

Review of the May 2010 Elections

A report of the Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel

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Foreword



I am pleased to present the report of the Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel on the elections held in Calderdale on 6 May 2010.

Problems arose at the elections in a number of different parts of the country. In particular a number of people were not able to vote because of queues at polling stations at 10.00pm as the polls closed.

Although we did not experience those problems in Calderdale, we did want to make sure that everything is in place to minimise the likelihood of such events taking place here in the future.

We felt it important that the review of elections is conducted in public. Elections are the most direct way of the people holding government – national or local – to account and it is important that they have the opportunity to observe and contribute to that report. I was pleased that three political groupings came and gave their views to the Scrutiny Panel and that the meeting was attended by other members of the public and press.

The Panel was satisfied that the elections had been administered efficiently, effectively and fairly. We would like to thank Linda Clarkson, the Principal Electoral Services Officer and her staff for the excellent work they do to make this happen.

Both Linda and Owen Williams, the Chief Executive, told us that they are always willing to consider improvements to the way we do things and a number of ideas came out of our discussions that Owen and Linda have agreed to consider whether they can be introduced at future elections.

I believe that our review of the administration of the election has been a valuable process and one that is worth repeating after every election and we have recommended that the Returning Officer should be asked to prepare a written review of the administration of each election and present it to the Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel within six months of the election.

We consider that our other recommendations can be implemented with little difficulty and cost in time for the May 2011 election and the likely referendum on voting systems. I look forward to seeing that happen.

Councillor Bryan Smith
Chair, Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel
November 2010

1. Background and Terms of Reference

1.1 Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel added a review of the elections held in May 2010 to their work programme when they met in 24 June 2010.

1.2 Terms of Reference for the review were agreed when the Scrutiny panel met on 5 August 2010 and can be found at Appendix 1. The ambition for the review was:

To ensure that the local election May 2011 and the expected referendum on Alternative Voting are run to the highest quality for voters, candidates and agents.

1.3 The specific topic was identified as:

To review the arrangements for the general and local elections held in May 2010 including; the accuracy of the Electoral Register; siting of polling stations; arrangement for counts; and the budget available for running elections. The review will not cover any issues concerning electoral malpractice.

1.4 Cllr Fekri (at that time Deputy Chair of the Scrutiny Panel) assisted by meeting with the Principal Electoral Services Officer and the Senior Scrutiny Support Officer to plan the review.

1.5 It was agreed that those political parties represented on Calderdale Council, should be invited to contribute to the review. Invitations to participate were sent on 14 October 2010 to representatives of; the Conservative Party; the Liberal Democrat Party; the Labour Party; Councillor Raistrick (as leader of the Independent Group); and Councillor Bates (BNP).

1.6 Dr Roberto Espindola, of the University of Bradford, who undertook the Best Value Review of Electoral Services in 2005, was invited to attend the meeting to contribute to the review.

1.7 The Electoral Commission and the Electoral Services Officer of Wakefield Council were also invited to attend.

1.8 An Information Pack was prepared for Panel members, including reports on the 2010 elections from the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Commonwealth Observer Team. It also contained statistics on the 2010 elections (with 2006 as a comparator) and examples of reviews of the 2010 elections from three other Councils. The contents of the pack and web links to all the reports are contained in Appendix 2.

1.9 The Panel met to consider evidence on 10 November 2010. As well as Panel members, the meeting was attended by Councillor Battye, Councillor Raistrick, Elisabeth Wilson (Liberal Democrat candidate at the May 2010 election), Martin Burton (Labour Party) and Dr Roberto Espindola. Barbara Lines from the Electoral Commission and Christine Mason from Wakefield Council were unable to attend and sent their apologies.

2. Our Findings and Recommendations

2.1 Comments from the evidence session

- 2.1.1 Councillor Raistrick attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. He advised that candidates found it difficult to complete the lengthy forms to register. Independent candidates found it especially difficult as they did not have political agents to assist with this. He requested that completed examples of forms be given to all prospective candidates to assist in completing the paperwork.
- 2.1.2 Councillor Battye attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. She asked if there was any guidance on where polling stations should be situated and what the position would be for the 2011 elections where there would be a possibility of 3 ballot papers in areas where there were parish and neighbourhood councils. In response, Officers advised that polling stations were located in each polling district where possible, however, in some areas it was necessary to locate polling stations outside the polling district or to combine two polling stations into one. These issues would be considered as part of the 2011 review of polling districts and polling places. No definite decision had yet been made by the Electoral Commission about the use of separate ballot boxes at the proposed 2011 referendum.
- 2.1.3 Dr Espindola of Bradford University attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. He advised that he had carried out in 2005 a review of Electoral Services in Calderdale and staff in Electoral Services should be commended for their high quality work.
- 2.1.4 Dr Wilson, a candidate in the 2010 election attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. She expressed concern over several aspects of the last election which included an example of a resident in residential home who had not been canvassed and could not vote and the position of tables at the count. Officers advised that Dr Wilson's points would be taken on board and requested information on the resident who had not been canvassed so that further investigations could be made.
- 2.1.5 Mr Martin Burton who had acted as an agent for a candidate in the 2010 election attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. Mr Burton asked if it was possible to make people aware if they had submitted a vote which had been rejected. In response, Officers advised that due to legislation it was not possible to notify people when their vote had been rejected. The majority of rejected votes were due to genuine errors. It may be possible in future to have a general education campaign to assist voters when completing their ballot papers.
- 2.1.6 A question was asked about whether the Council had ever been prosecuted for failing to register? Linda Clarkson, the Principal Electoral Services Officer advised that the Council had never prosecuted anyone as it is difficult to prove that a person has deliberately refused to provide information and the costs to the Council would far outweigh the maximum fine of £1,000. Additionally, there were personal benefits to registering for example as a requirement to obtain credit.

2.2 Our Findings and Recommendations

2.2.1 Our overarching conclusion was that the elections in Calderdale in May 2010 were well run. Members were universal in their praise for the skill and dedication that Linda Clarkson and her team apply to administering electoral registration and the whole election process. The Panel extended their thanks and gratitude to the team. Linda Clarkson and Owen Williams were very clear that they are always seeking to improve. We believe our recommendations will help that improvement process.

2.2.2 Elections are a very public process. Reviewing their administration in public gives the participants, whether they are the public, candidates, or agents an opportunity to contribute to that review. We noted that the Returning Officer in Manchester, for example, published a 41 page review of the combined parliamentary and local election. We have included detail of the analysis of the Principal Electoral Services Officer so that this report can stand as a public review of the May 2010 elections.

We consider that the Returning Officer should publish a review of the administration of every election and that review should be presented to the Governance and Business Committee within six months of the election. That review should cover any by-elections that have taken place since the last review.

2.2.3 One person gave evidence to the Panel that she had come across someone who was a resident of a residential home for older people who had not been on the electoral register for three years. We were satisfied with the detail that officers gave us about how they canvass residential and nursing homes to ensure maximum registration. We believe that this was a one-off aberration.

2.2.4 Administering elections requires taking account of the needs of voters and the general public, the Council, and candidates, their agents and parties. There was some evidence given that sometimes it felt that the needs of candidates, agents and parties came a poor third to those of the public and the Council. Given that the Scrutiny Panel specifically invited political parties to attend, it is perhaps not surprising that this view was given.

2.2.5 However experienced a candidate or agent is the paperwork around elections can be daunting and the risk of submitting incomplete, incorrect or late paperwork significant. It was suggested that paperwork could be accompanied by a mocked up example, showing how each section should be completed. Linda Clarkson agreed to look into this further.

2.2.6 Some information is sent to candidates, some to agents and some to both candidates and agents. This can mean that individuals involved in the election do not always know who has received which piece of information. We recognise that some information can only be sent to candidates. We think it would be helpful if a schedule of what information is sent where could be produced and sent to candidates and agents and made available on the Council's website.

Linda Clarkson told us that she intends to review the documentation relating to elections and we welcome this.

2.2.7 We wondered whether a symbol or sentence could be added to all Council publications reminding people to register. Owen Williams, the Chief Executive agreed that he would look into ways in which wider publicity about electoral registration could take place and we welcome this.

2.3 Our Recommendations

Recommendation 1

We conclude that the General Election 2010 and the Local Election 2010 we administered fairly and efficiently and we pass on our thanks to the Returning Officer, the Principal Electoral Services Officer and her staff for the excellent job they do.

Recommendation 2

The Returning Officer should publish a review of the administration of every election and that review should be presented to the Governance and Business Committee within six months of the election. That review should cover any by-elections that have taken place since the last review.

Recommendation 3

Examples of how forms should be completed should be prepared and sent to candidates and agents along with the blank forms. These examples of how to complete forms could also be published on the Council's website.

Recommendation 4

A document setting out all the different information that is sent out during an election should be prepared and sent to candidates and agents. This document should also be made available on the Council's website.

Recommendation 5

Ways in which the electoral registration could be better publicised should be explored and implemented wherever possible.

3. Principal Electoral Services Officer's Review of the 2010 Elections

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This year's District elections were combined with the Parliamentary General election on Thursday 6 May 2010.

3.1.2 It was also the first time that postal voters' personal identifiers had to be checked at a Parliamentary election.

3.1.3 The figures in this report predominantly relate to the Parliamentary election. The figures for the District elections are very similar.

3.2 Electoral Registration

3.2.1 At May 2010 there were 149,043 electors on the register.

3.2.2 It is estimated that 94.6% of those persons eligible for registration were included in the register at the election. This figure is based on the 2007 population estimate. However, a proportion of that number will not be eligible due to their nationality.

3.2.3 We undertook a number of initiatives to encourage registration in advance of the elections, including: -

- Posters displays in public buildings.
- Information was displayed in a continuous loop on the Central Library's advertising screen

3.2.4 In February 2010 a postal canvass of all those properties with no registered electors was undertaken. A percentage of such properties may be occupied by people who are ineligible for registration.

3.2.5 Throughout the year a voter registration form is included with all new Council Tax bills.

3.2.6 A flyer promoting registration and the elections was included in all annual Council Tax bills, which are sent out in March and April each year.

3.2.7 From the publication of the register on 1 December 2009 to the closing date for applications for registration 2,950 electors were added to the register, there were 2,242 deletions and 356 entries amended.

3.2.7 We received 230 applications after the closing date. These were all acknowledged and processed to take effect after the elections.

3.2.8 Some 40 applications were queried and additional information requested but there were no applications which gave rise to suspected fraudulent activity.

3.3 Poll Cards

- 3.3.1 Poll cards for the District elections were issued at the end of March. As the Parliamentary election was not called until 12 April legislation required a separate Parliamentary poll card to be sent out.
- 3.3.2 To delay the issue of District election poll cards in order to send out a combined poll card would have meant that electors would have shorter notice of the local election and consequently restricted opportunity to apply for a postal or proxy vote. The requirement to issue two separate poll cards did cause some confusion for electors. Some electors did make two postal vote applications.
- 3.3.3 As has been the practice in Calderdale for a number of years, the poll cards sent to ordinary electors had a postal voting application attached and the poll card sent to postal voters had a cancellation form attached. This gives electors maximum opportunity to apply for or cancel their postal vote and helps to ensure that large numbers of applications are not received near to the closing date.
- 3.3.4 The personalisation of the postal voting applications and cancellations assists greatly with the processing of forms. It not only helps to encourage early applications but speeds up the inputting of applications and the barcode helps to ensure that the postal vote is issued to the correct elector.
- 3.3.5 A number of calls were received from voters who had not received their poll card. In the majority of cases electors had moved house and were not registered at their new address. Most of these were satisfactorily resolved as electors remain registered at their previous address and so are able to vote. Those who were not included elsewhere in the register were provided with a Voter Registration Form. Forms received after the 20 April deadline were processed but those electors were unable to vote at the election.

3.4 Postal Voting

- 3.4.1 At publication of the register in December 2009, 33,854 electors had registered to vote by post.
- 3.4.2 The last date for applications for a postal vote was 5pm on Tuesday 20 April 2010 and postal ballot packs were issued to 35,582 electors.
- 3.4.3 As the Parliamentary and District elections were held on the same date a combined postal ballot pack was issued. The combined packs contained ballot papers for both elections, where applicable, and a single security statement and return envelope in an attempt to make the process both easier for voters and more cost effective.
- 3.4.3 Postal ballot packs were sent by Royal Mail on Friday 23 April to 35,582 Parliamentary electors by first class post.
- 3.4.4 Almost 100 postal votes were sent to electors and service personnel overseas. The Ministry of Justice, the Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Defence made special arrangements for the delivery and return of postal votes for members of HM Forces serving in Afghanistan.

- 3.4.5 All postal vote applications received after the deadline were acknowledged and the applicant informed that the application would either be processed for future elections or, if it was for the May elections only, that the application was received too late.
- 3.4.6 The Electoral Commission again produced its Code of Conduct for political parties on the handling of postal vote applications, which is agreed nationally with the main political parties.
- 3.4.7 Parties kept to the code fairly well with only two exceptions – firstly where the national party delivered applications which were for the Electoral Registration Officer in a different local authority. Secondly, where the applications were inadvertently delayed in reaching the Electoral Registration Officer.
- 3.4.8 Neither instance caused a particular issue with the processing of the applications, so far as Calderdale was concerned, as these problems arose in advance of the 20 April closing date. However, had these problems arisen on or close to 20 April then some electors either in Calderdale or elsewhere could have been denied the opportunity to vote.
- 3.4.9 All postal votes were opened, under secure conditions at the Central Library in Halifax. Postal vote opening sessions started on 26 April 2010 and continued every day up to and including polling day.
- 3.4.10 Candidates and their agents/or a nominee in place of the agent were invited to attend any or all of the postal vote opening sessions and some did attend.
- 3.4.11 Statute requires that the ballot papers are kept face down during the opening process and ballot papers are not separated between candidates. The role of a scrutineer overseeing postal vote opening is to check that the process is being correctly undertaken. Secrecy requirements prevent any information, which may be obtained at postal vote opening, from being passed on before the poll is closed.
- 3.4.12 Some 30,531 Parliamentary postal votes were processed which was 85.81% of those issued and almost 32% of the total overall turnout.
- 3.4.13 All postal voters' personal identifiers were checked - as has always been the case in Calderdale. The security statement for each postal voter is scanned and the signature and date of birth checked electronically against those supplied in the original application. Those which fail the initial electronic check are determined individually by the Returning Officer.
- 3.4.14 Some 29,199 Parliamentary and 29,081 District postal ballot papers were included in the count .
- 3.4.15 Some 1332 postal votes were rejected for various reasons, which was 4.36% of those returned. The national average for rejected postal votes was 5%. Postal votes were rejected for the following reasons:
- 192 where the security statement had a signature or a date of birth missing
 - 120 where the security statement had neither signature nor date of birth
 - 470 with either no security statement or no ballot paper enclosed

- 323 where the signature on the security statement failed to sufficiently match that supplied on the original application
- 212 where the date of birth on the security statement failed to match that supplied on the original application
- 15 where neither the signature nor date of birth matched

3.4.16 Whilst the 4,058 postal ballot packs returned on polling day might at first appear a high number, this is probably due to the level of public interest in the elections. This meant there were 8,100 postal ballot papers in total over both the general election and the local election processed on polling day.

3.4.17 In 2008, 393 postal votes were returned via polling stations throughout polling day. That figure rose to 702 in 2009 with 1637 returned in this way in 2010, of which 844 were for Calder Valley constituency and 793 for Halifax constituency. Whilst this might seem to be a major increase it must be considered alongside other factors, for example, electors becoming more aware of the system, increased media coverage prior to the elections and the higher turnout at Parliamentary elections.

3.4.18 Overall turnout in 2009 was 32.09%, whereas in 2010 turnout was 64.22%. Taking a straight like for like increase in postal votes returned via polling stations, it would be reasonable to anticipate somewhere in the region of 1,400 postal votes being returned via polling stations in 2010.

3.4.19 Postal ballot packs were collected from polling stations throughout the day to alleviate pressure on the system at the close of poll. Although the last collection took place at around 7pm there were still some 501 more ballot packs received from polling stations at 10pm – 275 in Calder Valley constituency and 226 in Halifax constituency.

3.4.20 During each opening session a number of postal votes are marked as “provisionally rejected” - where either the relevant ballot papers or the security statement are not received together. Before the verification process can be completed all those provisionally rejected postal votes must be checked and matched up wherever possible. This includes those returned from polling stations after the close of poll.

3.4.21 There have been many changes to elections legislation over recent years particularly in relation to postal voting. The increase in the number of postal voters combined with the requirement to verify postal voters’ signatures and dates of birth means that this process has to be centralised.

3.4.22 In 2006, prior to the introduction of personal identifiers in 2007, the postal vote checking process was completed at 1.00am after the polls had closed. Since the introduction of personal verifiers in 2007, postal vote opening and verification has taken much longer. At this year’s elections the opening and verification of postal votes at the Central Library was concluded at approximately 4.30am. The sealed postal voters ballot boxes were then transferred, under police escort, to North Bridge Leisure Centre for inclusion in the count.

3.4.23 The count proper cannot commence until the postal ballot papers are ready for inclusion in the count as postal ballot papers must be mixed with ballot papers from at least one other ballot box from a polling station.

- 3.4.24 During the election 43 postal ballot packs were replaced – in 9 cases the elector had spoiled the ballot paper or security statement and in 34 others the elector claimed either to have lost their ballot papers or that they had failed to arrive.
- 3.4.25 There were 8 wards where the number of postal votes returned via polling stations was higher than the Calderdale 2010 average – 4 of these were in Calder Valley constituency and 4 in Halifax.
- 3.4.26 The rejection rate in 7 wards was above the Calderdale average. There is no evidence of the rejection rate being higher in those areas where there are residential or nursing homes.
- 3.4.27 Following each election security checks are undertaken on the rejected postal voting statements. Whilst no suspicious postal voting applications were identified in 2010 a number of suspicious proxy voting applications were referred to West Yorkshire Police, which are still under investigation.

3.5 Polling Stations

- 3.5.1 Premises used as polling stations vary greatly in the facilities they offer not only to voters but also to staff and in some cases tellers acting on behalf of candidates.
- 3.5.2 We used 123 polling stations at the elections. The majority of these have disabled access. However, there were ten polling stations where access for disabled electors could not be provided. In each of these cases a note was included on the official poll card to warn voters of the lack of disabled access. In some cases disabled access to the premises may not be via the main polling station entrance, but signage directing electors to the disabled entrance is provided. Temporary ramps have been provided at some polling stations in the past but these premises now have the benefit of their own disabled access. Those polling stations without disabled access are not suitable for the installation of temporary ramps. Ramps are still provided at all mobile polling stations but these are expensive.
- 3.5.3 Polling stations are sited in premises which serve all or the majority of electors within a polling district and disabled access and facilities for staff are all taken into account when premises are considered for use as a polling station. Wherever possible, facilities for tellers are also considered but, with the closure of many buildings within communities over the years, it is not always possible to accommodate all those who attend the polling station.
- 3.5.4 At each election the Presiding Officer is asked to complete a survey of the polling station which covers access issues and also lighting, facilities, security and health & safety.
- 3.5.5 Polling stations are reviewed after each election and any feedback provided from members of the public, candidates, their agents and polling staff are taken into consideration. Where changes to polling stations are necessary, for example, due to closure of existing premises, or where better alternatives are identified, these are agreed with ward members at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.5.6 In 2011 the Council is required to undertake a review of all polling districts and polling places and the review will start in Spring 2011. This will allow for members,

candidates, agents and voters to consider possible alternative arrangements over the election period with the review to be concluded in the Summer. Amendments to polling district boundaries will then be undertaken following the 2011 Autumn canvass of electors. Changes will take effect at the publication of the revised register in December 2011.

3.5.7 All polling stations are supplied with a number of aids to help voters to vote without the need for assistance by either a companion or the Presiding Officer. Each station has;

- A low level polling booth
- A tactile voting device to assist partially sighted and blind voters
- A magnifying glass
- Large print versions of the ballot paper
- A pictorial guide to voting with information in plain English
- Translations on How to Vote in Urdu, Bengali and Czech.

3.5.8 Polling stations with a larger electorate were supplied with two ballot boxes. However, electors were required to place both ballot papers in the same box. These “double” ballot boxes were clearly identified and candidates and agents were provided with a schedule showing the number of ballot boxes issued to each station.

3.5.9 It was not considered cost-effective or necessary to purchase additional ballot boxes in order to supply separate ballot boxes at every polling station. The electorate at many polling stations is not sufficiently high to require two individual ballot boxes and it would add unnecessarily to the weight of equipment that the Presiding Officer has to transport.

3.5.10 If there had been separate ballot boxes for each election, all ballot boxes would have been required to be opened and verified before the count can begin. A ballot paper cannot be rejected simply because an elector may have put it into the wrong ballot box. A test carried out by the Electoral Commission has shown that the time difference between verifying one box with two ballot papers inside or 2 separate ballot boxes is minimal.

3.5.11 Whilst problems such as electors queuing at the close of poll and lack of sufficient ballot papers issued to polling stations, were reported in other parts of the United Kingdom, there were no similar problems reported in Calderdale. All polling stations opened and closed on time and there were no major issues raised during polling day. One report of a polling station not being open in the late afternoon proved to be incorrect.

3.5.12 Individual issues which could not be satisfactorily dealt with by the Presiding Officer at the polling station were resolved by Electoral Services staff, for example, issues over tellers taking numbers at polling stations and tellers wearing rosettes.

3.6 The Count

3.6.1 Both the Parliamentary and local election counts were held at North Bridge Leisure Centre. This has been the case for Parliamentary elections since 1999 and since 2004 for local elections.

- 3.6.2 In 2006 the decision was taken to hold the local election counts on the Friday following the election and this has been the case for local elections since then. Changes to legislation such as the extension of polling hours, returning postal votes to polling stations, the introduction of postal voters' personal identifiers and the requirement to match, wherever possible, postal ballot papers and security statements returned separately from each other, were all factors in the decision to move the count to Friday.
- 3.6.3 Although there is significant support for counts to be held at several localities within the Borough, this is no longer a feasible option. There are not enough people available with sufficient electoral knowledge and expertise to staff several count venues. If we attempted to do this, we may risk incorrect results being declared, as has occurred in other parts of the country.
- 3.6.4 At the European elections in 2009 the "mini count" system was used for the first time. Rather than counting the election result as a whole the count is broken down into a series of smaller counts with the result from each mini-count being collated centrally. This method helps to ensure that any discrepancy can be narrowed down to a particular count team and can be more easily rectified.
- 3.6.5 With the combination of the Parliamentary and local elections in 2010 this method was again adopted for the counts for both constituencies. It was particularly effective on this occasion as ballot boxes had to be verified by wards within each constituency.
- 3.6.6 Information on how the verification and counts were to be conducted was provided in advance, to all candidates and agents together with a plan showing the layout of the counting room.
- 3.6.7 At the close of poll ballot boxes were returned by the Presiding Officer, to North Bridge Leisure Centre, with the exception of those from the Calder and Todmorden wards. For these two wards a collection point was arranged at Todmorden Town Hall and ballot boxes were delivered to North Bridge Leisure Centre with a police escort. This system has operated successfully for a number of years. This year, an administrative misunderstanding led to the delivery taking 45 minutes longer than it should have done.
- 3.6.8 As set out above, both Parliamentary and local election ballot papers were placed in the same ballot box. Whether, one ballot box was used, as in Calderdale, or separate ballot boxes as in some other areas, both sets of ballot papers must be verified before the count may begin. A test carried out by the Electoral Commission's Elections and Registration Working Group has determined that there is very little time difference between the two methods.
- 3.6.9 During the verification stage the number of ballot papers contained in each ballot box for each election is counted and verified against the number returned on the account provided by the Presiding Officer. At this stage the ballot papers are not separated into candidates nor are any ballot papers rejected.
- 3.6.10 The delay in receiving the ballot boxes from the Todmorden collection point did delay the verification process for the Calder and Todmorden wards. Other count staffs were drafted in to help speed up the process for the two wards concerned.

- 3.6.11 At the completion of the verification stage local election candidates and their agents were invited to remain at the count to observe the Parliamentary count.
- 3.6.12 Legislation required that the Parliamentary count was held after the close of poll. Owing to the time that it was estimated that the Parliamentary counts were likely to be completed, and taking account also of any possible recounts, it was decided that the local election counts would be held on Friday afternoon.
- 3.6.13 The Parliamentary count proper commenced at 3.45 am. As the law requires postal ballot papers to be mixed with those from at least one other ballot box, the count could not begin until the postal vote verification process was almost at an end. The result for the Halifax Constituency was declared just before 7.00am closely followed by that for Calder Valley.
- 3.6.14 The local election counts started at 5pm on Friday 7 May 2010 and were all completed by 7pm.
- 3.6.15 Candidates and agents at previous elections commented on problems experienced in gaining access to the count venue due to delays in accessing the premises. This process has been improved and additional staff employed to speed up the process whilst still retaining the required level of security.
- 3.6.16 Similarly other issues raised, for example, the provision of refreshments and an improved sound and display system have also been addressed. We will be seeing how we can make further improvements to these systems for the 2011 elections.

3.7 Working with other organisations

- 3.7.1 The organisation and successful delivery of any election is reliant upon input from a variety of sources – from the print company supplying poll cards, ballot papers and postal vote packs to the Royal Mail for its delivery service. Despite the very short timescales both these organisations delivered a high quality service. This can be evidenced, particularly in the case of Royal Mail, by the small number of postal votes requiring replacement due to their claimed non-delivery.
- 3.7.2 It is not possible to administer any election without the support of staff from within my own and other directorates of the Council. Their help and assistance cannot be underestimated and is greatly appreciated, as is that provided by members of the wider community who volunteer to staff polling stations and assist with the counts.
- 3.7.3 For many years we have worked closely with West Yorkshire Police to ensure that voters can access the democratic process in a fair and proper manner. It is testament to the work of the police that we have seen successful prosecutions in cases of voter personation and fraudulent proxy applications in recent years. From an operational aspect West Yorkshire Police provide assistance on polling day visiting polling stations, accompanying ballot boxes and postal votes to the count and also attending at the count itself and I would thank them for their commitment throughout.
- 3.7.4 We asked the police if they had anything they wished to input to this review and PC Craig Robinson, from Calderdale Operations, said

“With regards to the Policing aspect of the elections it went very well, there were a couple of internal aspects for us to address but nothing from the Local Authority side.

Our standpoint is that we will do anything that can reasonably be expected by the Returning Officer in order to ensure that the process is democratic and goes off without a hitch, I saw nothing from a Police perspective that the LA should change.

The one thing that in our opinion delayed things was the delivery of the Todmorden count box, which if I remember rightly was delayed due to a misunderstanding, but things like that can happen with anything. The count did seem to take a long time, but you can only count as fast as humanly possible, so if it takes that long so be it!

Overall we have no issues with the process. “

3.8 Getting There

- 3.8.1 In the 5 week election period Electoral Services Staff worked a combined total of 775 additional hours over and above their normal working hours in order to ensure the effective and timely delivery of the elections. It is fair to say that for all involved in the election process in 2010, candidates, agents and staff alike, fatigue played a major role.
- 3.8.2 Whilst working these additional hours is very tiring it is difficult to reduce the workload of the office itself by providing additional staffing resources. The multitude of changes in legislation over recent years has meant that the electoral knowledge of many people, who may have had previous elections experience, is now outdated and consequently they are unable to deal with issues effectively with minimum input from Electoral Services staff. Additional experienced staff are, of course, drafted in to assist with specific tasks such as the issue and opening of postal votes and work on polling day and at the count. Relevant training is provided to prior to each election.
- 3.8.3 Funding for the Parliamentary election is provided by Central Government. This funding covers those costs which are purely attributable to the Parliamentary election, for example ballot papers, and 50% of those which are considered to be costs shared with the local election, such as the hire of polling stations. Combined national and local elections will therefore show some savings in local election costs. It must be borne in mind that current budget provision for local elections does not cover the actual cost of a full stand alone election.
- 3.8.4 Wherever possible the Returning Officer follows the Council’s procurement processes when acquiring goods and services for electoral administration. However, there may be occasions, where time or availability of services is at a minimum, when it is not feasible for the procurement process to be followed. There are special circumstances and timescales which, particularly in relation to printing services, require them to be sourced from specific companies. As an example it is common practice within the print industry to work to a slight tolerance. In electoral printing terms this would be totally unacceptable.

3.8.5 The work of electoral services staff does not finish with the declaration of the result. A great deal of work still remains to be done following an election - payment of staff and premises, dealing with election expenses returns, secure storage of documentation, checking and arranging repair or replacement of polling booths and other elections equipment, and general clearing away and making ready for the next elections.

3.8.6 Additionally, the Electoral Commission requires a great deal of information to be supplied, from statistics on the election itself to financial information on the way that the Council funds elections. Much of this information is not readily available in the format requested and, although it is accepted that the Electoral Commission has its own reporting schedule to comply with, often the timescales placed on the supply of information is unrealistic.

3.9 Feedback

3.9.1 After any election a review is carried out by the Returning Officer and the Electoral Services staff and issues raised are resolved, where possible, in advance of the following elections. This review also takes into account any issues raised during the election period by candidates, agents and voters.

3.9.2 Feedback is also sought from all staff involved in the election process, including polling station staff, visiting officers and count supervisors. In addition, feedback has been sought from candidates and election agents. All the comments raised have been noted and actions will be taken to resolve these issues where feasible. There will, of course, be some instances, where legislation prevents any action from being taken. Some of the issues raised will be dealt with by improvements to staff training, others by amending current practices or systems.

3.9.3 Our aim is to provide electors with the opportunity to cast their vote in a fair and proper manner and for candidates and their agents to have confidence that elections in Calderdale are conducted lawfully and without bias.

3.10 Learning

3.10.1 Candidates can make an appointment to formally submit their nomination papers or may simply deliver the nomination papers and wait for them to be checked. Arrangements will be made in 2011 for candidates to be informed of the validity of their nomination by telephone if requested.

3.10.2 We have been asked whether the postal voters list on the secure website to be made easier to download. We attempt to update the list daily at present, however, we will take this up with IT to improve the list for next year and will provide written instructions on how to download the information.

3.10.3 Ward Members, electors and polling station staff made comments about the accessibility and suitability of the polling station at Brooksbank School. This has already been investigated and, in consultation with Ward Members, the polling station will be relocated to Cross Lane School in 2011.

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference for the Review

BROAD TOPIC AREA: Elections 2010

SPECIFIC TOPIC AREA: To review the arrangements for the general and local elections held in May 2010 including; the accuracy of the Electoral Register; siting of polling stations; arrangement for counts; and the budget available for running elections. The review will not cover any issues concerning electoral malpractice.

AMBITIONS FOR THE REVIEW: To ensure that the local election May 2011 and the expected referendum on Alternative Voting are run to the highest quality for voters, candidates and agents.

HOW DO WE PERFORM AT THE MOMENT? Electoral Registration Officer performance was better than the Electoral Commission standard except for one measure, which met the standard. (2009)

Returning Officer performance was better than the Electoral Commission standard except for two measures, which met the standard. (2009)

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results_and_analysis/assessment

WHO AND HOW SHOULD WE CONSULT?

- Returning Officer
- Councillors (by survey as well as other verbal or written evidence)
- Principal Electoral Services Officer
- Political parties
- Other local authorities

WHAT EXPERT SUPPORT DO WE NEED? None identified at this stage. It may be worth having an initial discussion with the Electoral Commission.

WHAT OTHER HELP/TRAINING DO WE NEED; Members may wish to visit one or two neighbouring authorities before hearing evidence from within Calderdale.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE? It is anticipated that evidence could be received at one session to be held in September or October 2010 and a report presented to Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel on 18 November 2010.

OUTCOMES: Recommendations leading to an action plan to introduce changes in time for the 2011 election.

Appendix 2 – Parliamentary and District Elections 6 May 2010 - Statistics

PARLIAMENTARY & DISTRICT ELECTIONS 6 MAY 2010

Electoral Area	Electorate	No of Proxies	Postal Votes					Polling Stations	
			Issued	% of Electorate	Returned	Included in Count	% Included in Count	Votes Cast	% Turnout
Brighouse	8533	18	2279	26.71%	1977	1892	83.02%	3748	43.92%
Calder	9183	18	2166	23.59%	1940	1885	87.03%	4808	52.36%
Elland	8752	6	1950	22.28%	1664	1567	80.36%	3522	40.24%
Greetland & Stainland	8423	21	2065	24.52%	1785	1727	83.63%	3872	45.97%
Hipperholme & Lightcliffe	8667	19	2410	27.81%	2088	2022	83.90%	4002	46.18%
Illingworth & Mixenden	9398	11	1995	21.23%	1676	1587	79.55%	3883	41.32%
Luddendenfoot	7879	13	1813	23.01%	1587	1552	85.60%	3986	50.59%
Northowram & Shelf	9070	14	2195	24.20%	1914	1840	83.83%	4528	49.92%
Ovenden	8460	4	1799	21.26%	1450	1343	74.65%	2825	33.39%
Park	9055	164	2186	24.14%	1823	1571	71.87%	3993	44.10%
Rastrick	8483	13	2399	28.28%	2083	1972	82.20%	3486	41.09%
Ryburn	8772	16	2302	26.24%	2007	1950	84.71%	4053	46.20%
Skircoat	9621	26	2454	25.51%	2111	2010	81.91%	4594	47.75%
Sowerby Bridge	8326	8	1930	23.18%	1610	1508	78.13%	3627	43.56%
Todmorden	8829	14	1772	20.07%	1496	1429	80.64%	4327	49.01%
Town	8866	3	1957	22.07%	1628	1547	79.05%	3410	38.46%
Warley	8542	82	2055	24.06%	1781	1679	81.70%	3757	43.98%
TOTALS	148,859	450	35,727	24.00%	30,620	29,081	81.40%	66,421	44.62%

Calder Valley	76903	137	19119	24.86%	16605	16036	83.87%	35902	46.68%
Halifax	70380	312	16463	23.39%	13926	13163	79.96%	30647	43.55%
TOTALS	147,283	449	35,582	24.16%	30,531	29,199	82.06%	66,549	45.18%

Appendix 3 – Contents of Information Pack provided for Members

CALDERDALE COUNCIL

USE of RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL

INFORMATION PACK

	Title	Web Address	Comment
1	Programme for the session – 10 November 2010		
2	Possible Areas for Consideration		A summary of questions drawn from available material that members may wish to consider in the course of the review.
3	Report on the Administration of the 2010 UK general election, The Electoral Commission	http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/100702/Report-on-the-administration-of-the-2010-UK-general-election.pdf	Although this is a large document, it has been included in full as some of the detailed areas covered may be of particular interest to Members
4	Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK, Association of Electoral Administrators	http://www.aea-elections.co.uk/downloads/reports/aea_election_report_final_PUBLICATION.pdf	Although this is a large document, it has been included in full as some of the detailed areas covered may be of particular interest to Members
5	Commonwealth Observer Team to the UK General Election 2010, Royal Commonwealth Society and The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, UK Branch – Final Report	http://www.thercs.org/society/Filestore/PDFDownloads/Commonwealth_Observation_Team_SummaryReport.pdf	This is the summary report
6	Review of Elections and Democratic Engagement Working Party, Calderdale Council, 2006		
7	Parliamentary and District Elections, Calderdale May 2010 - Statistics		
8	District Elections, Calderdale May 2006 - Statistics		

9	Acting Returning Officer's Review of the combined parliamentary and local election 2010 in Manchester, Manchester City Council	http://www.manchester.gov.uk/elections2010/download/56/acting_returning_officers_review_of_the_parliamentary_and_local_election_2010_in_manchester	Summary and Recommendations
10	May 2010 Election Process, report of the Acting Returning Officer to the Call In and Performance Scrutiny Committee, Watford Council	http://www3.watford.gov.uk/egenda/akswatford/images/att3935.pdf	
11	Bristol Electoral Review, A report to the Chief Executive, Bristol Council	http://www.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2010/wa/wa041/07276.pdf	Introduction and summary of recommendations
12	Examples of local press coverage of the arrangements for the 2010 elections.	http://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/I-will-report-Owen-over.6281294.jp http://www.calderdale-politics.co.uk/main/wordpress/?p=50 http://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/Delay-over-start-of-Calderdale.6279557.jp	