

## Minutes of the Elections and Registration Working Group

10 February 2010

Mothers' Union Building, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P  
3RB

**Present:** Paul Brunton (Ministry of Justice)  
Lindsay Dixon (Sunderland City Council)  
Bill Gillatt (Leeds City Council)  
Debra Harrod (Poole Borough Council)  
Keith Hathaway (GLRO)  
Ailsa Irvine (Electoral Commission)  
Laura Lock (South Cambridgeshire District Council)  
Jill Lewis (Manchester City Council)  
Glynne Morgan (Pembrokeshire County Council)  
James Pack (Electoral Commission)  
Pat Parker (Electoral Commission)  
Kath Richards (Southampton City Council)  
Alison Scott (Leicester City Council)

**In attendance:** *Items 4 & 5:* Paul Docker (Ministry of Justice)

**Apologies:** Robert Connolly (Birmingham City Council)  
Alex Meek (Leeds City Council)  
John Owen (AEA)  
Alex Thomson (City of Edinburgh Council)

### 1 Welcome and apologies

1.1 Ailsa Irvine thanked members for their attendance and gave a brief overview of the key issues to be covered on the agenda. In particular, she highlighted service voters and cross-boundary issues as being matters for discussion under the item 'Other election issues'.

1.2 Apologies had been received from Robert Connolly, John Owen and Alex Thomson. Alex Meek also sent apologies, with Bill Gillatt in attendance in his stead.

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

2.1 Paul Brunton briefed the working group on the meeting held on 26 January and in particular noted that the ECG had agreed the content of the letter that had been drafted for RROs to send out to Returning Officers in their electoral regions about the role and purpose of the ECG and E&RWG. He also mentioned that the fees & charges had been finalised, highlighting that 100% funding had been secured for PVI checking and that provision had been made for Royal Mail sweeps to be carried out.

2.2 With regard to aborted costs for parish and community elections Paul Brunton agreed to check whether any provisions would be included in the fees and charges order.

## 3. Election issues - Combination

3.1 The Commission highlighted the key points addressed by the combination issues paper that the working group had requested be produced at its last meeting and which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

3.2 James Pack provided an overview of the key points related to potential combination and in particular regarding the postponement of the poll at contested parish council elections. It was agreed that given the complexity around postponement, a separate section be added to the 'Issues paper' clarifying the questions that had been raised.

3.3 With regard to official poll cards it was established that most of the members in the group were planning on separate poll cards. The Commission endorsed this approach given that combined poll cards cannot be despatched until after the publication of the notice of the UK Parliamentary election.

3.4 It was agreed that as part of the Commission's post-election review, the detail in the issues paper should be incorporated into the relevant guidance manuals when they are next revised for future elections.

3.5 In view of the urgent nature of the issues discussed, the Commission agreed to circulate a revised paper for comment on Monday 15 February for comment, with a view to final distribution to the local authorities affected by combination by Wednesday 17 February. For completeness, the guidance document would also be passed to the AEA for uploading to their website along with the minutes of this meeting. (**Post-meeting note:** the revised paper was circulated to group members on 16/02 for comment by 18/02, with a view to wider circulation from 19/02)

## 4. Other election issues

4.1 Service voters – Paul Docker gave a detailed explanation of the proposal for expediting postal votes for service voters currently serving or likely to be stationed in Afghanistan. It was stated that the Commission will be sending out a circular once all arrangements have been finalised with the MoJ/MoD.

4.2 Cross boundary issues – Paul briefed the group on the discussions between the MoJ, the Commission and suppliers at the AEA Conference regarding cross-boundary PVI checking, and in particular to ensure that appropriate systems were in place to deal with replacements for lost/spoilt postal votes. It was agreed by the working group members that whatever system is adopted for the issuing of replacement postal ballot packs, the following principles must be adhered to:

- The process must prevent the original postal ballot paper being sent to the count
- The postal vote list should be marked when the replacement is returned
- The PVI's must still be checked

## 5. Guidance update

5.1 James Pack provided an overview of progress on the Commission's guidance and support programme for the forthcoming elections.

5.2 The Returning Officers and candidates and agents guidance were published on the website in December and hard copies are now in process of being distributed.

5.3 Polling station support material – all UKPGE polling station products, including the polling station handbook, are now on the Commission's website. Hard copies of the handbook (and the standalone local government and combined UKPGE/local government versions) are currently being printed for distribution in the first week in March.

5.4 Count support products – a local government version of the count support pack is currently being developed. Doubtful ballot booklets and placemats for both UKPGE and English local government elections have now been finalised and will be on the website in mid-March, with hard copies following shortly after.

5.5 The group agreed that FAQs for front line staff would be useful together with a PowerPoint template for briefing candidates and agents. The Commission agreed to develop these products and make them available on the website as soon as possible.

5.6 In response to reports of difficulties with completing the statement as to postal ballot papers (Form K) and the need for this form to be absolutely accurate, it was agreed that there was a need to improve the guidance for completing this form, which should also be shared with the software suppliers.

## 6. Referendum results event planning

6.1 It was explained that the purpose of this session was to assist the Commission with their planning to deal with potential referendums whether UK-wide or Wales only, and to enable the Commission to benefit from the experiences of group members in running regional results collation events at the European Parliamentary elections.

6.2 The discussion focussed on objectives for the results collation event as well as logistics, transparency, managing stakeholders and display of information and results.

6.3 There was agreement from group members that they would be willing to feed in further information and comments either individually or collectively to support the Commission in its planning.

## 7. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 9 March 2010 at the Mothers Union Building, 24 Tufton Street,  
SW1P 3RB