

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Plymouth City Council Review of Registration and Elections
Committee: City Council
Date: 25 September 2017
CMT Member: Tracey Lee (Chief Executive and Acting Returning Officer)
Author: Giles Perritt (Assistant Chief Executive)
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Ref: DSER17
Key Decision: No
Part: I

Purpose of the report:

The report presents to Full Council the outcomes of the investigation undertaken by Dr David Smith into the administrative issues encountered with the 2017 General Election.

In the days leading up to the General Election on 8 June 2017, the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for the three parliamentary constituencies of Plymouth Moor View, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport and South West Devon identified a problem with the issue of postal voting packs to electors who had requested them.

In addition to the above, a further issue emerged at the declaration of the results of the election, where the final number of votes declared for the Plymouth Sutton and Devonport constituency was not correct, despite the count itself being accurate and the result unaffected.

A number of electors reported that they attended polling stations on 8 June 2017 with their polling card, but were unable to vote.

In response to these issues the Acting Returning Officer instigated an independent review and commissioned Dr David Smith, former Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council, highly experienced returning officer and advisor to national bodies on elections, to investigate what happened and why so that lessons could be learned.

Dr Smith commenced the investigation on 19 June 2017 and submitted the final report on 8 September 2017.

Dr Smith's report is presented to Full Council for consideration and included alongside is the Acting Returning Officer's initial response to the recommendations. The Council has established an Electoral Services Improvement Programme to drive and sustain a robust and resilient elections service.

Corporate Plan 2016-19:

This report relates strongly to the corporate values of 'democratic', 'responsible' and 'fair' as the Council seeks to learn from the issues of the 2017 General Election and ensure that actions are taken to improve the administration of future elections such that all citizens trust the process will be fair and have opportunity to exercise their vote.

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

Actions to strengthen the capacity of the Elections Services team are highlighted. Appendix 3 details the financial impact of the elections response and recovery, including the cost of the investigation. Resources for the implementation of recommendations from this report will be allocated within the envelope of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion:

The recommendations from the report have implications for ensuring all of Plymouth's electorate have equal opportunity to register for and vote in forthcoming elections.

Equality and Diversity

The Council has a duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and those who do not.

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? Elements of the improvement plan will require equality impact assessments which will be undertaken as appropriate.

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

That Council:

1. notes the recommendations in Dr Smith's Review of Registration and Elections relating to the 2017 General Election, in the context of what happened and why (see Appendix 1);
2. notes the Acting Returning Officer's response to the review recommendations (see Appendix 2);
3. notes the costs associated with the election response, recovery and independent investigation (see Appendix 3)
4. asks the Constitutional Review Group to oversee the Council's response to the recommendations from Dr Smith's report and the implementation of the Electoral Service Improvement Plan, reporting back to Full Council on progress as required; and
5. notes that a follow-up external review of elections-readiness will be commissioned and undertaken in January 2018.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

Reject findings from the investigation – the Council needs to understand the reasons for the issues experienced during the General Election and take robust, sustainable action to ensure future elections are undertaken well and public trust restored. The independent investigation report and recommendations provide an objective assessment of the issues and provides recommendations from a highly experienced and well-respected elections expert. Rejecting the findings from the report is therefore discounted as a viable course of action.

Pursue an alternative improvement plan focussed on a shared-service model – such a plan would take time to initiate and implement and there is unknown appetite for sharing elections services across local authorities due to the complexity of elections delivery specific to each area.

Published work/information:

None

Background papers:

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Draft Elections Improvement Action Plan	X									

Sign off:

Fin	AKHI718.102	Leg	lt/28965/1409	Mon Off	lt/dvs/28965	HR	Assets	IT	Strat Proc
Originating SMT Member – Giles Perritt									
Have you consulted the Cabinet Member(s) named on the report? n/a									