

Draft Minutes of the Elections and Registration Working Group

13 August 2009

Trevelyan House, Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW

Present: Jess Bishop (Electoral Commission)
Kate Brightwell (Electoral Commission)
Bill Crawford (Sunderland City Council)
Debra Harrod (Poole Borough Council)
Keith Hathaway (GLRO)
Tom Hawthorn (Electoral Commission)
Ailsa Irvine (Electoral Commission)
Gill Lewis (Manchester City Council)
Laura Lock (South Cambridgeshire District Council)
Jennifer Martin-Kohlmorgen (Electoral Commission)
Alex Meek (Leeds City Council)
Glynne Morgan (Pembrokeshire County Council)
John Owen (AEA)
James Pack (Electoral Commission)
Pat Parker (London Borough of Lewisham)
Karen Quaintmere (Electoral Commission)
Kath Richards (Southampton City Council)
Peter Richardson (Ministry of Justice)
Jason Smithwick (Ministry of Justice)
Phil Thompson (Electoral Commission)

Apologies: Robert Connelly (Birmingham City Council)

1 Welcome and approval of minutes

1.1 The minutes of the meeting on 07 July were approved.

1.2 During the discussion of the minutes, the group considered that it would be useful to record the experiences of those RROs who used results collation software at the European Parliamentary election as part of the post-election evaluation. Members agreed to seek feedback on this from their RROs and to report back to the Commission.

Post election meeting note: given the advanced state of the election reporting process, members are advised to submit their feedback as soon as possible to the Commission.

2 Update from RRO coordination group and suppliers' group

2.1 Minutes of the latest RRO and suppliers' meetings were circulated ahead of the meeting. Pat Parker also provided a brief overview of the key points from both meetings.

Suppliers' group

2.2 Pat Parker commented on the dichotomy between the views of administrators and those of suppliers: while administrators are concerned about the capacity of suppliers, suppliers appear to present themselves as keen to take on an increasing workload.

2.3 The group agreed that it was important for administrators to improve their contract management and to ensure that they mitigate risks by monitoring the quality of the work of suppliers. It was agreed that the Commission would produce a checklist of issues to consider when outsourcing work, and that the group would feed into the development of this.

RRO group

2.4 It was noted that one of the key messages that emerged from the latest RRO group meeting related to the need for future support to focus on basic count management and the efficient management of polling stations.

2.5 More detailed discussions on the count took place in the afternoon (see count section below).

3 Evaluation of Commission guidance and support products

3.1 Phil Thompson updated the group on the feedback received on the Commission's guidance and support products. Overall, all of the main products were well received. There was, however, low awareness of some of the online templates. Also, there was some disagreement expressed by several respondents with the Commission's guidance on CNLs at combined elections, and some respondents thought that the guidance on AVI checking was too detailed and therefore did not match their processes.

3.2 It was noted that the Commission do recognise the concerns that have been expressed regarding its guidance on CNLs at combined elections, and that this had already been highlighted at the last meeting of the working group, where it was agreed the guidance would be re-visited and revised in consultation with the group.

3.3 Analysis on the use of the various templates will help to inform the range of support products developed for future elections, including the next UK Parliamentary general election.

3.4 One respondent to the evaluation requested online interactive training tools. In response to this request, the group agreed to take an initial look at

different possible approaches to delivering guidance and approach in the future at a meeting in early 2010.

3.5 The final evaluation report will be circulated to the group once it is completed.

4 Future work programme and meeting dates

4.1 A list of future meeting dates was circulated.

4.2 The group discussed potential approaches for commenting on drafts of Commission guidance products. Members agreed that it would be useful if the Commission could highlight changes from previous versions and divide large documents, such as the guidance manual for (Acting) Returning Officers at a UK Parliamentary general election, into more manageable parts for consideration by groups.

4.3 It was agreed that upcoming drafts of the UKPGE (A)RO manual would be split between the group members as appropriate:

- Part A (Context) and Part C (Action before the poll): John Owen/Keith Hathaway/Alex Meek (available from 27/08 to 25/09)
- Part D (Absent voting) & Part E (The poll): Bill Crawford/Kath Richards/Debra Harrod (available from 08/09 to 25/09)
- Part F (The count): Pat Parker/Laura Lock/Gill Lewis (available from 08/09 to 25/09)
- Part G (After the declaration of result): Glynne Morgan (available 11/09 to 25/09)
- Part H (Combination of polls): everyone (available from 11/09 to 25/09)

4.4 Ailsa Irvine provided an overview of the tentative work plan for forthcoming working group meetings, which was agreed with the group:

- 9 September: Count support; UKPGE nomination and other forms; UKPGE (A)RO guidance; *IER*
- 14 October: Review of draft count support products; England and Wales local government guidance; *IER*
- 11 November: Polling station support (including consideration of combined CNL guidance)
- 15 December: Doubtful ballot guidance; England and Wales local government elections nomination and other forms
- 12 January: Support products
- 10 February: E-learning/future approaches to guidance
- 9 March: *Election issues*

4.5 It was noted that this plan will need to remain flexible to deal with any issues arising, particularly around individual electoral registration, and so that the group can be prepared to consider anything referred to the group from the RROs.

5 Elections during the canvass

5.1 The group briefly discussed the Commission's new guidance on elections during the canvass arising from the legislative changes made by the PPE Act.

5.2 Members debated at what point forms are considered to have been "returned to the ERO" and John Owen questioned whether the Commission should be explicitly saying in its guidance that canvass forms are considered returned to the ERO if they are in the hand of a canvasser.

5.3 The Commission explained that it was seeking legal advice on the issue but that there was a strong possibility that canvass forms returned to a canvasser could be considered "returned to the ERO". The MoJ stated that this had been their intention when drafting the legislation.

6 Essentials of effective election management

6.1 The Commission informed the group that the planning section of the UK Parliamentary election guidance to (Acting) Returning Officers is currently in production. It was noted that it will no longer feature in the manual, but instead will be published as a stand-alone product ahead of the release of the full manual.

6.2 Karen Quaintmere gave an overview of the checklist for (Acting) Returning Officers that has been included in the new planning document. The group supported the approach taken. Bill Crawford suggested that potential combination be split into a separate bullet point

6.3 A draft version of the more detailed planning guidance will be circulated to group members on 21 August.

7 The count

7.1 Following the feedback from the RRO co-ordination group meeting regarding the need for guidance and support to focus on basic count management, the group considered possible mechanisms for achieving this.

7.2 Members were keen for Part F of the (Acting) Returning Officers to remain the main source of reference for the count, but that the Commission should explore alternative mechanisms for providing guidance (e.g. via practical tools and templates). Members also suggested looking at count resources produced by Melvin Humphreys and posted on the AEA website.

7.3 It was agreed that a follow-up discussion on count guidance would take place at the next meeting on 9 September. While the 9 September meeting will focus on the detail of what support will be needed, the 14 October meeting will be used to review drafts of these products.

8 Individual electoral registration (IER)

8.1 Tom Hawthorn provided an overview of the work the Commission has been doing and will be doing in collaboration with the MoJ on IER.

8.2 In particular, he updated the group on its work on forms for the collection of personal identifiers (PIs). He informed the group that the Commission had employed a design agency and that it would undertake usability research with the general public on the PI collection process and form design.

8.3 The design agency has been contracted to look at the following options for collecting PIs:

- Amendments to the existing rolling registration form
- Re-designed canvass form on which to provide PIs
- A separate form for the collection of PIs after an individual has registered through the canvass

8.4 The group discussed issues around forms and the process for collecting PIs in more detail. Members noted that collecting and storing PIs could have security and cost implications.

Layout and form content

8.5 The group expressed their support for a uniform form, but generally felt that it should be capable of some local adaptation.

8.6 Portrait forms were seen as preferable to forms produced in landscape. The group suggested that all of the information the elector needs to provide and which needs to be scanned should be contained on the same side of the form to ease processing.

8.7 The group was supportive of forms including additional information in the form of Q&As or FAQs to help people to complete them, but agreed that this additional information could be provided with the form on a separate.

8.8 It was highlighted that forms will need to be able to capture if someone does not have a National Insurance number. It was also noted that the management of signature waivers will also have to be considered.

8.9 Providing a space on the form for the voluntary provision of contact details (e.g. telephone number and email address) on the form was also considered useful, allowing administrators to contact electors quickly if they need clarification.