



## **Counting without fingers**

*Fujitsu scanners automate the ballot process for the London election.*

Ballot counting has come a long way since the first mayor of the City of London was elected in 1215. From the first ballot votes which were contested with a show of hands in a guild hall, the election is now a highly technological affair and none more so than the 2008 London mayoral elections. This election was by far the most advanced with electronic counting and a state of the art Fujitsu scanning system which was programmed to reject any ballot papers that were deemed to be tampered with. With this advanced technology the Greater London Authority ensured that the new London mayor was elected quickly, fairly and without the city missing a beat.

### *Importance of the London election*

The London mayoral election is second only to the general election in the UK in terms of press interest and impact on the economy. London is one of the key financial centres of the western world. Along with New York and Hong Kong, whatever happens in London from a financial and political stand point can affect millions of people.

The offices of the mayor and the London Assembly serves over 7.3 million people every day as well as countless others that come to the city for major global events. In 2012 the city will play host to the Olympic Games and this mayoral term will be paramount to its success. With such important events taking place in the next few years, and with the decisions that are made in City Hall by the mayor and his staff affecting the lives of so many people, the system to elect the mayor needs to be efficient and reliable to ensure accurate counting.

### *Politics plugs in*

To ensure the vote was correctly counted, and done in an efficient manner, London Elects, the body organising the poll, opted for an electronic counting system. John Bennett, Deputy Greater London Returning Officer, explains “.The London Mayor and Assembly elections have used e-counting systems since their inception in 2000. For the third election in 2008, we opted to use a new system developed by Indra.”

Another reason for moving to an electronic system was that this year’s election involved three ballot papers. For the 2008 London election voters cast a first and second choice to elect the Mayor, one to elect a London Assembly Constituency Member and one for the London-wide Assembly Member contest which added to the complexity of the election.

John continues “With this essentially being the UK’s most complex election and with London’s uniquely diverse and large electorate, the only solution to get the vote done accurately and quickly was to use e-counting – a manual count would have taken as long as three days. For this we needed to look for equipment that was fast, reliable and could handle the large volume of paper – 7.5 million ballot papers - that would be coming through the count centres on polling day. To get the best value for money for all of London’s council tax payers we put this work up for tender.”

### *Fujitsu scanners tick all the boxes*

After a 6 month process the tender was eventually won by the major Spanish technology company, Indra, who proposed using Fujitsu fi-5900 Scanners to complete the job. This was no easy task however. If counted manually the vote counting process would take almost three days meaning the electronic system would need to use the full speed of the fi-5900 by scanning at up to 125 pages per minute in simplex and 250 images per minute in duplex. To complete the vote recording process, the scanners scanned 7.5 million ballot papers in 15 hours.

A major problem that the GLA could encounter when dealing with such a vast amount of ballot papers is the chance of paper jams and double feeds meaning machines would become jammed and would need to be fixed or, even worse, votes would not be counted – not a problem for the fi-5900. The fi-5900 comes equipped with three individual ultrasonic sensors which greatly increase the reliability of double feed detection. This, together with superior paper processing and continuous document protection, ensures that if sticky or stapled documents are included in the batch, the sensors identify an overskew incident and interrupt the scanning process to prevent possible damage to the document and ensuring every vote is counted.

Andrew Cowling, Senior Marketing Executive, at Fujitsu said of the task “This is a great example of how technology can play a part in the political system and aid democracy. When you have to count and register hundreds of thousands of ballot papers, the only real economical choice in terms of time and cost is to go digital.”

Cowling continues “When we were first approached about this project people were asking whether the scanners could digitally manipulate the voting papers and were worried about not using people to count the ballot papers. The fi-5900 can’t be programmed to alter the image 'content' of a specific page so there were no chance that anyone could manipulate the outcome and with the ultrasonic sensors looking for doubled up pieces of paper, there was also no chance of any votes being missed in such a crucial election.”

Not more than a day after beginning the count at 9am on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, London found out it had a new mayor. With the help of Fujitsu scanners London could get back to business and look forward to the coming mayoral term and onwards to the Olympic games.