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// bringing change

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Waitematā Local Board

C/- Marguerite Delbet

Democracy Services

Re: Auckland Council 2016 Triennial Elections: Missing Voting Packs, Grey Lynn Area

We refer to the 27 March 2017 Waitematā Local Board resolution to 'formally request that the Electoral Officer investigate and report back as to why ballot papers went missing during the election period, what action was taken at the time and what steps are being taken to ensure it does not happen again'.

We advise as follows:

- For the 2016 Auckland Council triennial election, there were 1,031,667 electors eligible to vote and had a voting pack (one of 128 combinations) produced
- Voting packs were printed, assembled, lodged and delivered by NZ Post (who have undertaken these processes for many triennial elections)
- When the voting documents are printed, they are 'signed-off' by the Electoral Officer by combination of voting documents, on site at NZ Post's mailhouse
- Voting packs were delivered to electors Auckland-wide from Friday 16 to Wednesday 21 September 2016
- It came to the Electoral Officer's attention on Thursday 22 September 2016, through Facebook comments, that some electors in the Grey Lynn area (Crummer Road specifically) had not received their voting packs
- We first checked that all voting packs for the Waitematā Local Board had in fact been printed, and confirmed all 49,127 voting packs had been printed (and signed off by the Electoral Officer at 3.35pm on 3 September 2016)
- Inquiries were then made to NZ Post (delivery) to investigate why some electors in this area had not received their voting packs
- The response was that NZ Post had spoken with the postie for the Grey Lynn area (an experienced postie) who advised that NZ Post treated it as a priority for the election mail to be delivered to the Grey Lynn area on Saturday 17 September 2016 (a very wet day) and remembers delivering to most delivery points on Crummer Road (except to those redirections and holds which had been removed prior)
- We were subsequently advised of specific electors that had not received their voting packs (telephone enquiries, requests for special votes) and from this we were able to establish a potential affected area - Crummer Road/Williamson Avenue from Pollen Street to Coleridge Street - with approximately 1,000

electors potentially affected (noting that some votes were received back from Crummer Road outside of the affected area)

- On the assumption that all voting packs had been delivered to this area, we then suspected mail box theft may have occurred
- NZ Post discussed this scenario with the police, however this enquiry did not surface any wide scale instances of recent mail box thefts in this area
- An alert was placed on the 'Neighbourly' website that some voting packs had not been delivered (in the Crummer Road area) and to contact the Electoral Office for a special vote (if an ordinary voting pack had not been received)
- A number of special votes were hand delivered to electors in the affected area
- Unfortunately the cause of the issue still remains unknown, despite investigation -
 - we know the affected voting packs were printed
 - we have been advised the affected voting packs were delivered
 - we know that the affected voting packs have NOT been returned (either voted on or as 'Gone No Address')
 - we believe through the police there were no reported thefts from mail boxes occurring in the area
- Where this type of situation occurs, legislation provides for the issuing of special votes -
 - we know that 90 special votes were issued to electors in the potential affected area
 - we know that the number of special votes returned for the Waitemata Local Board area increased at the 2016 election (as expected)
 - 533 in 2016
 - 315 in 2013
- Voter turnout for the Waitemata Local Board appears not to have been affected by this issue
 - turnout for the 2016 election was 41.3% (average Auckland-wide was 38.5%)
 - turnout for the 2013 election was 35% (average Auckland-wide was 35.5%)
 - turnout for the 2010 election was 49.1% (average Auckland-wide was 51%)
- In any election, issues arise that are outside of the Electoral Officer's control, which when occur, must be mitigated in the most efficient manner (and according to legislation)
- For postal voting, delivery of voting packs can be a challenge, especially for Auckland where over one million voting packs are required to be delivered over three days
- Unfortunately a guarantee that this type of situation does not occur again at future elections cannot be given, but what can be given is, if such a situation does occur again, an undertaking to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to enable electors to cast a vote
- Even as we move towards offering an online voting option, this may not help negate any postal delivery issues. Every method of voting bring its own advantages and challenges.

Dale Ofsoske

Electoral Officer

Auckland Council