CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Subject:	Parliamentary and Plymouth City Council Elections 2010 Review and Evaluation
Committee:	Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Date:	15 November 2010
Cabinet Member:	N/A
CMT Member:	Adam Broome, Director for Corporate Support
Author:	Nigel Spilsbury (Electoral Services Manager)
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Key Decision:	No.
Ref:	E3/Elections/2010
Part:	1

Executive Summary:

This report sets out details of the Elections Review 2010 and any issues arising from it.

Corporate Plan 2010-2013:

None directly from this report.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

There are only minor costs arising from the review of the 2010 elections.

In financial year 2011-2012 legislation requires the Electoral Service to obtain fresh signatures from all postal voting applicants and it is estimated that £49,500 will be required to complete this task. Funding for this is included in the government Rate Support Grant.

Although the issues mentioned in paragraph 7 (Government Political Reform) will have cost implications, actual costs cannot be accurately defined until the relevant legislation has been finalised.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.

None directly from this report.

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

That the report is noted.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

Not applicable.

Background papers:

None

Sign off: comment must be sought from those whose area of responsibility may be affected by the decision, as follows (insert initials of Finance and Legal reps, and of Heads of HR, AM, IT and Strat. Proc.):

Fin Cor5 1011 004		Head of Leg DVS		Head of HR		Head of AM		Head of IT		Head of Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member: Tim Howes											

1.0   Introduction

1.1   Following each election the Electoral Services Team undertakes a review of administrative and related matters. As part of the review process comment is invited from Elected Representatives, Political Parties, Candidates and Election Agents and staff at all levels of the process.

1.2   This report provides details of the Electoral Commission review of the 2010 elections, assessment of contractor performance, staff de-briefings, comments received and issues arising from the 2010 Parliamentary and Local Elections. The report also contains an evaluation of the promotion and participation activities undertaken, election statistics, details of the expected government political reforms and other related issues.

2.0   Electoral Commission Feedback and Review

2.1   The Electoral Commission conducted a post-election seminar on Tuesday 25 May at Sandy Park Conference Centre, Exeter for Returning Officers and Electoral Administrators.

2.2   The main comments and feedback provided was as follows: -

- ❖ Election timetable needs to be reviewed, as the statutory deadlines are failing administrators and customers alike. The general consensus was that the registration, postal voting and nomination deadline should be separated with a longer lead-in to polling day. The timetable should be at least as long as the local election timetable, perhaps longer to enable more realistic timescales to be worked out.
- ❖ Electoral Commission forms should be reviewed to reflect Electoral Registration Officers operational needs (e.g. signature box currently on second page for the Overseas Electors and proxy form).
- ❖ Information overkill
- ❖ Royal Mail is not providing a consistent service to local authorities. Some are requesting and receiving a Saturday service, some are not. Mail sweeps appear to be inconsistent. Mail is simply not being delivered or delivered late.
- ❖ Service voter registration needs to be reviewed in view of the 'five' year extension.
- ❖ Overseas Electors – questioned if they should have a vote at all.
- ❖ Call Centres (if operated properly) are good for off-loading enquiries.
- ❖ Polling station problems in other parts of the UK. Careful that new legislation is not a 'sledge hammer to crack a nut'.
- ❖ Candidates, Election Agents and political parties should have no involvement with the postal vote process
- ❖ Deadlines should be 4pm or 5pm at latest (registration currently midnight)
- ❖ Postal votes on demand should be reviewed.
- ❖ Handing in postal votes at polling stations should be reviewed.
- ❖ Elections should not be combined – confusing for voters and difficult to administer.

- ❖ EC campaign 'it takes only 3 minutes' campaign was apparently an issue for some – forgetting that the application has to be completed and returned to the Electoral Registration Officer, after downloading.
- ❖ Funding regarding the cross over of registration and postal vote issues with election issues
- ❖ Some Electoral Administrators felt that the Postal voting code of conduct should be legislated for, rather than voluntary.
- ❖ Tellers may be an issue in some areas – do tellers need ID badges?
- ❖ Local authorities subsidise national elections
- ❖ Cross boundary issues in relation to postal voting – should be a cross boundary protocol for 'swopping' data.
- ❖ Issues relating to the timing of the canvass in connection with an autumn election.
- ❖ Can we legislate with regard to second homes and student entitlement to registration
- ❖ Independent candidates are at a disadvantage with regard to obtaining register data.
- ❖ Electoral Management Boards may co-ordinate elections?

For a full list of comments and issues refer to the Electoral Commission summary issued on 16 June 2010 (available on the Electoral Commission website).

2.3   The Electoral Commission agreed to consider these issues in relation to their reporting process. Although the statutory report is a 'high level' report only, fact sheets and other themed reports may be prepared. An interim report was published in June: Review of problems at polling stations at close of poll on 6 May 2010. This provided a quick analysis of the problems that occurred at some polling stations with recommendations to address these problems.

2.3.1   The problems outlined in the Electoral Commission interim report related to: - not having the correct staffing levels at polling stations and having to turn voters away; polling stations running out of ballot papers; use of unsuitable buildings. The problems appear to have affected only 27 out of 40,000 polling stations.

Plymouth did not experience the first two problem areas, although it could be argued that some of the buildings that we use for polling stations have some disability issues (however in all cases the building used is the only building available for use in the polling area concerned).

2.3.2   The Electoral Commission published its full statutory report on the 27 July on the UK Parliamentary and English local elections held on the 6 May 2010. The Commission found that the elections were well run in the vast majority of constituencies, but recommends an outline agenda for the UK Government that they believe needs to be implemented over the next five years. It includes calling on the UK Government to: -

- • Bring forward a comprehensive electoral modernisation strategy for future elections. This should include lengthening the timetable for general elections and improving voting opportunities for service personnel and overseas voters.

The modernisation strategy should also address what role, if any; advance voting might play and also if there is a case for requiring proof of ID at polling stations in Great Britain.

- Bring forward a comprehensive plan to ensure the effective management and delivery of future elections. This should include ensuring greater co-ordination for the delivery of elections and introducing mechanisms to hold Returning Officers to account for the delivery of their statutory functions.

- Implement individual electoral registration in Great Britain in a way that maximises the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register.

The report also reiterates the Commission's urgent call for the Government to change the law as soon as possible to make sure voters who are queuing at polling stations at 10pm are able to vote at all future elections.

2.4 Can we learn anything in Plymouth from the Electoral Commission post election seminar or review for future elections? Perhaps the following: -

- Royal Mail – need more direct liaison, rather than leaving to Print and Document Services (meeting to be set up for January 2011).
- Tellers – consider more simple guidance notes.
- Ensure that all current planning processes are strictly adhered to.

The Plymouth Review

3.0 Contractors

3.1 **Delivery and setting up of election equipment: Plymouth Community Homes (PCH)** under a Service Level Agreement (formerly the Manufacturing Service part of Plymouth City Council) was responsible for the delivery and setting up of voting screens, tables, chairs and other necessary equipment at polling stations; delivery, setting up and removal of mobile polling units; signposting in relation to polling stations; setting up the count locations, including signposting; miscellaneous manual handling tasks.

3.1.2 This is a major and particularly important part of the elections process and overall Plymouth Community Homes provided an excellent service undertaking the tasks mentioned above.

3.1.3 A de-brief took place on Wednesday 19 May attended by the Electoral Services team and representatives from Plymouth Community Homes. A number of issues were highlighted and are summarised as follows: -

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
The formatted delivery and contacts schedules could have been provided earlier.	Agreed – reason for being later than usual – person responsible sick.	Provide as early as possible (for local elections early – mid March as usual).
New mobile polling units.	Overall the new units are vastly superior to the old ones.	Minor modification required.
	Electrics partly failed causing some heating and lighting problems. Electrics in new units were set up slightly different from the 'proto-type' unit used in 2009.	Signs to be placed above switches and the electrics investigated.
	Vents have a slightly smaller aperture – less airflow – needs minor modification.	Very minor modification required.
	Flooding occurred in one unit.	Non-slip lino inside door to be provided. Two units to be raised very slightly off the ground (no need for mats).
Mobile unit at Royal Eye Infirmary.	The new units are too large for this site. Would obstruct the public highway.	Refer to 4.4.
Mobile sites generally.	Other sites may prove difficult to site the new style units. Existing sites – some ramps too steep.	Sites reviewed in 2008. All sites reviewed in 2010 for locating new style units (see below).
Old Style mobile units.	Gas lighting difficult to replace and needs to be reviewed.	Contractor will review the use of gas lighting and replace with battery operated lights (and for use as a contingency in all mobile units).
Count	Count trays are passed their 'sell by date'	To be replaced for next General election.

3.1.4 <u>Mobile polling units – general comment:</u> damp and cold (old units); too small; access inadequate (old units); slippery in wet weather (Dunnet Road – needs to be re-sited); lighting poor (particularly the old units); not enough space for forms/stationery (shelf would be useful); ramp too steep (Sedley Way/Ruskin Crescent); furniture in poor condition (Merafield); Is two litres of water enough for 2 people for 15 hours. All these comments have been noted for the 2011 elections.

3.1.5 <u>Mobile polling units – further requirements</u> – sign on door 'no smoking'; waste bin; brush or mop; mobile at Merafield did not have the 'mind the step' sign; several presiding officers mentioned that a mat is required for wet weather (see schedule above – non-slip surface to be provided).

3.1.6 <u>Portable toilets</u> – the unit located at Tamarside Community College had no key to lock it. Consequently school children were opening/closing the door!

3.1.7 <u>New mobile polling units</u> – The six new style mobile polling units mentioned above had several advantages such as lower level access, wider doors, more space inside, built in toilet facilities, running hot and cold water serving a wash hand basin, a sink unit in the kitchen area, integral generator compartment with <u>acoustic lining and exhaust,</u> built in polling booths and kitchen area. They were deployed as follows: -

- Tewkesbury Close, Lower Ham

- Polzeath Gardens, Pennycross

- Kneele Gardens, Hartley Vale

- Kensington Road/Salcombe Road, Lipson

- Holmwood Avenue, Plymstock

- Hessary, Belliver

Following the experience of using these units at the 2010 elections, a number of fairly modest modifications will be introduced for future elections (refer to 3.1.3). Any additional costs will be covered from within the regular budget for replacing mobile polling units.

3.1.8 One general question has been raised – "As the new units are larger can they be accommodated on existing sites?" As a result a review of the mobiles has been undertaken with the results set out below.

Location	Building To use in polling area	Merger with adjacent areas	Location Suitable for new style units	Notes
Tewkesbury Close, Lower Ham (838)	No	Part only	Yes	Best location in terms of flat area and security.
Former Trelawny Primary School site (1270)	N/A	N/A	N/A	To be discontinued.
Polzeath Gardens at Pennycross (1288)	Yes	No	Yes	St Pancras Church investigated, but NOT for hire and outside polling area. Best location given hilly nature of area.
Chaucer Way (1308)	Yes	No	Yes	Mobile used as temporary replacement in 2010. For investigation – refer to 4.4. To be retained, but kept under review.

Location	Building To use in polling area	Merger with adjacent areas	Location Suitable for new style units	Notes
Sedley Way/ Ruskin Crescent, Brake Farm (1337)	No	No	Yes	On balance the current area is by far the best location in terms of voter accessibility, but could be improved by moving to an adjacent space within the same car parking area.
Junction of Budshead Road & Canterbury Drive (1354)	No	Yes	Yes	Prior to 2003 voters were split between adjacent polling areas. Re-merger rejected in 2008. Best location.
Thirlmere Gardens (1004)	No	Possibly	Yes	Merger proposed but rejected in 2008. Location suitable.
Dunnet Road (1272)	No	No	Yes	Merger has been explored but not seen as practicable. Also refer to 4.4.
Hessary Drive at Belliver (854)	No	No	Yes	Could be a Community Centre built sometime in the future. For the present location suitable.
Kneele Gardens, Hartley Vale (835)	No	No	Yes	Golden Hind public house investigated, but no separate meeting rooms. Location best available.
Royal Eye Infirmary, Dale Road (1162)	Yes	Part only	No	Church available in Gordon Terrace, but would require a boundary change. Also refer to 4.4. No further action at this time.
Island at Junction of Kensington Road and Southern Tce (1240)	No	No	Yes	Planning application to install mast on this site. Also refer to 4.4. The current site is the only practicable location. Area extremely hilly.
Dove Stores car park, Deer Park (537)	No	No	Yes	To be re-located to car park area behind Humber Close. Also refer to 4.4.

Location	Building To use in polling area	Merger with adjacent areas	Location Suitable for new style units	Notes
Valley Road at Plympton (890)	Possibly	Yes if school site used	Yes	Training Centre investigated, but not suitable. School site considered by ward members to be too far away. May need to re-consider at some future point, due to emergency access to park area.
Merafield Road, Plympton (1061)	No	Possibly	Yes	This is the only practicable and suitable site.
Holmwood Avenue at Plymstock (1092)	No	No	Yes	New style unit trialled here in 2010 and no comments received.
Coombe Dean School (1654)	Yes	No	Yes	The use of the school is under review. Also refer to 4.4.

3.2 **Printing of Postal ballot packs: OPT2VOTE Limited** was recruited to undertake the printing of postal ballot packs and ballot papers. The fully enclosed postal ballot pack service was used which included packing the appropriate ballot papers and arranging for Royal Mail collection/delivery.

3.2.1 There is obviously the need for a high degree of accuracy when undertaking this task and OPT2VOTE provided the service expected.

3.2.2 This is only the second time that the City Council has used this company and the first where multiple elections have taken place.

3.2.3 The following comments should be noted for future reference and built into the contractors requirements schedule: -

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Postal ballot packs	Delivery to voter undertaken one day earlier than expected. Planning processes brought forward causing extra work at a peak period. Electors appreciated early receipt, but not well received by some Election Agents.	Posting date either needs to be tightened or poll card and timetables should give a date by which the postal ballots will be posted, rather than a specific posting date – This will be discussed with contractor at a meeting to be held in November 2010.

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Postal vote data	The postal vote data storing process took longer than expected.	The storage of data needs to be critically checked to ensure that this process has been completed, before attempting to run data for contractors.
	Can we store in batches.	Yes data can be stored in batches, but this also has its own risks.
	Checking after 5pm and through the early hours needs to be reviewed.	Contractor will investigate and advise after the December User Group meeting.
Postal votes - Cross border data for parliamentary election	Neighbour could not provide one clean file of data immediately after the deadline for contractor use. Contractor could not undertake extractions for cancelled postal votes which were advised by neighbouring local authority after the deadline.	Smaller authorities do not have the resources to provide an immediate turn-around of data, but should be able to provide the following day. This needs to be discussed further with neighbour / contractor prior to the next General election.
Combined packs	On rare occasions only one ballot paper was returned.	Contractor agreed to improve instruction insert.
Spare postal packs	More spares are required to cover the increased number of lost post votes.	Order to be very marginally increased for spares.
Postal packs – live sample check	Sample not extensive enough.	Contractor will review.
Postal vote completion	Birmingham place video on website on how to complete a postal vote.	Contractor to investigate and report at the next User Group.
Ballot papers proofs	Contractor deleted logos without reference to local authority (joint candidates).	Contractor apologised.
Ballot paper quantity	In view of the national problems consider ordering further spares.	Order to be very marginally increased for spares.
Ballot paper numbering	Incorrect numbering printed on two books	Checks in place work!
Test systems	The test computer system data does not match live system.	IT department will be attending to in December.

3.3 Printing of Poll Cards: City Council's Print and Document Service department (PADS) undertakes this requirement.

3.3.1 PADS provide a full service, this includes; taking the data, merging the data, printing the poll cards, guillotining and document handling – sorting and preparing for posting, dealing with Royal Mail contracts. If undertaken correctly this takes a good deal of pressure off the service.

3.3.2 However, on this occasion a number of issues have arisen, namely:

- ❖ Slight delay in posting the poll cards
- ❖ Minor data issue

3.4 Delivery of Postal votes, poll cards and other mail: Royal Mail, has the monopoly in regards to delivery and collection of mail in such tight time-scales.

3.4.1 Royal Mail has a very difficult task to perform at the best of times, but at a Parliamentary General election they must be incredibly stretched. However, this does not get away from the fact that postal votes and poll cards are vitally important to electors and the efficient administration of elections.

3.4.2 A number of issues have been reported to Royal Mail such as late or non-delivery of postal votes and poll cards. Further discussion will take place in January 2011.

3.5 Software Services: Undertaken by Halarose Limited.

3.5.1 On the whole Eros, Adest and Avantguard computer systems worked well. Support from Halarose was excellent. However, there were a number of issues, which can be summarised as follows: -

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Staff payments	Very time consuming to produce City Council payroll spreadsheet.	Confirmed that Halarose will improve this process.
Lack of understanding of new legislation	Patch to deal with Parliamentary nominations came too late to use.	Noted at User Group meeting.
Too many patches	Original release needs to be more thoroughly tested.	Noted at User Group meeting.
Emergency proxy process too complex	Very slow to process.	Noted at User Group meeting.
Some reports are not consistent	Varying electorates come out of the system/staff reports – no ability to run at constituency level.	Noted at User Group meeting.

4 De-briefings – <u>Electoral Services and Management Teams</u>

4.1   De-briefing for Electoral Services took place on Tuesday 18 May.

4.2   Overall comments have been recorded as follows for this de-brief: -

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Accommodation – Count	Lower Hall/Astor Charter rooms are rather small for parliamentary counts. Although the extra table worked reasonably well for the parliamentary count, it did not for the city council count on the Friday.	Refer to comments/actions under Returning Officer and Management team de-brief.
Accommodation – Ballot box preparations and issue	Astor/Charter rooms used for the issue of ballot boxes. A number of presiding officers considered the previous location used to be better.	Discussed - on balance Astor/Charter provides for better use of facilities.
Security at Guildhall entrance	Cover needs to be more consistent. Admission list – data from software not accurate.	Ensure that at least two security staff is available and at least one remains in attendance at the front entrance of the Guildhall at all times during the count. Improvements required for admission list.
Press Office and media	At parliamentary elections this is getting too much for Electoral Services to deal with.	All matters concerning media will be handled by the Communication unit in future. Communications Manager happy to undertake.
Collection of postal votes from polling stations	Some Polling Station Inspectors are not as active as others in collecting postal votes for return to office.	The importance of collection will be stressed at election briefings. It may be worth considering using the Emergency polling staff as 'floating" inspectors'.
Temporary staff	An additional person may have been useful within the office	The employment of an additional person will be considered at the next general election.

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Register and postal voting application forms	A large volume of application forms was received close to the deadline. One party representative passed in well over 500 applications on the day before the deadline, causing unnecessary overtime.	Consideration will be given on how we can prevent this happening in future.
Enquiries – telephone	Dedicated team trained and used, who were very successful. However, further improvements are still required for a general election.	Further resources to be arranged at the next general election such as additional telephone lines and PC, transfer of one existing Eros licence and re-location of scanning station.
Enquiries from staff	Using Managers personal mobile number was not a good idea.	Further dedicated telephone number will be installed for polling day?
Enquiry Hall	Further information required.	Investigate if notice boards with information/forms (and ballot box for returned applications) can be placed in the Enquiry Hall.
Poll cards	Poll cards do not provide office opening hours.	Include this information on poll cards and perhaps place more emphasis on the website application forms.
Staff appointments – combined election	Combined election over-stretched the Electoral Service.	Counting appointments for any subsidiary election must be undertaken by an officer from outside the Electoral Service.
Staff at polling stations	One or two not up to the usual standard.	Consider feedback for those staff concerned.
	Staff not turning up at polling station.	Ensure Presiding Officer informs office immediately.
Postal voting	Hospital provided patients with wrong information regarding emergency proxies.	Note for future and provide information to hospitals at an early date.

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Postal vote verification	Due to increased numbers – further licences may be required? Cross border checking was a failure – resulting in a manual check of neighbour's postal vote statements.	Survey other users and consider further licences for future general election. Further testing required for future combined elections.
Poll cards	Friday postings not a good idea. Royal Mail non-deliveries. Proxy poll cards –notes regarding medical emergencies are not clear enough. Amendments to detail required.	Noted for next time, although sometimes unavoidable. Discussed with Royal Mail. Amendments will be made to provide clarity. Add Mon-Fri office hours etc. Emphasise downloading of application forms. Re-consider wording for postal vote delivery date.
Polling station issues		Refer to 4.4
Tellers	Problem at two polling stations.	Tellers guidance notes to be reviewed
Polling station communications	A number of Presiding Officers appeared to have mobile phones switched off. There is also a problem with reception in some rural areas.	Must ensure that Polling Station Inspectors check that all staff has phone switched on.
Polling station – Burgess Hall	Coins for gas meter!	Make sure money is drawn from petty cash and supplied to the Presiding Officer.

4.3 **De-briefings for the Acting Returning Officer and Management team** took place on - Monday 24 May and Friday 28 May.

4.3.1 Overall comments recorded as follows for the Acting Returning Officer and Management team de-briefs: -

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Count	<u>City Council count</u> Car parking on Friday: - Civic Centre barrier taken down too early. Some supervisors completed tasks and could possibly have declared earlier.	Must be double-checked at next election. Give supervisors more freedom to act with further responsibilities for all stages of the process.
Count	Parliamentary count: - 'Eggbox' style ballot paper containers – no longer functional. Centre tables containing ballot papers not showing as clear a transparent process as could be achieved. Guildhall as a venue for three parliamentary counts is restrictive in terms of accommodation, how many staff can be used and eventual count completion times.	Replace with new design at the next General election. Reverse centre tables containing ballot papers so that Agents can see more clearly. At present there is no choice regarding the use of the Guildhall, as this is the only building capable of holding three parliamentary counts in one location. By 2011 the new LIFE Centre should be built and this building will hopefully prove to be more adequate. The Electoral Services Manager (ESM) has also looked at the new sports centre at the University of St Mark & St John, but has been ruled out on grounds of costs.
Royal Mail	Concerns expressed about no Royal Mail second post on polling day and that arrangements for the 10pm sweep could be better.	On investigation a second post was received during the afternoon of polling day. Arrangements for the 10pm mail 'sweep' will be discussed with Royal Mail in January 2012.
General Support from other council departments.	Considered inadequate	Acting Returning Officer to deal with at future elections.
Postal vote verification	Can we further streamline our processes?	ESM to consider prior to the 2011 elections.

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
National problems – queues at polling stations	Could the national problems have occurred in Plymouth?	Unlikely as we plan staffing levels and for the printing of ballot papers to a very high level of efficiency. However, we may need to 'beef' up the briefings for polling staff and polling station inspectors (and instructions) to ensure that the Electoral Service is informed of potential problems at as early a stage as is possible.
Electoral Services Manager (ESM)	The ESM was not available during most of February and March – placing undue pressure on his return. ARO considers that more delegation should be made by ESM.	If these circumstances were to be repeated, resources must be found to cover the post. ESM to consider if further delegation is practicable.

4.4 **Comments or issues recorded concerning polling station buildings** (from Electoral Services, polling staff and political parties): -

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
Ham ward	Now that parliamentary boundaries are in place and with South Trelawny Primary School closed, Ham ward polling district boundaries and stations requires a review.	Agreed with elected representatives to reduce the number of polling districts in this ward by two (BB and BJ) and making other amendments to BA, BC, BD, BF, BG and BI. Morice Baptist Church will replace South Trelawny Primary School as polling station.
St Philips Church Hall (BE)	The Member of Parliament for the area observed that there are steps at entrance. May be closing – investigate	The church authorities have undertaken a number of access improvements over the years, but it has proved impossible to make this hall completely accessible. Not closing for foreseeable future – one alternative location but situated on extremity of polling area.

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
The Barn, Kit Hill Crescent (CA)	Failed to open on time.	Mix up with collection of key. Contingency arrangements worked well – Issue from back of car and mobile polling unit delivered and used until building opened.
Tamar View Resource Centre, Miers Close (CAB)	Member request - Could we consider using the new Riverside Community Primary School instead of current location (situated at Poole Park Road, opposite Miers Close)?	At the present time there seems very little point in altering this location, the current polling station is just across the road from the new school and there were no reported problems in 2010. The school would also have to close, with the usual child care problems for parents.
West Park Library (DA)	The voters around the Ringmore Way area are discouraged from voting by having to travel a great distance.	The proposal to re-split DA to the 2005 boundary has been accepted by ward members
Mobile polling unit at Chaucer Way (DC)	A mobile polling unit was sited at Chaucer Way as a temporary measure due to the closure of Chaucer Primary School. Shakespeare Community Primary School has now opened and could act as the replacement for Chaucer Primary School.	The new school is not ideally located, but nor was Chaucer Primary School – both schools located on the edge of the polling area. Only one other observation, the new school has a security fence which is only open for part of school day to allow parents to drop off the children. Ward members consider current position to be more beneficial to voters, but agreed that this area should be kept under review.
Ernesettle Community Primary School (DE)	Access to room poor (according to presiding officer). Suggestion to use Reception area or portacabin at front of school? Polling station inspector considers 'mat' required in wet weather.	Files checked, other locations previously considered. Noted for future elections.

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
St Aidans Church Hall (DF)	Polling Station Inspector considers 'mat' required in wet weather.	Noted for future elections.
St Peters RC Primary School (EB)	Lighting leading to entrance considered poor.	Contractor to look at possibly locating temporary solar powered lights for 2011 elections.
Derriford United Church (EH)	In wet conditions the ramp is slippery.	Sign to be placed above ramp at future elections.
Mary Deans Primary School (FA)	Entrance door draughty. Staff suggested that we use a portable draught lobby? Member comment: Difficult for some voters to get to. Three buildings available: Mary Deans Primary School (current); St Mary's Church (very isolated from majority of voters); Hilltop Community Centre (could cater for the old naval quarter area and maybe area around Ashleigh Close and Henley Drive – remainder of polling area is closer to current location).	Contractor to look at in 2011. Members accept proposal to split polling district, using Mary Deans Primary School and Hilltop Community Centre (subject to availability).
Mobile polling unit at Dunnet Road (FB)	In wet conditions the ramp is slippery and also steep (mobile unit currently placed on a grassed area).	Contractor will re-locate to car park area, adjacent to current location.
Southway Training Centre (FD)	Access not good at all. Building on Council's buildings 'disposal' list. Check new primary school.	New school will not open until 2011. Use current location until disposal confirmed.
Elm Community Centre (GC)	Room used was small and became crowded at times.	The room is adequate for local and European elections. Review prior to next General election (larger room is available).
Manadon Vale Primary School (HA)	Presiding Officer considered Music Room too small.	Agreed that the room proved difficult to operate for a combined election, when furniture not moved out of room. At the next General election book the hall for use.

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
Manadon Vale Primary School (HA)	Member comment: Could we use the Church of the Ascension, Crownhill for former HMS Thunderer voters??	Due to traffic arrangements voters would literally pass the current location in order to access the Church of the Ascension. Therefore, no Change to polling station.
Austin Farm Primary School (HE)	Alternative access not used – side door into room with flat access from Eggbuckland Road. There are 7 steps inside building leading down to Hall.	Alternative access not now practicable. For 2011 elections check if an alternative room is available.
Ford Primary School (JE)	Could the new St Marks CE Church built in Cambridge Road replace Ford Primary School, which has one step at the entrance (with no possibility of being ramped)?	Preliminary view of the outside of the new St Marks Church was undertaken on 2 September. The front entrance has 2 steps, but the side entrance has good access. Currently waiting to hear from church authorities on availability.
Mobile polling unit at Royal Eye Infirmary (MA)	Site not big enough for new larger style units that will be in place by the 2014 council elections.

There is a church building located in Gordon Terrace, no more than 3-4 minutes from current site. If used the boundaries of polling district MA/MB will need amending. Name of Church – Tabernacle Christian Fellowship. | The whole polling area was viewed the 26 August.

There are no other realistic locations for the larger style mobile units. We have until December 2014 before all new units are deployed, after this time I doubt that there will be any choice but to look at the church in Gordon Terrace. Although this church has steps at the entrance, flat(ish) access can be achieved through the adjacent lane, although a cobbled lane it is better than accessing a mobile unit. One ward member does not support any move. For the present time an old style polling unit will be used on the current site. |

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
St Mathias Church, North Hill (MC)	The room used at recent elections is too small and cluttered. The outside disabled lift was not working at the 2010 elections. Can we review for an alternative location or insist on the use of the Parish Hall.	There is an alternative building at the junction of Hospital Road & Greenbank Road. However, this building is situated at the edge of the polling area and not considered to be as central as the current location. For the 2011 elections the Parish Hall will be booked and a check made on the disabled lift.
St Andrew's Primary School (NC)	Request from a concerned parent to seek an alternative location. Is there a practical alternative? Three buildings are situated in this polling area: The Greek Orthodox Church in Central Road, Pavilion near Radford Road and the TA Centre.	Area viewed on 26 August. Looked at TA Centre – cannot use for security reasons. Pavilion at the Tennis Courts in Radford Park Road – is an unsuitable building with very limited accommodation. The Greek Orthodox Church of Saints Demetrios and Nikitas – has no hall available for use. Therefore, there is no choice but to use the current location.
Salisbury Road Baptist Church (OB)	Sign posting by staff not adequate.	Contractor to arrange for signposting at the top of Rosebery Avenue at the next election.
Mobile at junction of Kensington Road and Southern Terrace (PA)	Site issues.	Reviewed on 9 September 2010. Current site – only practicable location.
Laira Library (PD)	Laira Library is very small, not an ideal polling station, with a disability issue (although a ramp is provided). In addition – has the library a sustainable future? Is there an alternative? Yes two churches – previously discounted – as they both have disability issues.	Laira Church – is up for sale. St Mary's Church – has 13/16 steps leading to church from Old Laira Road, although the main access is in Federation Road – no steps but a long way around. Agreed with ward members that no action would be taken at this time, but polling station to be monitored at the next election.

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
High View Primary School (former Plym View), Blandford Road (PE))	The site will be closing by February 2011, when pupils are expected to move to new school premises in Torridge Way A new location will be required for elections held after February 2011.	Option 1: Straightforward replacement using either the RC Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel or Efford Youth & Community Centre. Option 2: Sub-divide polling area and use both of the above locations. A meeting was held with ward members on 31 August. Agreed: To the implementation of option 2 and transfer of 'Little America' voters to polling district PF. The building is available, <u>subject to agreement by the church committee</u>.
Mobile polling unit at Dove Gardens (PF)	Problems with resident parking car where mobile located.	The mobile unit will be moved to an area behind houses in Humber Close. Also agreed with ward members to transfer 'Little America' voters from PE.
Chaddlewood Primary School (QA)	Polling Station Inspector advised that there is a very low step at room entrance. Mat required in wet weather?	Visit made to school on 15 October. The step is actually a door threshold designed to prevent water running into the hall. Contractor to deliver ramp to provide polling staff with the ability to ramp if necessary.
Glen Park Primary School (QB)	Parent at Glen Park Primary School did not want school used.	There is no alternative location to consider and current polling districts are too large to merge with adjacent areas.
Boringdon Primary School (RC)	A step at the entrance appears to be a problem, despite the alternative ramped entrance (and warning signs/tape in place).	The step is highlighted, adequate signage is in place and the alternative entrance acknowledged. Arranged to visit school to judge what action to take (if any)

Polling Station or ward	Comment	Action (if any)
Goosewell Primary School (TC)	No reported problem. However, Goosewell Primary School is used for two wards. There may be an alternative location available at the Radford Family Community Centre, Stokingway Close	Ward members would prefer to retain the current polling arrangements.
Plymstock Sports Pavilion (TD)	The ramp used at this location may be inadequate, not reaching the top of the steps – only 2 steps initially – with third step a little further on? There is an alternate access that disabled voters could use at the rear, although the corridor is narrow.	Sports Association may be looking at undertaking permanent ramping. This will be checked out prior to the 2011 elections.
Mobile unit at Coombe Dean School (UD)	The mobile unit is too small to cater for a parliamentary or combined election – 2 staff not enough to cope with the volume of turnout. Electorate 1654.	In 2008 the school advised that they would need to cancel examinations if we insisted on using a room at the school. Obviously this would not be satisfactory. But equally using a mobile unit has proved to be unsatisfactory. Further discussions will be held with the school to see how we can resolve this problem before the next election.
Ermington Primary School	Highlight further that the lodge is used not the main school entrance.	Noted.

4.4.1 All polling districts and polling stations must be kept under constant review in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006).

4.4.2 Objectives of any review are as follows: -

- Where practicable to have more accessible and convenient polling stations;

- Reduce the number of schools used to afford students with a further days education (in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny recommendations established in 2003);

- Use suitable buildings rather than mobile units (in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny recommendations established in 2003);

- Reduce the use of mobile polling units (or portacabins) to accord, as far as practicable, with the Disability Discrimination Acts and health and safety requirements.

The next 'full' statutory review takes place in 2011, and must be completed by 31 December 2011.

4.4.3 All polling stations mentioned above have been or will be reviewed in accordance with the comments received.

Polling station types – Plymouth City

Polling Station Type	Number used
Church Halls	34
Community & Youth Centres	15
Libraries	3
Mobile units	17
Schools	35
Club or other hall or centre	12
Training Centre	3
Total	**119**

Polling Stations – Accessibility – Plymouth City

Comparison	Accessibility percentage	Target
2003-2004	69%	-
2004-2005	73%	71%
2005-2006	76%	74%
2006-2007	77%	76%
2007-2008	77%	78%
2008-2009	77%	78%
2009-2010	77%	78%
2010-2011	84%*	84%

* Based on surveys undertaken between 2003 and 2008 and introduction of new style mobile unit in 2010.

4.4.4 A suggestion has also been made that a short description of the polling stations should be maintained on the internet, together with review details (including alternative locations). This will be undertaken at some time in the near future.

4.5 **Comments or issues recorded following a survey of polling staff: -**

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Training and briefings – Presiding Officers	Suggestion to tailor briefings for 'experienced' presiding officers.	No action – for consistency of approach, all Presiding Officers must receive the same briefing.
	Role playing and demonstration of how to vote.	No action – previously considered – to do properly require very confident personalities combined with experience. It is also prolongs the duration of a briefing making it more costly.
	Further clarification on the franchise codes.	Already covered in instructions and at briefings – more detail to be provided in 2011.
	Colour of text on slides not good.	To be altered to black print on white background (rather than green on white).
	Further examples of problems with solutions required.	This may be a good idea – and will be considered. In addition a test questionnaire could be issued at the end of the briefing?
Training and briefings – Poll Clerks	Sound quality – poor.	Some trainers may need to use a microphone.
	Style of presentation.	All trainers to ensure that they introduce themselves by name.
	Would like to see a copy of the register at the training session.	A demonstration copy could be made available – or issued as a handout.
	More samples – as handouts of the voting material.	A pack of forms could be issued at the briefing.

Area of election or issue	Comment	Action (if any)
Training and briefings – Poll Clerks - continued	Arrange lunchtime or early morning session? Could polling staff have feedback?	This maybe worth trialling. Not practicable – too few resources with large numbers of staff employed.
Overall	Suggestion that we produce a training video.	Too expensive to produce. A quote received in 1999 for a fifteen minute video professionally produced was around £30,000. It would probably be out of date after the first year of production.
Polling station stationery	Provide name badges for polling station officials More string. Number forms	This is perfectly possible and not costly. Useful in wet weather. Forms already numbered/and or cross referenced to packing envelope (look at further, but doubtful that this can be improved).
Name(s) of staff	Provide staff details to poll clerks as well as presiding officers in advance of polling day	Seems reasonable.
Ballot boxes – canvass style	Some voters have difficulty placing the ballot paper in the box, as the slot on the top is quite rigid.	Canvass style box not used very often. Nothing that can be done regarding the slot.
Polling station survey forms	Could a copy of the previous election survey form be included in the presiding officer appointment?	The practicality of doing this will be considered.
Disabled polling station signs	According to an inclusion officer – signs should read - Accessible access with pictogram/symbol of a wheelchair)	This will be altered when stocks run out.

Area of election or issues	Comment	Action (if any)
Combined election signs	Suggestion to colour code.	Most signs and notices were colour coded, excepting the ballot box labels which were not colour coded as this would confuse ballot box delivery to the count.
	Provide an extra recycling bag.	Agreed.
Book of maps	Book of maps – out of date.	Do we need to issue?
St Anne's Church Hall	Staff welcomed extra poll clerk allocated for general election, could they have for local as well.	To be considered.
South Hams telephone enquiry line on polling day	Polling staff had difficulty getting through.	Direct line required in future for polling staff.
Emergency proxies	Derriford Hospital – provided wrong information to patients, causing problems on polling day.	Derriford Hospital to receive full information from the office so that we can adhere to our own proper procedures.

4.6 **Comments or issues recorded following a survey of candidates and election agents** (a number of comments received are recorded above): -

Area of election or polling station	Comment	Action (if any)
The Barn, Kit Hill Crescent	Could we use Riverside School instead?	Also included at 4.4.
West Park Library	Too far for Ringmore Way voters.	Also included at 4.4
Siting of a number of mobile units	Would it be possible to re-site?	Refer to 3.1.
Count Centre	Size of some rooms questioned.	Refer to 4.3.
Civic Centre car park	Not enough room.	Refer to 4.3.
Manadon Vale Primary School	Could we use an alternative?	Refer to 4.4.
Residents at Pottery Quay	Residents currently fall within polling district AB and following the closure of Parkside School, now vote at Salvation Army Hall in Balfour Terrace.	Ward members have agreed to the suggestion of transferring these voters to polling district AA, allowing them to vote at Marlborough Primary School.

Area of election or polling station	Comment	Action (if any)
Coombe Dean School (UD)	Comment from Election Agent that a mobile unit is totally inadequate?	Refer to 4.4.
St Judes Church Hall – Polling District (NA)	At the next ward boundary review – include polling district NA in adjacent ward – Drake.	This will be considered at the next ward boundary review
St Andrews Primary School – Polling District (NC)	Problem with tellers and staff not providing turnout figures.	Also included above. Refer to 4.4.
Counting of ballot papers	Candidate/Party vote stacking not undertaken as per usual procedures?	Stronger emphasis to be made at a briefing to ensure staff places the ballot papers for each party/candidate in front of the Election Agents.
Nursing/Residential Homes	Facilitating attendance at polling station/postal vote.	Letters to be sent to Residential / Nursing Homes explaining voting procedure and further encouragement to apply for postal votes.
Understanding democracy	Approach Open Doors International Language School to include voting information within curriculum.	This will be considered.

4.7 **Website** - The Society of information technology management (SOCITM) selected 42 councils to survey on the quality of on-line election coverage. The survey was undertaken in three ' rounds', timed to coincide with key dates in the election process, namely; registration deadline; encouraging people to vote two days prior to polling day and results coverage.

4.7.1 SOCITM found that local and national websites could do better when it comes to publishing information to support the democratic process. They found that information was patchy, hard to find, out of date or just missing. Communication of deadlines was poor and seldom promoted from the website home page. Clarity of candidate information was also poor.

4.7.2 The general contents of the electoral area of the Plymouth website will be reviewed to ensure that the information is up to date and easy to understand.

5   Election statistics - Absent voting and Voter turnout – Plymouth City (only)

Absent voting - postal vote applications received

Year	Postal vote applications received/ballot papers issued	Postal ballot paper packets returned	Percentage returned
2003	10,381	7,111	68.5%
2004	17,407	13,483	77.5%
2006	20,001	14,325	71.6%
2007	22,385	17,934	80.1%
2008	24,067	17,528	72.83%
2009	25,173	16,466	65.41%
2010	28,367	24,420	86.09%

Absent voting – proxy voting applications received

Year	Number of proxy applications
2006	695
2007	508
2008	564
2009	457
2010	1081

Voter Turnout

Year	Turnout
2004	36.08%
2006	34.60%
2007	37.20%
2008	33.73%
2009	31.08%
2010	62.12%

6 Promotion and Participation evaluation

The basic plan was: -

Objective	Target Group	Activity
Raise awareness & increase in number registering to vote	All voters	Poster campaign – general
Raise registration rates in advance of 2010 elections	Households with no entry in register	Mail shot including two registration forms to all such households
Raise awareness & increase number turning out to vote	People with Learning disabilities	Using posters & booklets prepared in 2009, issue packs to learning disability groups
Raise awareness & increase in number registering to vote	BME communities	Work with Race Relations Manager to promote turnout among BME communities
Raise awareness	Young People	School packs/website information Issue of birthday cards/letters.
Raise awareness & increase in number turning out to vote	All voters	Work with Communications unit to send out press releases to media in relation to above
Raise awareness & increase in number turning out to vote	All voters	Work with Communications unit to produce information for: Plymouth People publication; Staff upfront magazine; Staff notice board & Web-site

6.1 The aim of any promotion and participation exercise is to increase electoral registration, followed by an increase in turnout. However, at a parliamentary election very little effort is required on the part of local authorities as the general media gives 'blanket' coverage to elections in general. In 2010 this included registration and absent voting deadlines.

However, to ensure that we had an accurate register for the 2010 elections the main concentration was on increasing registration as this is key to running a successful election.

6.2 Poster campaign – posters were distributed to a variety of outlets. There is no evidence that the type of poster campaign used was successful. It is doubtful that posters, unless displayed on large hoardings or in eye catching locations will ever be successful in the electoral field of work. This form of promotion should be discontinued.

6.3 Households with no entry in the register – all such households were targeted with a letter and two registration application forms to encourage participation at the 2010 elections. Nearly 7,000 households was targeted with an encouraging response rate of around 850-900 forms returned.

6.4 People with learning disabilities – After being approached by the Learning Disabilities Partnership, the Electoral Service re-issued the booklet prepared in 2009, providing information on how to vote to various centres for people with learning disabilities. A simplified voter registration application form was also included, along with posters for day centres.

The Electoral Services Manager also intended to attend a 'registration and voting day'. This would have involved giving a short talk to voters and then holding a 'dummy' ballot. However, due to sickness in the office he was unable to attend.

No real evaluation was possible on this occasion due to limited nature of the promotion, but is it worth doing. Yes – if only to raise awareness of voting and showing people how to vote.

6.5 BME Communities – The aim was to 'test the water' again. However, due to sickness this activity was cancelled.

6.6 Young People – The aim here was to encourage schools to learn more about the elections process through holding either mock elections or using the pack sent to them to hold school elections. The pack and resources are also available from the Electoral Services website, with word documents that can be adapted for use.

Early signs are encouraging with some very complimentary remarks made.

6.7 Press release/other publications – There is no evidence that press releases or information in other publications have much impact. However, this form of promotion must be continued as a supplement to any other activity being carried out.

7 Government Political Reform

7.1 Earlier this year the government issued a document entitled "The Coalition: our programme for government". This document sets out a number of matters under the broad heading of Political reform.

7.2 This includes:

1. The establishment of five-year fixed term parliaments (now a 'BILL' – to be enacted by July 2011)

2. Referendum for the introduction of the Alternative Vote (now a 'BILL' – referendum to be combined with Council elections and held on 5 May 2011).

3. Reducing the number of parliamentary constituencies (review of boundaries – now a 'BILL' – to commence early 2011 and completion by July 2013).

4. Power of recall, allowing voters to force a by-election where an MP is found to have engaged in serious wrong doing and having a petition for a by-election signed by 10% of the electorate (legislation by November 2011?).

5. Elections for a wholly or mainly elected upper chamber (House of Lords – election expected May 2012)

6. Directly elected Police Commissioners (elections expected May 2012)

7. Elections to Health Boards (elections expected May 2012)

8. Elections for directly elected Mayors in the 12 largest English local authorities (elections May 2012– Localism Bill).

9. Giving the power to local residents to instigate local referendums on any local issue and to veto council tax increases (legislation by November 2011 – Localism Bill).

10. Introduction of individual voter registration (speeding up introduction – July 2014 or possibly earlier).

11. Dissolution of the House if 55% or more votes in favour.

12. Review of voting rights for prisoners (allowing them to vote) to be completed by December 2010 and in place for 2011 elections.

13. Legislation placing new duties on Returning Officers in regards to political party funding.

Other issues (not included in the coalition programme): -

14. Legislation allowing voters to receive ballot papers after 10pm (and other legislation resulting from the 2010 Elections review – will be enacted fairly quickly).

15. Postal voting applications – signatures to be refreshed in January 2012 – legal requirement (finance for this has been included in the overall Rate Support Grant). We have around 30,000 applications to renew.

16. Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – statutory review to be completed by the end of 2011.

17. Petitions for Mayor for Plymouth under existing legislation can be submitted from April 2011.

7.3   Clearly if any of the above reforms are introduced, it will impact on Council resources. The extent of the required resources will not be known until the relevant legislation has been finalised.

8.0   Recommendation

8.1   That the report is noted.