

Brentwood Borough Council
Parliamentary & Local Election counts - 7th May 2015.

In recent years there have been a number of legislative and other changes which should be considered when deciding when an election count should take place.

The following should be considered by the appointed Returning Officer when deciding whether to conduct the verification and count of all polls immediately after close of poll on Thursday 7th May or to complete some local election activities before conducting the actual count on Friday 8th May and the counting of parish ballot papers on Saturday 9th May.

- Parliamentary Boundaries - the area of Ongar taken from Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) increases the electorate by approx 16,000 electors & 16 polling stations.
- Distance between polling stations and count venue in particular where ballot boxes are transported from Ongar polling stations to the count.
- Time taken for 60 ballot boxes to arrive from BBC polling stations and 16 Ongar polling stations.
- Recent legislation stipulates the need to verify personal identifiers for 100% returned postal votes.
- The postal vote verification process includes cross boundary issues.
- Time taken for the postal vote verification process including the checking of personal identifiers for combined Parliamentary and local postal packs for BBC and EFDC.
- There are now additional clerical duties on polling day.
- The increased number of postal votes brought to the count requiring verification can cause timing and staffing issues.
- Electors can now be issued ballot papers if they are in a polling station queue at 10pm which could delay ballot boxes arriving at the count venue.
- Legislation has now ended the automatic postponement of parish elections that currently fall on the same day as ordinary local government and UK Parliamentary or European Parliamentary elections increasing the number of combined polls.
- Verification of BBC and EFDC Parliamentary and local ballot boxes.
- Reconciliation of unused Parliamentary, BBC and EFDC local and parish ballot papers.
- Secure storage and transportation of BBC and EFDC reconciled local and parish ballot papers to the Town Hall.

Advantages of counting Local ballot papers on Friday 8th May 2015

- Ballot papers and postal votes will already be verified ready at the start.
- Health and safety issues are limited where core election staff have often been working in excess of 20 hours on election day in addition to excessive hours during the pre-election weeks.
- Key staff are fresher and there is less risk of errors due to core staff tiredness and exhaustion.
- Staff attention is directed towards individual ward elections.
- Local postal votes can be counted, sorted and securely stored during the Parliamentary count.
- Any late arrival of postal votes from Royal Mail sweep (discretion of the RO) will not delay the start of the count.
- Local ballot papers can be securely stored ready for transportation while the Parliamentary count is commencing.
- Election staff are able to verify Parliamentary postal votes as a priority
- Greater first time accuracy from fresher count staff.
- Willingness for count staff to work sociable hours.
- Availability of polling station staff to count on Friday.
- Ability for key staff and management to trouble shoot if necessary.
- More publicity and public interest through daytime radio and social media.

Disadvantages of counting Local ballot papers on Friday 8th May 2015

- Availability and cost to BBC for the hire of count venue (approx £2500).
- Count staffing cost (approx £3500).
- Appointing Friday counting staff, impact on BBC staffing levels and council services.
- Delay in the declaration of local results and appointment of elected members
- Lack of availability for a further day (or part of the day) of count venue to members of the public.