

Minutes of the Elections and Registration Working Group

15 December 2009

The Electoral Commission (Boothroyd Room), Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW

Present: Robert Connelly (Birmingham City Council)
Lindsay Dixon (Sunderland City Council)
Bill Gillatt (Leeds City Council)
Debra Harrod (Poole Borough Council)
Keith Hathaway (GLRO)
Ailsa Irvine (Electoral Commission)
Jill Lewis (Manchester City Council)
Glynne Morgan (Pembrokeshire County Council)
John Owen (AEA)
Pat Parker (Electoral Commission)
Kath Richards (Southampton City Council)

In attendance: *Items 1-8:* James Pack and Jennifer Martin Kohlmorgen (Electoral Commission)
Items 5-8: Lindsey Taber (Electoral Commission)
Item 9: Sue Parker & Debbie Warren (National Occupational Standards)

Apologies: Paul Brunton (MoJ)
Paul Docker (MoJ)
Laura Lock (South Cambridgeshire District Council)
Alex Meek (Leeds City Council)
Alison Scott (Leicester City Council)
Alex Thomson (City of Edinburgh Council)

1 Welcome and approval of minutes

1.1 The minutes of the meeting on 11 November were approved. The only outstanding action point concerned progress made by the MoJ regarding the letter it had been agreed should be sent to Regional Returning Officers outlining their continuing role, and which could then be sent out to all their Local Returning Officers. As MoJ had submitted apologies for the meeting,

the Commission undertook to follow this up with MoJ and to update the group accordingly.

1.2 It was agreed that in order to disseminate information on the work of the group in a timely way, minutes should be agreed and finalised by e-mail rather than delaying this process until the next meeting of the group. The Commission undertook to continue to supply draft minutes within a week of each meeting, for approval by group members within a further week. The minutes will then be uploaded onto the Commission's website as a way of keeping administrators informed of the decisions and action being taken in preparation for the UK Parliamentary general election. Copies of the minutes will also be provided to Nigel Hurlll of the AEA, which can then be uploaded to the AEA website and highlighted in the weekly newsletter.

2 Update and issues for consideration from the Elections Co-ordination Group (ECG)

2.1 In the absence of the MoJ, the Commission provided a brief overview of the matters discussed at the 1 December meeting of the ECG, which included fees and charges and Royal Mail issues. Ailsa Irvine agreed to contact the MoJ to obtain a copy of the minutes of the meeting for circulation to the members of the working group.

3. Election issues

3.1 It was suggested that 'Election issues' should be a standing item on future agendas in the lead up to the forthcoming UKPGE and the May local government elections in England.

3.2 The group discussed the colour of ballot papers for the forthcoming elections. It was noted that the majority of (Acting) Returning Officers intend to use white for the UK Parliamentary election, although there will be some exceptions. For the local elections in England, a wide variety of colours will be used, although it was noted that if the elections are not combined and the UK Parliamentary election has taken place earlier, many authorities intend to use white for their local election ballot papers. The group agreed that there was no particular value in any recommendations being made in respect of colour as long as authorities have early discussions with their printers on this point.

3.3 The group also discussed the issuing of poll cards at combined elections. A query from one authority was discussed which concerned the potential for issuing the local government poll card at the end of March which, if the UKPGE had not been called by this point, would include a reference to the UK Parliamentary election, and whether this could replace issuing a UK Parliamentary poll card once that election was called. The group agreed that this approach would not conform to the legislation. The majority of members present who are facing potential combination noted that they intend to issue separate poll cards for each election.

3.4 Beyond these two issues, members of the group were asked to identify any particular issues they thought worthy of more in depth discussion. The

potential of combination and the various issues which need to be considered in preparation for this were discussed at length. It was agreed that the Commission should produce a note on the implications of a combined election, highlighting key points administrators should be considering as part of their preparations, for discussion at the next meeting. In particular the group identified the following areas:

- Poll cards (combined or separate)
- Postal votes (combined or separate; cross-boundary arrangements)
- Ballot boxes (one or two; potential for lending of ballot boxes by authorities without combined elections)

3.3 It was agreed that the final paper should be made more widely available to help administrators with their decision making. Further consideration will be given to how these key messages can be disseminated at the next meeting. As a starting point to support any Commission circulation, the group suggested that the Commission approach Nigel Hurlll at the AEA with a request for the document to be included as part of his weekly newsletter.

4. English local government nomination and other forms

4.1 James Pack presented the final version of the UK Parliamentary general election nomination forms and demonstrated how they could be completed on screen and printed for signature. James explained that these forms together with a candidate checklist were now available on the Commission's website.

4.2 James also circulated copies of the draft English local government nomination forms. He explained that these would no longer form part of the candidates and agents guidance manual but would instead be made available on the Commission's website in the same way as the UK Parliamentary forms.

4.3 The detail of the draft forms was discussed and the working group suggested a range of changes/amendments to be incorporated into a second version. In particular, they commented on the need for the home address box to be larger and the need to cross-reference the parts of the forms for completion with the notes on the reverse. Additionally, the 'busy' consent form was identified as needing amendment to ensure candidates understood the need to identify all of the qualification criteria that are applicable and also makes clear that being on the register in the local government area does not need to be satisfied by all candidates.

4.4 James agreed to supply a revised version to the working group by 7 January for their final comments. It is intended that a final version of the forms will be available on the Commission's website by 13 January.

5. Guidance update

5.1 The working group were updated on the latest publication dates for the core UK Parliamentary general election and English local government election guidance and support products.

5.2 Ailsa explained that a circular will be sent out on 5 January summarising all of the Commission's guidance and support for the 2010 elections, and to highlight when and how that will be made available. This will include information on the ordering and distribution of hard copies of the candidates and agents guidance and polling station handbooks.

6. Count support product

6.1 A revised version of the guidance was circulated to the working group. Pat Parker explained that she had included completed forms as examples to support the written explanations in the guidance. She took the group through the completion of each form and demonstrated how she had used the figures from a mock count that she had organised at the Commission using 2,500 ballots papers with votes marked for five candidates.

6.2 It was agreed that this model should now be finalised and loaded onto the Commission's website together with a blank set of model forms in both Word and Excel format. It was also agreed that the final forms should be sent to the software suppliers.

6.3 It was noted that following discussions at the last working group meeting, an article has been written for the next edition of Arena, which will be published in January.

7. Doubtful ballot papers

7.1 Examples of doubtful ballot papers for both UK Parliamentary and local elections were circulated and discussed. In general, it was agreed that the examples used should be those provided for previous elections but that the size of the ballot paper used in the examples should be larger and that any new examples included would need to be supported by case law.

7.2 The Commission undertook to circulate a draft of the placemats and booklets to the working group and the ECG for comment by mid-January.

8. Polling station support

8.1 The working group were invited to suggest the type of support products that they thought would be useful to administrators in relation to the management of the polling station, in particular to address the aspects of the process identified at the last working group meeting.

8.2 It was generally agreed that a PowerPoint presentation would be very useful, provided it was modular in design and covered the key issues that they had identified at the previous meeting. It was also suggested that

quizzes, role play examples, and other means of testing learning would add value. Polling station inspector checklists will also be developed.

8.2 It was agreed that the above products would be developed and circulated to the group for comment by the next meeting, with a view to having final products available to administrators by the end of January.

9. National Occupational Standards

9.1 Sue Parker and Debbie Warren provided an overview of the work they had are carrying out on behalf of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to review the electoral services standards to make them more user friendly and generic. They explained that their remit was not to make significant change to the standards but to tweak them with a view to carrying out a more comprehensive review in two years time following the commencement of the implementation of IER. The import of two new standards on managing change, however, were given as an example of an effort to future-proof the standards to an extent, as was the approach of avoiding reference to particular pieces of legislation.

9.2 There was some discussion about the potential for the revised standards to be linked in to a qualification. The AEA will discuss the potential for mapping the standards across to their qualifications separately.

9.3 Glynne Morgan raised the issue of translation of the revised standards into Welsh, and was advised that funding for this was available.

9.4 The working group were advised that the cut-off date for any further comments on the revised standards to be sent to Debbie Warren was 11 January.

10. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 12 January 2010 at the Electoral Commission, Trevelyan House (Boothroyd Room).

Post-meeting note: it has now been decided to cancel this meeting. Although there will be e-mail consultation throughout January, the next meeting of the group is now scheduled to take place on 10 February.