

## Minutes of the Elections and Registration Working Group

14 October 2009

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

**Present:** Paul Brunton (Ministry of Justice) (for item 2)  
Robert Connelly (Birmingham City Council)  
Lindsey Dixon (Sunderland City Council)  
Bill Gillatt (Leeds City Council)  
Debra Harrod (Poole Borough Council)  
Keith Hathaway (GLRO)  
Tom Hawthorn (Electoral Commission)  
Ailsa Irvine (Electoral Commission)  
Laura Lock (South Cambridgeshire District Council)  
Jennifer Martin-Kohlmorgen (Electoral Commission)  
Glynne Morgan (Pembrokeshire County Council)  
Clyde Murray (Ministry of Justice) (for item 4)  
John Owen (AEA)  
James Pack (Electoral Commission)  
Pat Parker (Electoral Commission)  
Karen Quaintmere (Electoral Commission)  
Malcolm Rawlings (Ministry of Justice) (for item 7)  
Kath Richards (Southampton City Council)  
Phil Tucker (Electoral Commission)

Apologies: Jill Lewis (Manchester City 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1.1 Ailsa Irvine opened the meeting, thanked everyone for their contributions to the consultation on various draft guidance materials and for responding quickly, assisting the Commission to meet its publication timescales.

1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 9 September were approved with a correction to the spelling of Bill Gillatt's name.

1.3 European Parliamentary election results collation system: the short paper pulling together feedback from London and Southampton was approved as being the working group's record of the experience of those that used the system at the European Parliamentary election.

## 2 Update from the Elections Coordination Group and Suppliers' Group

2.1 Paul Brunton (MoJ) explained that the previous Regional Returning Officers Group had been renamed the Elections Coordination Group and were due to have their first meeting on 27 October. New terms of reference had been drafted and the group would be chaired and supported by the MoJ with representation from Regional Returning Officers, the Electoral Commission, and the Association of Electoral Administrators. It was proposed that the revised terms of reference should be shared with the working group once agreed on 27 October.

2.2 Similarly the Suppliers Group had not met since August, a meeting that was reported as being far too large to be effective with more than one representative from many of the companies in attendance. Paul Brunton agreed that new terms of reference was needed for the continuation of a similar group with a limitation on one person only to represent each supplier. He added that he was keen to retain the electoral knowledge that they collectively brought to the table and wanted to balance this with input from electoral practitioners.

## 3. Submission and transmission of registers to the Commission

3.1 Phil Tucker (Head of IT at the Commission) attended the working group to discuss the issues around transmitting register data to the Commission. He explained that in order to improve the security of the data being transmitted he wanted to set up a secure portal which would encrypt information as it was received. Phil, therefore, asked the working group if they thought there would be any problems if local authorities were asked to process information in this way.

3.2 The working group raised the issue of information being stored and transmitted in a variety of different formats according to the requirements of the electoral management system being used. It was also suggested that Phil should attend the Suppliers' Group meeting where he would be able to explore any potential technical difficulties with the suppliers themselves.

3.3 In principal the working group could understand the need for the added security arrangements and, subject to any technical issues being resolved, were fully supportive of the initiative.

3.4 The timescale for the proposed installation is not yet fixed but was estimated as being early next year.

3.5 With regard to access to the 1 December 09 registers and future years, James Pack highlighted the Boundary Commission's recent request for

register data to separately identify the over 70's as they will be dealing with Jury lists in future. James explained that the Jury Summoning Board would need to appoint the Boundary Commission to be their data processing agent before registers identifying the above markers could be legally transmitted to the Boundary Commission.

3.6 Publication of the register on 1 December and new Parliamentary boundaries: James explained that the Commission's position remained as given in Circular EC34/2007. The Commission explained that a Circular on matters relating to supply of registers would be sent out shortly and would cover this issue.

## 4. Individual Electoral Registration

4.1 Clyde Murray from the MoJ advised the Working Group that they had organised two workshops to help to identify the actions required for the voluntary phase of the IER programme which was scheduled to commence as part of the 2010 canvass. He stated that the timelines were very tight if this part of the project was to be completed for 1 July 2010.

4.2 With regard to the storage of identifiers it was confirmed that suppliers will not have systems in place before January 2011.

4.3 Clyde stated that funding for local authorities was likely to be paid through grants based on a specific formula.

4.4 Publicity: Tom Hawthorn explained that there was currently a debate about whether the campaign approach should be 'explanation and promotion' or 'explanation' only. The Working Group stressed that if Electoral Registration Officers needed to supplement the national campaign they would have to make provision in their 2010/2011 budgets and the Commission were, therefore, asked to ensure that information was disseminated in a timely manner.

## 5. Count support products

5.1 Pat Parker introduced the draft guidance paper on 'The mini counting approach' explaining that she had included all the ideas that had been discussed at the previous Working Group meeting either in the body of the report or as appendices. She emphasised that she had deliberately kept the procedure as simple as possible as a way of encouraging (Acting) Returning Officers and/or their practitioners to review their count arrangements. She added that there were, of course, variations to the system she had described, some of which were more sophisticated than others.

5.2 Feedback already received internally from the Commission covered:

- The need for further instructions as to how to complete the forms

- Addressing the physical challenge of managing vast numbers of bundles allocated to each pair of counting assistants especially if the ballot papers were longer than normal
- The adjudication process and the need to commence this as early as possible.

5.3 Mini counting on a ward basis: there was some debate about the danger of using wards as the separation of the whole count as in so doing many agents might expect to receive results on a ward basis. This approach would also introduce the need for a decision about the management of postal votes received for a UK Parliamentary election and the fact that managing these on a ward basis might not be viable.

5.4 The forms/templates, etc.: the Working Group suggested that the election management system suppliers should be asked to include these, once formalised, within their elections programmes so that they could be automatically populated from other data bases stored on their systems i.e. the list of candidates, the polling station numbers and their addresses, the presiding officers' names and contact details. It was agreed that this item should be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Suppliers' Group.

5.5 Dissemination of guidance: the Working Group was asked for their views with regard to encouraging the use of mini counting as a way of improving transparency and confidence in the vital end product of an election. Generally it was agreed that, once finalised, the guidance should be promoted through the Commission's seminars, as well as via the normal EC Circular distribution and also, possibly, on the AEA website.

5.6 Working Group members were asked to e-mail any final thoughts on the guidance by the end October to enable the document to be finalised and made available as suggested above.

## 6. National Occupational Standards (NOS) Review

6.1 Debbie Warren, Consultant working on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council, informed the Working Group that she was undertaking a review of the Electoral Services NOS and to assess the progress made since their inception in 2007. She further explained that, amongst other things, the introduction of Performance Standards by the Commission meant that amendments were needed to bring the NOS in line with the changes in the electoral services environment.

6.2 Debbie circulated a one page map identifying the linkages between the NOS and Performance Standards that highlighted the areas of NOS that may require change.

6.3 A further document was circulated that had been colour coded according to priority to assist the consultation process. It was stated that the review needed to take place before the end of the financial year.

6.4 Karen Quintmere remarked that the main focus needed to be around 'Managing Change' and expressed support for the NOS to be up-dated in the near future. She further stated that a new custodian to take over the funding and the ongoing maintenance was crucial given the uncertainty about Skills Plus.

6.5 It was suggested that some of the issues being raised by Debbie should be discussed with the Commission (Tom Hawthorn and Andrew Scallan) and the AEA (John Turner), but that more generally the Working Group were willing to have input to the drafts of the revised NOS. The Commission agreed to provide Debbie with the e-mail addresses of the Working Group members to assist with the consultation process.

6.6 There was some doubt about how extensively the NOS were being used as part of electoral staff development and although the workshop at the last AEA Conference at Brighton had been well received it was obvious that more exposure to these standards would be required once they were amended. Debbie re-assured the Working Group that re-branding was being considered in preparation for a fully funded national launch initiative.

## 7. Fees & Charges and Efficiency Group update

7.1 Malcolm Rawlings from the MoJ explained to the Group that he was working on the Fees and Charges Order for the next UK Parliamentary election. He stated that he was preparing one set of fees for a combined election on 6 May and another set for a single UK Parliamentary election. He also added that his proposals would make recommendations for any by-elections held during the term of a Parliament. He expected the Charges Order to be made by the end of the year allowing for early distribution in 2010.

7.2 On the progress with the Efficiency Group, Malcolm advised that there had been three meetings and although many of the ideas being discussed would need changes to legislation the Efficiency Group had supported the change with regard to grants which had resulted in the Consultation Paper being distributed by the MoJ to all Returning Officers on 7 October.

7.3 Working Group members questioned Malcolm on the recovery of monies relating to IT and storage costs and stated that there needed to be more clarity around the proposals described in the consultation paper.

7.4 The Working Group was reminded that the deadline for response to the consultation was 6 November, and all were encouraged to collate and submit the responses from their regions by the deadline. Malcolm also stated that for the time being the grants system had been suspended and that any debts around previous grants were being written off.

## 8. UK Parliamentary nomination and other forms

8.1 James Pack circulated updated nomination forms and *Part B: Action before the poll* of the draft (A)RO guidance. He asked for any further comments from the Working Group by close of play on Monday 19 October.

8.2 James highlighted some of the key changes to the guidance. He pointed out that the Commission were recommending that the nomination forms should be retained, along with all other sensitive documentation, for a period of one year, except for the candidate's home address form as the law requires that these must be destroyed on the next working day following the 21<sup>st</sup> day after the return of the writ.

8.3 The Commission anticipated that the forms, once properly designed, together with the guidance would be available on the website in December 2009. In addition, the guidance will be undergoing the usual publication process and will be online in December, with hard copies distributed to (Acting) Returning Officers in January. The possibility of 'online' completion of the nomination forms is also being investigated by the Commission.

## 9. Referendum results event planning

9.1 Karen Quintmere advised the Group that the Commission was keen to develop some scenario planning around the management of a referendum results event. She asked the group if they would be willing to provide any examples of documentation that would assist the Commission in developing plans to be prepared for the eventuality of a referendum being called, and suggested that the group could explore the topic in more depth at its next meeting.

## 10. Polling station support

10.1 Ailsa Irvine took the opportunity to thank the group for their work at the previous meeting on the mini count procedure and explained that she wanted to do something similar at the next meeting on support for the polling station staff, and asked the group to come along prepared for such a session so that any new ideas around new or revised products could be discussed and developed.

10.2 She explained that there would be the usual Polling Station Handbook, Quick Guide, PowerPoint slides but asked the group for any initial thoughts on what else would be desirable. It was suggested that, perhaps, a more modular approach could be considered with the inclusion of exercises to be used at training sessions. Also, the need for products to be pitched at different levels might be a consideration.

10.3 The PowerPoint slides were generally thought to be very useful and the feeling was that it was better to have more slides than less to give (Acting) Returning Officers and their staff a choice of what to include provided they signed up to the core messages/modules.

10.4 There was some discussion around the production of the products, including around the need for printed copies of polling station handbooks to be produced by the Commission. The Group suggested that for future years perhaps the Commission could consider printing inserts for ring binders in black and white but with well designed header sheets to link to the appropriate election event.

**11. AOB**

11.1 Local government Returning Officer guidance: Ailsa stated that this guidance would be distributed to the Group ahead of the next meeting.

**12. Date and time of next meeting**

12.1 Wednesday 11 November 2009 in the Boothroyd Room, Trevelyan House, starting at 10.30 with tea and coffee.