

## Minutes of the Elections and Registration Working Group

9 September 2009

Enterprise Rooms, 20 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2BU

**Present:** David Canning (Ministry of Justice)  
Robert Connelly (Birmingham City Council)  
Lindsey Dixon (Sunderland City Council)  
Bill Gillett (Leeds City Council)  
Debra Harrod (Poole Borough Council)  
Keith Hathaway (GLRO)  
Tom Hawthorn (Electoral Commission)  
Ailsa Irvine (Electoral Commission)  
Jennifer Martin-Kohlmorgen (Electoral Commission)  
Glynne Morgan (Pembrokeshire County Council)  
John Owen (AEA)  
James Pack (Electoral Commission)  
Pat Parker (Electoral Commission)  
Karen Quintmere (Electoral Commission)  
Alex Thomson (City of Edinburgh Council)  
Nina Ziaullah (Electoral Commission)

Apologies: Gill Lewis (Manchester City Council), Laura Lock (South Cambridgeshire District Council), Alex Meek (Leeds City Council), Kath Richards (Southampton City Council), Alison Scott (Leicester City Council)

### 1 Welcome and approval of minutes

1.1 Ailsa Irvine advised that Pat Parker had been appointed by the Commission to work part time to assist with the production of the guidance and support products.

1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 13 August were approved.

1.3 European Parliamentary election results collation system – it was reported that only one region had submitted their feedback regarding the results system. The group were keen that the lessons from the experiences this year be recorded so that they could be considered in planning for future similar elections, and so all regions that had actually used the system were

asked to submit a bullet point list of their views of the performance of the system.

## 2 Update from RRO coordination group and suppliers' group

2.1 As the meeting scheduled for the 17 September has been postponed, there was nothing to report. The Electoral Commission understands that the MoJ are drafting new terms of reference for the RRO coordination group which will be shared with the working group.

2.2 Suppliers' group – it was also noted that the Suppliers' group had not met since 8 July.

## 3 UK Parliamentary nomination and other forms

3.1 Draft nomination forms had been circulated in advance of the meeting. James Pack explained the approach taken in drafting these, noting that he had used the Sunderland EPE model as a base. In most cases the wording was as prescribed in the rules. All the forms had been numbered and headed up with 'UK Parliamentary election'. General comments from the group included the following:

- The inclusion of the date of the election (when known) in the heading
- The 'receipt check' boxes were too small and a further box needed to be added on form 1 to indicate the number of nominations submitted by an individual candidate.
- A consistent approach needed to be applied to all forms especially with regard to initial capitals, punctuation, etc.
- The Commission were asked to explore the possibility of the forms being capable of being completed electronically.
- The group questioned if there needed to be a footnote bearing the name of the printer and publisher.
- Instructions at bottom to state '**Deliver to the (Acting) Returning Officer for the Constituency by 4 p.m.**' excluding the address so that the forms would be generic to all users.

3.2 Nomination paper (Form 1): the group commented as follows:

- Specific notes as listed on the reverse of the form should be identified by number if referred to on the face of the nomination paper.
- Although not prescribed, a further column should be added for the proposer, seconder and subscribers to print their name (This approach to be explained in the section on nominations in the Commission's candidates and agents guidance).

- The word 'elector' to be removed from the last column under subscribers.
- On the reverse side of the nomination form – the notes:
  - Amend the numbering
  - Reword the last note (number 7) about the description used by a candidate. (The Commission's draft candidates and agents' guidance will be checked to ensure consistent advice appears in the nominations section).
- The numbering of the forms used for nomination i.e. Nomination paper, home address form and candidate consent to nomination to be linked together as Forms 1, 1A and 1B to indicate that these three forms are all a required part of the nomination process.

### 3.3 Home address form (Form 1A – previously 2)

- Reformat heading to highlight the name of the form, especially as this is a new form to be completed by candidates.
- Revise layout and wording to emphasise the implications of part 1 and part 2.
- Highlight the need for the form to be delivered with the nomination paper to the (A)RO, repeating the deadline included on the nomination paper. There was some discussion about the inspection of nomination forms and the disclosure of the candidate's address and the fact that this needed to be made clear in the Commission's (A)RO guidance.

### 3.4 Candidate consent to nomination (Form 1B – previously 3)

- After the words 'House of Commons Disqualifications Act 1975' to add the word '(amended)' with possibly a reference to how to access this Act either on the form or in the Commission's candidates and agents guidance.

### 3.5 Certificate of authorisation (Form 2 – previously 4)

- Form to be revamped to reflect the discussion within the group
- Instructions regarding delivery to be added making it clear that the form is only required to be completed by those candidates standing on behalf of a political party.
- Form to be available as soon as possible as the parties may wish to issue these early.

### 3.6 Request for use of a party emblem (Form 3 – previously 5)

- There was discussion about the Commission numbering the emblems on the website to ensure accuracy of selection by the parties and the (A)ROs.

The group were assured that there were no emblems on the website that did not now have descriptions.

### 3.7 Appointment of election agent (Form 4 – previously 6)

- Forms 6 & 7 to be combined under heading 'Notice of Appointment of Election Agent'
- Office address – need for a reference note to the Commission's candidates and agents guidance regarding the location of the office address being in the constituency or neighbouring constituency.
- It was noted that if a candidate becomes their own agent there could be an issue with the publication of the address on the agents' notice if that candidate has completed part 2 of the home address form and does not want their address to be shown on the statement of persons nominated or the ballot paper.

3.8 It was agreed that the amendments discussed above would be made to the forms and revised copies circulated for further discussion at the next working group meeting.

## 4 Template checklist for outsourcing work and managing contracts

4.1 It was explained that the headings on the draft list circulated had been extracted from a formal legal contract that had been drawn up for the printing of ballot papers for the European Parliamentary election. Working group members agreed that the checklist should carry a 'disclaimer' that this was not an exhaustive list and that (A)ROs should seek their own legal and expert advice.

4.2 Point 7 – Audit and inspection – it was noted that this section should be amended to make the point that EC representatives and observers would also have the right to attend premises.

4.3 Point 11 – Freedom of Information – it was questioned whether the (A)RO is actually subject to FOI. The group therefore agreed that point 11 would be annotated to state that (A)ROs may wish to comply with FOI requests in the interests of transparency and should ensure that their contractors are aware of the need to make information available if required.

4.4 Point 12 – Data protection - A specific point was made with regard to Data protection in connection with the involvement of various software suppliers as opposed to one and the need to make sure they all comply with the rules around secure management and disposal of the data.

4.5 It was agreed that the list would be amended to reflect the above comments. Once finalised, the checklist will be made available for download from the Commission's website, and will be highlighted in the (A)ROs guidance manual and in any briefing sessions organised by the Commission.

## 5 Individual Electoral Registration

5.1 David Canning from the Ministry of Justice provided an overview of the main issues surrounding the introduction of IER. He also stated that Ministers were keen that, during the implementation, measures had to be put in place to maintain the register and if possible increase numbers through the use of data sharing.

5.2 David Canning explained that the MoJ were in the process of scoping out the vision in connection with developing a large change programme. This programme would be scheduled to cover the seven year timescale which would also address problems that have existed around registration so that appropriate solutions could be included in a holistic and long term view of the new system.

5.3 It was the intention to also engage wider than normal stakeholder groups giving more confidence that a new system would be more effective. The scoping was expected to include:

- Exploring methods to maintain the register
- Data matching pilots
- Data management/data validation and the systems required
- Local or national validation
- Data transfer
- The use of the identifiers (including which identifiers for which purpose)

5.4 Nina Ziaullah, Head of Strategic Communications with the Electoral Commission, circulated draft electoral registration forms in both portrait and landscape format to prompt comment and discussion. She emphasised that they were very much a work in progress especially as many parts of the new IER arrangements were yet to be finalised. She stated that once the forms were finished they would be subjected to usability testing and extensive discussions with electoral suppliers.

5.5 Specifically on Form B (rolling registration form) Nina stated that the natural process of completing the form was to start with the first names rather than the surname so the form had been designed in this order. The possibility of reviewing the request for 'title' was discussed to provide extra space.

5.6 Generally the group felt that:

- There may be reluctance for the over 70's to provide their date of birth when they are not legally required to.
- The NINo boxes should be amended to reflect the format used in other forms.

- The option for postal and proxy voting application could be removed as a postal voting application form could be sent with the registration acknowledgment. It was, however, noted that this idea could potentially disenfranchise a voter if the registration application was submitted close to the postal vote deadline for a particular election.
- Under the date of birth boxes, 'dd mm year' should be used as per other forms.
- There may be problems with scanning forms if there is printed material on the reverse.
- The box asking for previous address should specifically ask for post code.
- Address box will be user-tested with both free text and with lines.
- Signature waiver provision and a box for a witness signature are also an issue for further consideration.
- There is a need for the forms to include sufficient space for a barcode.
- The actual collection of PIs may be more effective if actioned after the canvass rather than as part of the canvass.

5.7 Nina also circulated a draft letter that could be despatched after publication of the register. The letter explained the legislative change driving the request for the PIs and also highlighted the improvement such change would bring to the security of the voting process.

5.8 A press release was suggested as a way of promoting the collection of the PIs with the details being made available to all EROs to use as part of their communications strategy, particularly as primary legislation dictates that the voluntary nature of the task must be explained.

## 6 Guidance material

6.1 The Commission advised that not all versions of the sections of the UKPGE guidance had been finalised but the need for a guidance to be ready for an autumn election was paramount and was driving the timescales for completion. The Commission were keen to share the drafts with the group in sufficient time for members' to be able to review the parts, as allocated at the previous meeting, with a view to feeding back by Friday 25 September in the hope that these could be incorporated in the UK Parliamentary guidance or be considered for the future development of guidance and support products.

6.2 As the guidance would be supplemented with other pieces of work, such as the count support products the group were discussing later in the meeting, there would be the opportunity to communicate further guidance on points of practice using other mechanisms and at a later stage in the process.

6.3 The UK Parliamentary planning guidance will be uploaded to the website in a modular style to afford easy access by administrators.

6.4 The England and Wales local government Returning Officers' guidance will be circulated to the group in early October, and will show what amendments have been made from the 2009 version. It was suggested that working group members should focus on the same sections as for the UKPGE guidance, i.e.

- Part A (Context) and Part C (Action before the poll): John Owen/Keith Hathaway/Alex Meek
- Part D (Absent voting) & Part E (The poll): Bill Crawford/Kath Richards/Debra Harrod
- Part F (The count): Pat Parker/Laura Lock/Gill Lewis
- Part G (After the declaration of result): Glynne Morgan/Robert Connelly
- Part H (Combination of polls): all

## 7 The count

7.1 The afternoon session was dedicated to discussion on arrangements around the count specifically:

- A count preparation check list
- The aims and objectives of an effective count
- The key count activities
- A typical structure for managing a count.
- Templates and business continuity plan

7.2 The Commission agreed to develop some draft support materials following on from the discussion, which will be circulated for discussion at the next working group meeting.

8 Date of next meeting – Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009