WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report Cover Sheet

Name of Meeting:	Regulatory Committee
Date of Meeting:	27 September 2007
Report Title:	Elections pilot 3 May 2007 - Evaluation
Summary of report:	To evaluate the District, Town and Parish held on 3 May 2007.
For further information please contact (report author);	Gillian Friar Electoral Services Manager Ext. 3177 email: gillian.friar@warwickdc.gov.uk
Business Unit:	Members' Services
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the policy framework:	No
Would the recommended decision be contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Wards of the District directly affected by this decision:	None
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan?	No
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No
Date and name of meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number:	Regulatory Committee: 17 July 2006 - Minute no 243
Background Papers:	Report to the Regulatory Committee on 17 July 2006

Consultation Undertaken

Below is a table of the Council's regular consultees. However not all have to be consulted on every matter and if there was no obligation to consult with a specific consultee they will be marked as n/a.

Consultees	Yes/ No	Who
Other Committees	No	
Ward Councillors	No	
Portfolio Holders	Yes	Councillor Michael Coker
Other Councillors	No	
Warwick District Council recognised Trades Unions	N/A	
Other Warwick District Council Service Areas	N/A	
Project partners	N/A	
Parish/Town Council	N/A	
Highways Authority	N/A	
Residents	N/A	
Citizens Panel	N/A	
Other consultees	N/A	

Officer Approval

With regard to officer approval all reports must be approved by the report authors relevant director, Finance Services and Legal Services.

Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director(s)	11 September 2007	Chris Elliott
Chief Executive	11 September 2007	Chris Elliott
CMT		
Section 151 Officer		

Legal		
Finance	14 September 2007	Marcus Miskinis
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

    It is recommended that

1.1 election pilot Orders should be drawn up much earlier and with more consultation with pilot authorities and contractors;

1.2 authorities involved in submitting a joint bid for an elections pilot do so with their chosen supplier;

1.3 time should be allowed to run a 'test' election so that issues such as the adjudication of doubtful ballots can be resolved before live data is used;

1.4 contractors should be able to prove that they can deliver a pilot and have not overstretched themselves;

1.5 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) should specify at an early stage as to what auditing procedures they require from authorities;

1.6 contractors should be required to attend all project board meetings;

1.7 when employing contractors from outside the UK, the MoJ should ensure that they are aware of the pressure of the legislative timetable and be knowledgeable about how elections are conducted in the UK;

1.8 when piloting electronic counting the correct quality paper needs to be thoroughly tested;

1.9 when future pilots are considered the process should be either a paper system or a fully electronic system and not a mixture of both; and

1.10 the closing date for applications for inclusion on the electoral register and for postal votes should be separated.

2. **REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1.1 Elections for the District, Town and Parish Councils were held on Thursday 3 May 2007.

2.1.2 After close of nominations on 4 April, 2007, 46 District Seats were to be contested, plus four Parishes (Barford, Bishops Tachbrook, Budbrooke and Weston-under-Wetherley) and all seats on the four Town Councils.

2.1.3 Central government made a large number of changes to secondary legislation for these elections with the main changes being:

- Changes to registration – the public were allowed to register up to eleven working days before polling day;
- Age of candidature was reduced to eighteen;
- Changes to postal voting – no witnesses were required but the postal voting statement needed to be signed and date of birth to be provided. Signatures

and date of births needed to be checked at the opening of postal votes. Also a marked register of postal votes had to be produced,

- Charges could now be made for supplying copies of the marked copy of the electoral register,
- Ballot papers no longer had to be stamped but were required to have a security mark and a unique reference number.
- Ballot paper counterfoils were replaced by number lists,
- Clerical errors on the electoral register could be rectified up until 9 pm on polling day.

2.1.4 In 2006 Warwick District Council approached Stratford District Council to run a joint pilot in May 2007. The original application submitted in November 2006 was to have early internet voting, early vote anywhere (ie the elector is able to vote at any polling station), vote anywhere on polling day and to have all votes electronically counted. The former Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA), now known as the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) agreed that both Councils could run a joint pilot but with an electronic count over two joint counting centres, with the centralisation of the management of postal votes.

2.1.5 The Secretary of State announced to Parliament in January 2007 that the Councils would be running a joint pilot with Warwick as the lead authority. This announcement was made much later than the original date which was due to be early December and the Order for the election was finally signed on 26 March 2007.

2.1.6 The Order allowed the councils to use two count centres. The majority of our wards would be counted in the Town Hall, Leamington Spa apart from the Lapworth and Leek Wootton wards being counted in Stratford. The Stratford wards of Fenny Compton, Southam and Stockton and Napton would be counted in Leamington Spa. The Order also allowed all postal votes to be opened in one place to save on costs and it was decided this would be carried out in the Town Hall, Leamington Spa.

2.1.7 At the request of the former DCA, Software AG (with their Canadian subcontractors, Dominion Voting Systems) were chosen by the MoJ to run the electronic counting process and Opt2Vote to print the specialised ballots and run the managed service for signature and date of birth checking for postal votes at the joint postal vote openings.

2.2 **EVALUATION OF PILOT**

2.2.1 Following the close of the pilot, an evaluation has been carried out by the MoJ taking into account the following categories and in this report information regarding the pilot will be included within each of the following headings:

- Planning
- Publicity
- Staffing and Training
- Political Agents
- Poll Cards
- Absent Voting
- Fraud Investigation
- Royal Mail

- Collection of ballot boxes
- Polling day
- Counts
- Feedback comments received
- Election Turnouts.

2.3   **Planning**

2.3.1   From an early stage in the preparation for the elections a plan was created covering all aspects of the process. The plan was based on an Electoral Commission project document and modified for local use. The plan was a live document and updated on a daily basis.

2.3.2   A risk assessment was drawn up covering all aspects of the elections. Several issues were identified through this process and preventative action taken, eg contingencies with regard to the counting process.

2.3.3   Once the Order for the pilot was in place, meetings with the suppliers and both Councils were held. Each meeting was minuted and any action points raised. In hindsight this project board should have started meeting at an earlier date. This would have allowed more time for adequate testing. This fact has been passed to the MoJ for their information.

2.3.4   Timing in general was a problem and it has been strongly recommended to the MoJ that the pilot process should begin much earlier and that Councils and suppliers are matched before applying for a pilot.

2.3.5   The make-up of the project board would have been different if the Councils had known what was expected of them from the MoJ. For example, the MoJ indicated at a later stage that full audits of the project should be carried out and had both Councils been aware of this at the beginning, they would have provided full project management and audit support to the project board meetings.

2.3.6   Planning was further frustrated by Opt2Vote only attending one project meeting. Confusion later arose from this as a project plan was never produced by them and their Project Manager was rarely available.

2.3.7   Stationery and other electoral supplies were examined and ordered in advance. The alternative cardboard ballot boxes were required to enable papers to be posted unfolded.

2.3.8   The Customer Contact Centre handled routine day to day calls from electors and this reduced the volume of calls to the Elections office.

2.3.9   With regard to the new electoral legislation, officers from both councils felt that the timescale for running an election is much too short; the period from the close of nominations to the sending out of postal votes needs to be extended to allow ballot/absent vote printing to be checked thoroughly.

2.4   **Publicity**

2.4.1   There were several press releases made to the media regarding the electoral pilot. These went to all local newspapers and radio stations, plus the BBC.

2.4.2   A full page advertisement was commissioned in the March 'District Focus' wrap on the Observer Newspaper to notify the public of the pilot.

2.4.3   Press packs were issued to all media interested. These contained important information on logistics (such as time and place of count), candidates and statistics (including past results and turnouts). These were found useful by both staff and the media, thereby reducing the number of subsequent enquiries.

2.4.4   Software AG provided an interactive website but, due to the problems encountered at the count, this was never used.

2.5   **Staff and training**

2.5.1   The Returning Officer employed 116 Presiding Officers and 155 Poll Clerks to staff the polling stations. All polling staff attended an in-house training session held on 19 April in the Town Hall, Leamington Spa lasting approximately one hour. The training was derived from a modified Electoral Commission presentation and given by the Electoral Services Manager.

2.5.2   The District count on Thursday 3 May employed 29 Verification Assistants to open ballot boxes and make ballot papers ready for scanning, 20 Count Clerks to supervise collection and booking in of ballot boxes from Presiding Officers as they arrived at the Town Hall, 18 Senior Count Clerks to run the main Count Room during the evening and 3 Deputy Returning Officers. The count on Friday 4 May employed 18 staff.

2.5.3   The full re-count which took place on Tuesday 8 May employed 126 staff to supervise and recount the ballot papers.

2.5.4   Other staff included a total of 162 staff to open and process postal votes, 17 staff carrying out administration work and 7 Polling Station Visitors to collect postal votes handed into polling stations during election day.

2.6   **Political Agents**

2.6.1   A meeting with political agents was held after the close of nominations. This provided the Returning Officer with an opportunity to explain the election procedure and clarify key dates and times. It also allowed the agents the opportunity to question any issues that were not clear to them. Regrettably this meeting was not attended by all agents. There were also two demonstrations of the counting machines that candidates and agents were invited to attend.

2.7   **Poll cards**

2.7.1   Following usual practice, poll cards were issued during the weekend after the close of nominations to all electors eligible to vote on 3 May 2007. In accordance with new legislation, all postal voters were sent a poll card informing them when their

postal vote was expected to be delivered and gave instructions on what to do if it did not arrive.

2.8 **Absent voting**

2.8.1 The processing of postal votes was included in the electoral pilot plus an area of new legislation. The new legislation required

- That the declaration of identity be replaced by a postal voting statement removing the need to have a witness's signature. The postal vote statement required signing by the voter unless they had been granted a wavier.
- Each postal voting statement required the elector to give their date of birth (previously collected earlier in the year).
- 20% of all returned postal ballots and postal voting statements were to be matched up. The Councils opted like many other Councils across the country to check 100% of returned postal ballots.
- A marked register of returned postal votes and reports be produced giving details of rejected postal ballots.

2.8.2 The software to capture the Personal Identifiers (PIs – ie signature and date of birth) was delivered far too late for it to be entirely effective and officers had difficulty in scanning all PIs in to the elections system.

2.8.3 Officers found that postal vote applications without barcodes were more difficult to process as the electors' records had to be found manually on the electoral system. Whilst the elections team coped this year, at a Parliamentary election this could well require extra resources.

2.8.4 The closing date for applications for postal votes is now 5pm on the eleventh working day before election day and at this year's elections this was 18 April. New legislation now also allows electors with an election in their area to register up to the eleventh working day before election day. This caused some confusion and officers would recommend that these dates are separated. Problems at a District election can be overcome but at a Parliamentary election staff may not be able to cope with this timescale.

2.8.5 Opt2Vote outsourced the printing and issuing of the postal ballot papers to a company called Formpro in Bristol. This caused Software AG problems in obtaining the quality of ballot paper they required to enable the counting machines to scan the ballot papers effectively. As a result delays occurred sending out postal ballot papers.

2.8.6 Officers visited the contractors in Bristol to supervise the mailing of postal votes. A random sample of postal votes was checked for accuracy. Every District and Parish/Town ward was checked and no errors were found. However an error occurred in the process followed by the contractor and sub-contractor in that those papers that were checked were printed and sent out again. This only affected a very few electors across the District and the scanning system for the postal votes would not have allowed any duplicate ballots to be processed.

2.8.7 297 postal ballots were rejected before reaching the count, the majority being because the postal voting statement signature or date of birth did not match the one collected on the PIs.

2.8.8 Postal vote opening took place on 30 April, and 1, 2 and 3 May in the Town Hall, Leamington Spa.

2.8.9 All openings followed the same format:
- Openings were carried out on a ward by ward basis.
- Each return envelope was counted then opened.
- Invalid postal voting statements were put to one side.
- Once all return envelopes had been opened the postal voting statements were scanned.
- Signatures and dates of birth were validated.
- Ballot paper envelopes were opened and papers removed and went for scanning.
- The invalid postal vote statements and ballot papers were then scanned.

2.8.10 Scanning of the postal vote statements and the ballot papers was completed in full view of any political agents. Validation of signatures and dates of birth were completed by the Assistant Chief Executive (Members' Services) and the Head of Legal Services and members of his staff.

2.8.11 Officers found it disappointing that all postal voting statements for every ward had to be scanned in to the system before any ballot papers were scanned. It would have been more productive to scan the postal voting statements for a ward and then the ballot papers for that ward. This would have reduced the waiting time for any agents attending the opening. Officers were concerned that the scanning of ballot papers did not begin election day.

2.8.12 During the count on the Thursday evening there was a delay by Opt2Vote in the checking of absent voting identifiers on the postal voting statements received from the polling stations. This meant that no postal ballots were delivered to the count area until around midnight with the final ballots being delivered at 3.45am. This would have caused serious delays in main count of the adjudication of ballot papers and subsequent declaration of results should the count have proceeded as planned.

2.8.13 One of the main advantages of scanning the postal ballots is that ballot papers are more easily matched and so the process of provisionally rejecting ballots is made much more simple. Scanning also identifies any bogus or duplicated ballots.

2.8.14 Officers were frustrated with Opt2Vote as a result of not having the option to change the wording on the postal vote envelopes. Officers wished to add a helpline number on the paperwork for postal voters to use. This has been taken up with the company.

2.8.15 The table below shows the issues and returns for May 2007 elections.

Postal Ballot Papers Issued	% of electorate	Valid Papers Returned	% returned
10,314	11	7352	71

2.8.16 A total of 189 proxies were nominated at these elections.

2.8.17 Marked postal voting registers have been produced and distributed to political parties on request.

2.9 Fraud investigation

2.9.1 There were no instances of fraud reported.

2.10 Royal Mail

2.10.1 There were no reported problems with using Royal Mail for sending out poll cards.

2.10.2 A problem did occur when the postal votes were picked up by Royal Mail from the printers in Bristol on Wednesday 25 April as they were mislaid for 24 hours. The postal votes arrived in the Leamington Spa sorting office on the afternoon of Thursday 26 April and were then delivered to electors from Friday 27 April.

2.10.3 Postal ballots were to be sorted into wards at the sorting office before delivery to the Council offices at Leamington Spa and Stratford. This process however was not successfully carried out until election day itself when a member of Royal Mail staff personally supervised the operation.

2.10.4 Officers had requested a service for Royal Mail to pick up postal votes for transfer from the Stratford council offices to Leamington Spa. This service was not satisfactory as the pick up never took place at the requested times. Ultimately it proved easier for Stratford council officers to bring the postal votes to the Town Hall personally.

2.11 Polling station ballot papers

2.11.1 The same company was used by Opt2Vote to print the polling station ballot papers as they used to print the postal ballot papers.

2.11.2 The delivery of ballot papers was much later than expected. They finally began to arrive on the morning of Monday 30 April, the day before Presiding Officers collected their ballot boxes. The polling station ballot papers had been scheduled to be delivered on Friday 20 April, giving officers the weekend before the election to make up all the ballot boxes in good time.

2.11.3 Officers checked all the ballot books before issuing them into the ballot boxes and discovered that there were books missing; books were stapled or perforated incorrectly and in many of the books the print quality was not to the required standard.

2.11.4 The large notice type ballot papers to be displayed in the polling stations had not be delivered and officers had to arrange for the Council's print room to print sets for each polling station from spare ballot papers.

2.11.5 The Corresponding Number Lists (CNL) for the polling station staff to complete as they issued ballot papers to electors was not received until late on Wednesday 2 May by which time all ballot boxes and equipment had been collected by presiding officers. During the weekend before the elections, the Elections team had to draw up a blank version of the CNL with instructions and issue these to all the polling stations.

2.11.6 Officers are discussing a discount for printing and have informed the British Print Federation of the problems encountered.

2.12 **Collection of ballot papers**

2.12.1 Ballot boxes were collected by Presiding Officers on Tuesday 1 May from Riverside House between 10am and 4pm or at a pre-arranged suitable time.

2.12.2 This was the first year this arrangement had been used, with training and the collection of ballot boxes being carried out on separate days.

2.12.3 There has been positive feedback from polling staff. Comments have been received saying that holding the polling staff training two weeks before the election gave staff time to read through documentation thoroughly.

2.13 **Polling day**

2.13.1 There were less than the usual number of telephone calls received on the day. The office arrangements included one person being present at the Riverside House reception and the Customer Contact Centre during polling hours. The twelve members of staff which formed the election team for the day worked a rota system during the day so that the office was always staffed during polling hours and each was contactable by mobile phone.

2.13.2 There were no health and safety incidents noted during the day.

2.13.3 At 7.30 am it was reported that a number of electors were not showing on the polling station version of the electoral register. The names were showing on the office copy and which indicated that they had correctly claimed to be included on the electoral register and therefore entitled to vote. A problem with the electoral software meant that the electors who had applied to be added to the register between 10 March and 18 April 2007 did not appear on the polling station electoral register. Once election staff had been made aware of the problem it was quickly and efficiently solved by members of the elections team and the polling station visitors to deliver a copy of the latest version of the monthly alterations lists to the appropriate polling stations, in order for the Presiding Officer to amend their version of the electoral register. No voters were disenfranchised and this problem has now been resolved with the software company.

2.13.4 Polling staff who returned the Polling Station survey form encountered no problems with tellers on the day.

2.13.5 Polling staff reported that electors were confused by having two ballot papers (District and Town or Parish) and asked whether it would be possible to have printed on the front of each ballot paper the title of the election i.e. District Council election on the white ballot paper or Town or Parish Council election on the yellow ballot paper. Unfortunately, legislation states that only the names of the candidates can be listed on the front of a ballot paper and the title of the election can only be printed on the reverse of the ballot paper.

2.13.6 The Elections office received complaints about using a place of worship as a polling station and asked whether this may have put people off voting.

2.13.7 Polling staff requested that at a double or multi-polling station the words 'Station A' etc, should be printed in large letters on the poll cards, so that electors would take more notice of which polling station in which they voted.

2.13.8 The cardboard ballot boxes did not cause any problems, although a number of polling staff complained that they could not lift and carry them as easy as ballot boxes with handles.

2.13.9 The dropping off of ballot boxes at the rear door of the Town Hall worked very well with the police directing traffic on the Parade and Regent Grove. Presiding Officers were able to drive through the archway and back on to Regent Grove. All ballot boxes had been returned from the polling stations and booked in by 11.30pm.

2.14 **Thursday evening count**

2.14.1 The first floor of the Town Hall, Leamington Spa was used as the Count venue. The main count was held in the Assembly Room and in the Council Chamber candidates and agents could watch the television and see the large screen showing the live website. Refreshments were served in Room 18.

2.14.2 The verification and count started at 10 pm after the close of poll.

2.14.3 Auditors employed by the MoJ and members of the Electoral Commission were in attendance at the count.

2.14.4 The stages of the count varied from what normally happens at a District, Town and Parish Council elections count. The sequence was to be:-

- Boxes opened in front of candidates and agents.
- Ballot papers placed in trays and stored on racking in the centre of the room.
- The ballot paper account was checked for accuracy.
- Trays taken to scanner counting machines.
- Ballots scanned and verified back to the ballot paper account.
- Ballots put in transit cases and returned to the racking.
- Once scanned and verified ballots are released for adjudication.
- Adjudication consists of Returning Officer checking doubtful papers while election agents watch on screen.
- Once checked results are released to Returning Officer to declare.

2.14.5 Opening of ballot boxes went according to plan and all boxes were opened and papers put into trays.

2.14.6 Scanning started at 10.15pm and once this process had begun a number of ballot papers 'jammed' the machines. Software AG informed the Returning Officer that this was due to the quality of the paper and printing of the ballots.

2.14.7 When a machine jammed, it would be reset and the whole of the batch of ballot papers rescanned.

2.14.8 There were some complaints from agents on the night that they could not see what was going into the scanners or what ballots were being scanned.

2.14.9 The major problem of the evening was the adjudication of the doubtful ballot papers. The first ward to be checked was Leamington Manor. Usually in a ward of this size officers would expect approximately 60 doubtful papers to be revealed but in this case there were approximately 700 papers. The reasons for this was that the tolerance of the software was too sensitive and again the quality of the print. As a result, ballot papers were being sent for adjudication if there was any hint of a mark outside the voting boxes, i.e. print speckling on the paper or even the fold in postal ballot papers.

2.14.10 At 1.45am adjudication for the Leamington Manor contest was approximately two-thirds of the way through, when the terminal presented a blank screen where the adjudicated image should have been.

2.14.11 The Count was held open in order that the results of the two Warwick District Council wards being conducted at Stratford could be declared. The Returning Officer had been advised that Stratford were conducting those two elections manually and they were close to be finalised.

2.14.12 No other results had been declared by 2.20 am on Friday 4 May 2007. The Returning Officer therefore decided to suspend the count and subsequently sent candidates and agents home. The count was to begin again at 1pm later that same day.

2.15 **Friday afternoon count**

2.15.1 Overnight, Dominion Voting and the Council's Head of Legal Services considered how to reduce the high level of adjudications and thus increase the speed of the electronic count.

2.15.2 The solution arrived at was to continue to scan the ballot papers overnight, and then reconfigure the seven scanning stations, the communication station and the results monitoring station as adjudication stations, in order to maximise the throughput of ballot papers requiring adjudication. Dominion Voting staff continued scanning until 6am in the presence of the Head of Legal Services and other Returning Officer staff.

2.15.3 The Returning Officer was advised that given that the scanning was now complete the adjudication process should only take 3 hours against an estimated 8 to 9 hours for a manual count. He was further advised that all wards were ready to be adjudicated upon. The Returning Officer with colleagues contacted agents of the various parties to seek a consensus on the way forward. The overwhelming consensus was that the option of continuing with the electronic count should proceed but that if there were any further problems it should be halted.

2.15.4 After 1 pm on Friday 4 May 2007 the count resumed. However:

- the revised adjudication process did not prove to be any quicker than the previous evening even though more wards were being adjudicated upon.
- It became clear that in fact not all wards were ready to be adjudicated upon so not all stations were able to be used at the same time as had been advised by the contractor.
- There was only one person who could converse easily in English with the Returning Officer over the problems at each station and lack of progress.
- There were questions from candidates and agents on consistency of approach by staff using the system during the adjudication process which lead to some re starts of counting.
- It became apparent from many comments from agents and candidates and indeed staff, including the Returning Officer that there was increasing concern over the likely validity of the results because of these issues.
- At one of the adjudication stations the forenames of candidates retrieved from the database did not match those contesting the relevant election. This called into question whether votes were being correctly allocated. It has been suggested by the supplier that this problem may be attributable to incorrect ballot image files having been copied during the reconfiguration process.

2.15.5 After having waiting to see if a Ward was close to being capable of being declared, at 4.45pm (more than the estimated 3 hours for all wards) the Returning Officer assembled the candidates and agents to inform them that a decision had been made to abandon the electronic count and that all the contests would be counted manually on Tuesday, 8 May 2007.

2.15.6 The hall then needed to be cleared for other uses over the weekend. Ballot papers were retrieved still in their transfer cases and sealed in traditional ballot boxes. Each ballot box was recorded and locked away for storage ready for the manual count. There was no time to delete the images of the ballot papers and other sensitive information. The equipment was transported to Software AG's headquarters in Derby where a DVD of the information was made and delivered to the Returning Officer and the data deleted at a later date. This was not done in the presence of the Returning Officer.

2.15.7 Staff from the elections office and Leisure Services, and others, worked over the weekend to prepare for the manual count. The manual count proceeded on the Tuesday and the results had the full confidence of the candidates and agents. It took 126 staff six hours to declare all the results. The reduced time taken was aided by the use for the first time at Warwick District Council of block counting for multi member wards.

2.15.8 As the Friday count was not commencing until 1 pm, Stratford District Council decided to take back its two District wards and Parish to count in Stratford.

2.15.9 Officers strongly recommend that in future when running pilots of this nature, sufficient time must be allowed to have proper testing. This would include running a mock election using the chosen printer and paper supplier and logic and accuracy testing to be completed on live data. The MoJ do need to review the timetabling of its pilots. Ideally the process should be starting around June in the year before the proposed pilot is to take place and not just before election time.

2.16 **Comment from candidates, agents and staff**

2.16.1 All staff employed on the election, political parties, candidates and election agents were asked to comment on the pilot and the following written comments were received:

2.16.2 **Warwick and Leamington Green Party**

1.   There are many recent examples of national launches of massive IT systems that clearly are not fit for purpose (for example, the online system, MTAS, for doctors' training posts introduced in February 2007). Therefore, pilots of nature Warwick District Council undertook are welcomed. It should be noted that the failings all appear to be due to problems with the private IT companies involved, and that Warwick District Council staff were not to blame in any way.

2.   Indeed, Chris Elliott and his team appeared to cope remarkably well under difficult circumstances.

3.   It is easy to envisage electronic counting that works quickly and efficiently using a system similar to that piloted. However, we suspect that 'high-tech' will not be 'better' in the near future for the following reasons:

4.   Cost: large numbers of scanners, screens, computers and other equipment were employed.

5.   Local procurement: Even if an electronic system proves to be slightly cheaper, this money will go out of the region to the large company running the system. It is much better to procure systems locally so that the money stays within Warwickshire, thus helping to boost local employment and prosperity.

6.   Carbon emissions: It is likely that an electronic system will have higher carbon emissions than manual counting.

7.   It will take time before candidates and other observers have as much trust in an electronic system as they do with the current method. All systems are vulnerable to attack, misuse and error and so we need an external process to spot check a set of papers, or a whole ward or district.

8.   Advocates of electronic counting say that it is important to be as quick as possible. However, we are not convinced that speed is more important than visibility, trust and public involvement; there is great danger that the sense of occasion is lost.

9.   For these reasons, Warwick and Leamington Green Party believe that Warwick District should continue with manual counting in the near future. This is likely to be more transparent, cheaper, lead to fewer carbon emissions and keep money within the local economy.

2.16.3 John Holland and Ken Browne, Labour Party

1.   All postal ballot papers to be sent recorded delivery.

2.   Candidates names be listed in one column and nothing be printed in font size smaller than 12.

3.   Electronic counting not be used again for the foreseeable future. If it is to be used then the software must be audited independently to ensure that no one can change anything after the count has started.

4.   A fully trained staff for manual counting who have asked to be present be available, even if electronic counting is used.

2.16.4 Labour candidate in Town and District for Warwick North

1.   It is certain that this system used threw far too many ballot papers out and was not able to cope with the vast number of varying marks used by electors casting a manual vote.

2.   The count workers I encountered seemed to have been selected from those having IT skills and had no experience of the manual system and one would not accept all the candidates and agents assurance that a paper scanned onto screen was clear voter intent.

3.   We were also concerned to find that several mistakes on screen could not be explained or sufficiently assured files behind the system were not similarly flawed.

4.   The candidate's names for North were wrong and appeared incorrectly although appearing in the correct position on the ballot paper did not allay our concerns.

5.   Officers must take great care that any future use of electronic system of any kind should be tested to exhaustion before using us as guinea pigs.

6.   I would like to add that I think Chris Elliott did as good a job as possible in very difficult circumstances and trust lessons will be learnt for the future.

2.16.4 Labour candidate Leamington Brunswick

1. On behalf of myself and all my candidates, that we are grateful for all the effort you put into the electronic counting trial. Obviously it has failed, and I'm sure you'll be investigating the reasons etc. However, for now I thought I ought to let you know that none of us are angry at you for the problems we've encountered.

2. There are plenty of people who will claim that they told us that piloting the electronic counting system was a mistake, and there are already far too many people who seem pleased that it went so badly. However, that doesn't mean that you were wrong to at least try to drag electoral procedures into the 21st century, and although this is obviously a setback, I hope it doesn't mean that in future you will be too cautious in exploring new ways of conducting our elections.

2.16.5 Labour candidate Leamington Willes

It was a great idea to have a pilot in Warwick District. There are always teething problems with new projects, especially IT projects, which is why pilots are so important. It was the right decision to have a second attempt on Friday and a pity it still had to be abandoned but maybe the company's testing wasn't robust enough. A lot has been learned from the whole process so it was well worth doing, even if it doesn't seem so at the moment.

2.16.6 John Whitehouse, Liberal Democrats Election Agent

1. As someone who supports innovation and appropriate use of new technology I found this whole experience profoundly depressing.

2. Any future electronic counting system must be much more robust in both hardware and software terms, and must be much more rigorously stress-tested with production volumes of data before the event. It will take a lot to regain people's confidence after this experience.

3. A well-run manual count takes a lot of beating.

4. Please find a larger venue for future counts!

2.16.7 Election Agent for the Leamington Milverton Liberal Democrats candidates

1. Electronic counting is unlikely to ever be totally successful on its own. It should be part of an election which includes electronic voting. The mix of manual and electronic was unsatisfactory.

2. There was a dearth of information on progress during the electronic count. We wanted to know how many votes had been counted out of the total available and how many block votes had been allocated to the different parties. We also wanted to know which polling station was being counted at any time.

3. The manual count is so much more transparent that it is hard to have confidence in the electronic system.

4. The business of dealing with doubtful voting papers was very laborious. That aspect would have to be greatly improved to make it acceptable to agents and candidates.

5. The manual system was far simpler and quicker.

6. Really large screens need to be available in all parts of the building to give all the information so that everyone can feel involved.

7. In view of the delays this time I am doubtful whether politicians in Warwick District will ever want to volunteer as a pilot again.

2.16.8 **Presiding Officer and Count Assistant**

1. With the barcodes (replacing the use of the stamping instrument) at least we didn't run the risk of forgetting to put the official mark on.

2. In the event that we had to do a manual count, at least the majority of paper didn't have to be unfolded first!

2.17 **Elections turnout**

2.17.1 Turnout in the election was 42.5 % (36.3% in the 2003 District, Town and Parish elections).

2.18 **Evaluation of the pilot carried out by the Ministry of Justice**

2.18.1 Following the conclusion of the pilot, the Ministry of Justice was required to produce an evaluation report by 1 August 2007, and a copy is attached.

3**. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED**

3.1 Once the decision was made in July 2006 by the Regulatory Committee to submit a pilot bid, no alternative options were considered.

3.2 However, if there had been full and adequate time to thoroughly test the processes, and problems had been discovered, it would have been possible to withdraw and proceed with a traditional, manual count.

4. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

4.1 The election budget for the year is £174,400. The total costs have still to be finalised because the outcome of discussions with the suppliers involved with the pilot, and others, have not yet been completed. Also, several payments, eg the hire of polling stations, have yet to be completed. Until this has been finalised, recharges to the Town and Parish Councils cannot be calculated.

4.2 The MoJ will be responsible for meeting costs associated with the pilot.

4.3 Employing a contractor to undertake the management of postal votes saved on staff time and costs. In 2005 the management of postal votes cost £29,222, but this year it was only £20,000.

5.   **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

5.1   It is not considered that the pilot had any implications on the Council's policy framework, Community Plan, or specific policies.