for all elections (Parliamentary/District and Town and Parish Councils) to ensure that no papers had been placed in the wrong box. This meant that a total of 246 boxes required verification.
- 5.8 Once all votes had been verified the ballot papers for the District and Parish/Town elections were sealed away.
- 5.9 The verification process concluded at 3.10am nearly two hours later than the original estimate. The Parliamentary count then started at 3.40am and concluded at 5.30am. The verification process proved to be a much longer process than first anticipated, however it was completed accurately with only a discrepancy of one

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ballot paper between the number of votes issued for the Newbury Parliamentary Election and the number included in the ballot paper account in each of the 97 Parliamentary boxes.

- 5.10 The Parliamentary Count followed the verification and was concluded relatively quickly. The result was declared at 5.30am time. When compared with the rest of the country this was broadly alongside comparable areas. The Verification and Parliamentary Count had taken longer locally but the same issue had been experienced elsewhere where multiple elections had been held.

Issues

- 5.11 As a result of the late finish of the Parliamentary Count (5.30am) some key staff did not leave the Racecourse until 6.45am and were then required to undertake the same role later that morning.
- 5.12 There were minor issues experienced in transferring the data from the verified count sheets from each of the count supervisors to the control table to enable the up to date position to be relayed across the screens etc. The reason for this was firstly that this was a new process and secondly because the individual assigned this task was used to resolve other unforeseen issues which occurred on the night/morning.

Context - District Council Count

- 5.13 The District Count commenced at 11.00am on 8 May. All boxes were re-verified before the actual count commenced. The counts for the district wards had been allocated to the five count teams on an approximately equal basis. Various Count methodologies needed to be used depending on the number of seats up for election and the number of candidates however, it soon became clear that different supervisors were adopting different approaches.
- 5.14 Count Supervisors were required to undertake counts in an agreed order and once completed check and submit a provisional result to the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer was responsible for signing off provisional results or requiring a recount to take place to ensure that the numbers on the "provisional results sheet" and that on the Control Table master account sheet agreed.
- 5.15 The Returning Officer dealt with all doubtful ballot papers to ensure a consistent approach.
- 5.16 The District Count was concluded by 7.30pm. This was again somewhat later than expected this time due to the need for additional checking coupled with the need for several recounts.

Issues

- 5.17 The District Council Count started only 6 hours after the completion of the Parliamentary Count, namely at 11.00am. However some staff had the responsibility for making sure that the Racecourse Building was cleared and secure after the Parliamentary count had finished given the ballot boxes and papers were stored overnight. These staff only left the building at approximately 6.45am.
- 5.18 Key staff were then asked to report back to the Racecourse Building no later than 10.00am to receive a briefing on the process to be followed in managing the District

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Council Count. However, some of these key staff were required to report back much earlier (9.00am) to ensure that the communications aspects of the Count were up and running.

- 5.19 The result of this timeframe was that some key staff were on duty for over 36 hours without sleep.
- 5.20 The main issue in relation to the District Council Count was the Thatcham North seat. This Count was challenged after the result had been declared. In effect the total number of votes cast did not match up with those shown on the “form of declaration”.
- 5.21 The process followed was that laid down in that the preliminary result was passed through the Control Table (Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer) who, in turn, verified this result. The result was then shown to the various agents who acknowledged the result. The Returning Officer then declared the result. It was after this point that the result was challenged.
- 5.22 This was a result of human error. Had the count module attached to the Xpress software system been operational this would have been used to input the results and check figures. However, due to the problems identified earlier with the ballot paper numbers it was not possible to use this system. There were other similar errors made which were picked up by the Control Table.
- 5.23 The cause of these difficulties can be attributed to the following;
- (1) Exhaustion – it was not envisaged that the Counts would take as long as they did. The result was that some staff ended up working very long hours without a break. In hindsight, the Counts should not have been arranged on simultaneous days.
 - (2) Training – supervisor training was not extensive enough. There was an over reliance on expecting supervisors understanding the task in hand. At the same time supervisors were allowed to adopt the methodology they felt best suited their own Count circumstances. This proved problematic with some supervisors implementing approaches which were overly long winded and complex for the task in hand.
 - (3) Skills set – there is a requisite skill set required to supervise a Counting Table. Some supervisors were not well suited to the role and would be better deployed to other activities.
 - (4) Control Table – roles and supervision – there was insufficient supervision of the Counting Tables by the core Elections staff. The roles of the Returning Officer and his core staff need reviewing. The emphasis should be placed on oversight not detailed engagement in specific processes. The Returning Officer and his staff need to be capable of identifying and resolving problems before they escalate. That becomes difficult if they are heavily involved in other activities. Responsibilities at the Control Table need reviewing and clarifying. This will require additional staff to become involved beyond the small team that currently exists.

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- (5) ICT – the Count process remains dominated by paper based processes. The ICT would not function properly on the day of the Count. If it had, and had been used it would have provided an early warning system to the errors that were subsequently identified.

Town and Parish Councils Count

- 5.24 The counting of votes for Parish/Town councils commenced at 10.00 am on Saturday 9 May 2015. Whilst there were only 16 contests to count, the Parish/Town council elections were the most complex due to the high number of seats in some wards and the large turnout as a consequence of the elections being combined.
- 5.25 A completely new set of Count Supervisors was used at this count, some of who had little experience in dealing with counts of this complexity. As with the District count, a number of recounts were necessary. A number of measures were taken subsequent to the District Count to ensure that there was no repetition of the earlier difficulties and those proved effective. All counts were however concluded by 5.30pm.

Recommendations

8. That, should there be a requirement for the Council to manage three election processes (Parliamentary/District and Town and Parish Councils) in future (2035), that the individual counts be undertaken as follows;
- (i) Parliamentary – the day of the Election and running into the next morning.
 - (ii) District – Saturday
 - (iii) Town and Parish Councils – Sunday

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9. A core team of staff need to be selected to undertake Election Count duties. The emphasis should move away from seeking staff as and when Elections occur. Staff should be kept on the books and trained on an ongoing basis particularly given Elections are now taking place on an annual basis. The selection of a core team of supervisors is seen as particularly important
10. Supervisors should attend standardised training delivered by an appropriate outside body. This should take place at least annually.
11. Supervisors should be selected against a recognised and agreed person specification. The role does not suit everyone.
12. The role of the Returning Officer and his staff in relation to the Count needs to be reviewed. A much greater emphasis needs to be placed on oversight and supervision by key senior elections staff.
13. Additional senior staff are required to support the Control Table. This needs to include staff able to utilise the required ICT to support the process and thereby enable the required checks and balances to be put in place

6. Post Election

- 6.1 Following the elections arrangements were made for payments to be made to all staff, Polling stations and other suppliers. This process took approximately three weeks due to the large numbers involved.
- 6.2 Following the Election a number of statutory returns also needed to be made. These were all completed in accordance with Electoral Commission guidelines.
- 6.3 A number of review meetings were held to identify areas where improvements could be made resulting in a number of recommendations set out in this report.

7. Appendices

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: N/A

Officers Consulted: Deputy Returning Officers, Head of Strategic Support and the democratic and Electoral Services Manager

Trade Union: N/A