

INTERIM REPORT

Lewisham East – Westminster Parliamentary By-election
14th June 2018



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14th June 2018



Westminster Parliamentary By-election – 6th February 2018

Interim Report on Election Observation – Lewisham East

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Lewisham East Westminster Parliamentary by-election – 14th June 2018.
2. To advise the local council and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support the local council and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

A team of 4 observers registered with, and accredited by, the UK's Electoral Commission, made 38 separate observations in 36 different polling stations across the Lewisham East Parliamentary Constituency. This constituted approximately 88% percent of the polling stations in the area.

Each observation was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation and they then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

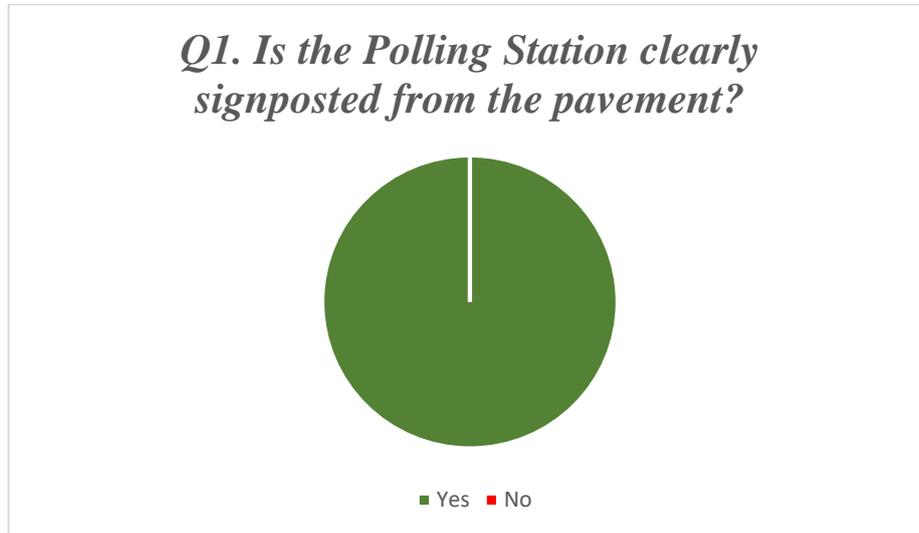
The observations generally took between thirty and forty-five minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible.

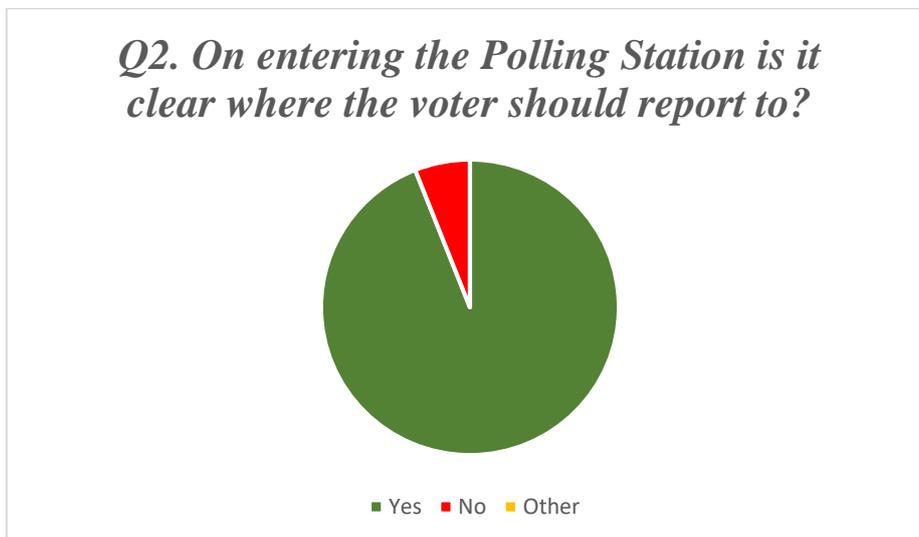
The organisation of polling stations was generally very well run across the council area, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

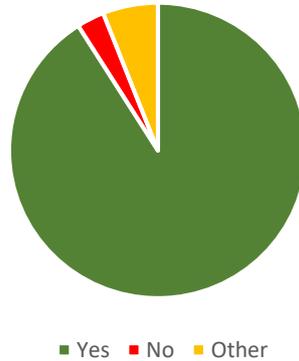


QUESTION 1: Signposting of the polling stations was good.



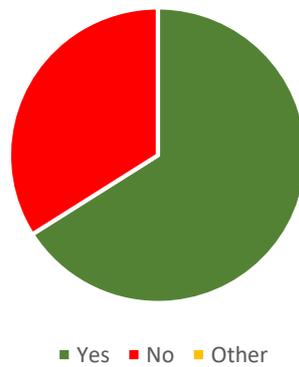
QUESTION 2: Observers identified some issues in terms of where voters should report in the polling stations.

Q3. Was it clear how disabled voters would access the Polling Station?



QUESTION 3: 91% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear. Another 6% suggested that some aspects of the polling station were inadequate and 3% were unsuitable for disabled access.

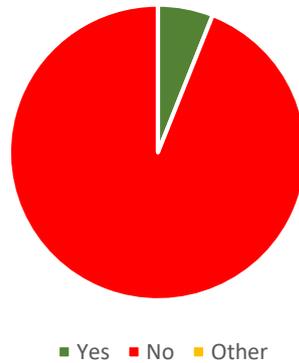
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Polling staff were generally not aware that an observation team might be operating across the constituency, the formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in the majority of cases.

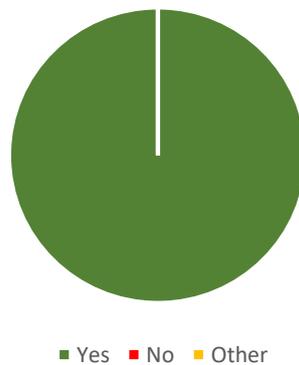
34% of observers had their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, 66% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

Q5. Did the staff record your ID number on a form?



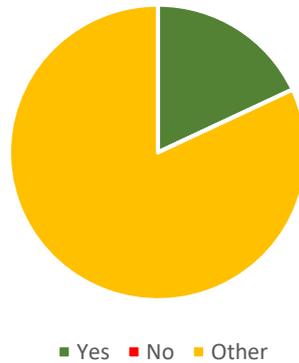
QUESTION 5: Similarly, only 6% recorded this details at some point during the observation, however, this was not always at the start of the observation. 94% of polling stations did not record attendance at all.

Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?



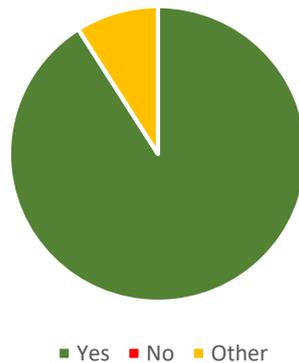
QUESTION 6: 100% of polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty as observers arrived at the polling station.

Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?



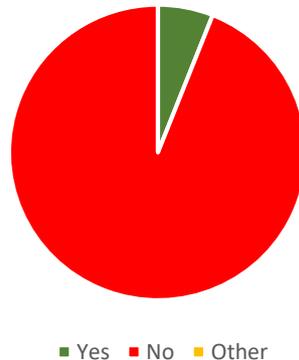
QUESTION 7: An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at 10pm was observed. All the ballot boxes observed were sealed. Only 18% of ballot boxes were correctly sealed. Our observers reported that 82% of ballot boxes were not entirely sealed: there were two main criticisms. Firstly, observers identified that the cable ties being used were loose, on some occasions so loose that it was considered insecure. Secondly, observers identified that ballot boxes only had two of the regulation cable ties rather than the three required to be properly sealed.

Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



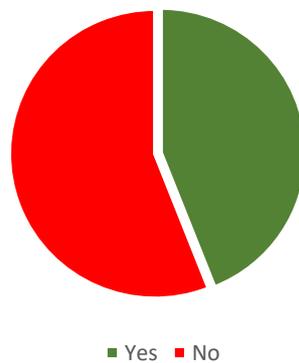
QUESTION 8: All but three of the polling stations were not properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

Q9. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to elicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹ On one occasion observers identified literature within the polling station which was biased towards one candidate.

Q10. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?

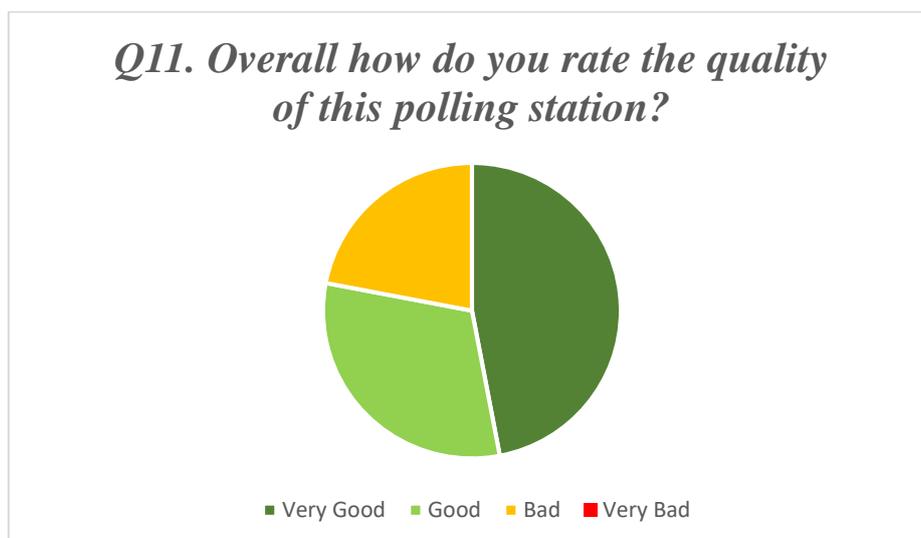


QUESTION 10: In 44% of polling stations, our observer team identified so-called 'family voting'. 10% of all voters observed were directly involved in 'family voting'. This was predominantly family members sharing polling booths, several spouses viewing the voting intentions of their spouse or direct collusion. We observed one voter casting his own ballot and that of his female companion. The OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'.² It occurs where husband and wife voting together is normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely.

¹ This question did not just relate to literature specific to this election but observers were also asked to identify if other literature, such as MP or councillors' surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

² <http://www.osce.org/>

Q11. Overall how do you rate the quality of this polling station?



QUESTION 12: Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 47% of polling stations were reported to be ‘Very Good’, 31% ‘Good’, 22% ‘Bad’, and none were ‘Very Bad’.

INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

This was an extremely well-run election. Access to voting was clear and despite the nature of the weather, throughout polling day, officials dealt well with the process.

As with several recent elections that Democracy Volunteers have observed we continue to be concerned about the levels of ‘family voting’ at polling stations.

Our observer team saw ‘family voting’ in 44% of the polling stations attended which, bearing in mind the team records all the voters who attend polling stations, means that 10% of all the voters who attended polling stations were involved in this practice.

We would recommend that officers, and the presiding officers, take time to be aware of this and intercede when they see this. Evidence, as provided by the OSCE/ODIHR, suggests that this practice most affects women voters as the secrecy of their ballot is restricted.

On the 100th anniversary of the first enfranchisement of women it is unfortunate that women voters continue not to have the right to vote in secrecy, from their spouse or other family member.