



Cabinet Office Elections Policy and Co-ordination Group

**13th Meeting, 14.00-16.00 Tuesday 2nd July 2013
Cabinet Office, 1 Horse Guards Road SW1A 2HQ**

Attendees

UK Government

Alex Thomas Head of Elections and Parliament Division, Cabinet Office (Chair)
Colin Dingwall Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)
Paul Docker Head of Electoral Administration, (Cabinet Office)
Adam Shoosmith Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)
Matt Carey Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)
Eileen Vagg Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)
David Olima Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)
Carol Gokce Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)
Ian Barber Department for Communities and Local Government
Ashton Cotter Home Office
Philippa Saunders Northern Ireland Office
Ady Garrett HMRC (for item 5)

Returning Officers (and/or representatives)

Kate Brown (KB) Manchester City Council (North West)
Ann Coronel (AC) Chelmsford City Council (Eastern)
Mark Heath (MH) Southampton City Council (South East)
John Mulcahy (JM) Leeds City Council (Yorkshire & the Humber)
Bryn Parry-Jones (BPJ) Pembrokeshire County Council (Wales)
Shirley Plenderleith (SP) Kettering Borough Council (East Midlands)
Graham Shields (GS) Chief Electoral Officer (Northern Ireland)

Association of Electoral Administrators

John Turner Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)

Electoral Commission

Peter Wardle Chief Executive
Tom Hawthorn Head of Electoral Policy

Operation Black Vote (for item 6)

Simon Woolley Director

Apologies

Sir Howard Bernstein Manchester City Council (North West)

David Cook Kettering Borough Council (East Midlands)

Stephen Hughes Birmingham City Council (West Midlands)

Samantha Mills Electoral Commission

Paul Morris Borough of Poole Council (South West)

Mary Pitcaithly Falkirk Council and Convener, Electoral Management Board for Scotland (Scotland)

Tom Riordan Leeds City Council (Yorkshire & the Humber)

Joanne Roney Wakefield Council

Paul Rowsell Department for Communities and Local Government

Dave Smith Sunderland City Council (and SOLACE representative)

Defra

Scotland Office

Wales Office

Minutes

1. Minutes of previous meeting

1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

1.2 The issue of Count Collation Systems had been referred to the Electoral Commission's Working Group and will be considered at its next meeting.

1.3 CO had undertaken to set out the campaign spending process at neighbourhood planning referendums. This had been sent to colleagues in advance of this meeting.

2. European Parliamentary Elections

2.1 CO provided an update on the legislation for the European Elections, confirming that it was expected that the conduct rules would be laid before Parliament ahead of the summer recess.

2.2 CO confirmed that the European Parliament had ratified the date of the forthcoming European Elections, which meant that, in the United Kingdom, polling day will be 22 May 2014. CO had received confirmation that, despite the accession of Croatia to the European Union on 1 July, the number of MEPs for the United Kingdom remains unchanged.

2.3 DCLG confirmed that the outcome of the Department's consultation on the local elections scheduled for in May 2014 had been supportive of moving the date in order to combine polls with the European Elections. An order to this effect had been laid before Parliament and is scheduled be considered by the House of Lords on 24 July and then by the House of Commons in September.

2.4 On a point of detail for early resolution, discussion identified a clear consensus amongst the group for the ballot papers to be used at the 2014 European Parliamentary elections to be printed on white paper.

- 2.5 Once CO receives confirmation of the arrangements for the RRO role for the London region, the order designating all RROs for the 2014 European Elections will be sent to the Electoral Commission for approval followed by a submission to Ministers for signature. *(Post-meeting note – the draft order has now been sent to the Electoral Commission)*
- 2.6 The ‘Information Exchange’ of elector data for those choosing to vote in their place of residence rather than their Member State of citizenship at the forthcoming European elections was discussed. CO confirmed that there will need to be a process in place and that information and guidance around the approach will be circulated once a scheme has been established.
- 2.7 There was discussion about the verification and count processes at the European elections, particularly where the election will be combined with local elections. The consensus was that RROs should discuss approaches to this collectively, recognising the need for some degree of flexibility to account for local circumstances. It was agreed that this should be discussed further at the Electoral Commission’s Working Group prior to further consideration at the EPGC meeting. **Action: Working Group / RROs**
- 2.8 CO presented an update on the timetable for electoral legislation over the course of 2013. In addition to the European and United Kingdom parliamentary elections, it was intended to update the rules for the local and mayoral elections and for local referendums, prioritising those elections scheduled to be held in May 2014. EPCG members agreed to CO’s proposal to prioritise work on the legislation for scheduled polls. *(Post-meeting note – the conduct rules for the European Parliamentary elections were laid before Parliament on the 9th July and are on-track to be debated soon after the summer Parliamentary recess)*
- 2.09 DCLG gave a brief update on the neighbourhood planning referendums. CO reminded the meeting that it is important for electoral services departments to work closely with colleagues in their planning Departments to ensure they are aware of any Neighbourhood Planning referendums scheduled for next May.
- 2.10 CO confirmed it is exploring the indemnity option to cover Returning Officers at the 2014 European Parliamentary elections. Approval of any indemnity / insurance scheme will require agreement from HM Treasury and CO Ministers. CO undertook to share the form of wording of the cover arranged with the Group once final agreement has been reached. **Action: CO**

3. Draft Roles & Responsibilities Document for Regional Returning Officers & Local Returning Officers

- 3.1 CO set out a draft document based on the present Regional Returning Officers (RRO) role description and on the description of Local Returning Officers (LRO) functions as used at the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. CO asked colleagues to consider whether updating such a document would be useful, and there was agreement that it would.
- 3.2 BPJ suggested that the note should include a reference to LROs’ responsibilities for effective supplier management and the safety of the ballot papers between the poll and the count, and RROs’ responsibility for leading the delivery of seminars to LROs. MH noted that LROs have a duty to follow the directions of

RROs, and must also complete data returns including accounting for postal ballot papers. MH suggested the note is modified to indicate the responsibility of RROs to oversee and co-ordinate the work of LROs in terms of managing suppliers. The Electoral Commission suggested additional sub-headings could usefully break-down the functions of RROs and LROs into the phases of elections activity.

- 3.3 It was decided that elements of relevance for LROs and their elections staff be discussed at a future Working Group. In advance of that, CO agreed to update and re-circulate the note for further comments in the light of the feedback already received. **Action: CO**

4. Funding review

- 4.1 CO's recent discussions with stakeholders had highlighted a number of issues about the electoral claims process, such as the funding models used and clarity of guidance on claims. The group welcomed transparency of claims with a view to putting more information into the public domain. Ministerial interest meant that the CO consultation document, setting out proposed changes for the 2014 European Elections would now be published in July. CO would also write to RROs seeking to update the data held in each area on electorate sizes, number of postal voters, number of polling stations etc. This exercise has been well coordinated and returned by RROs for previous national polls and this data will help inform the funding allocations for the forthcoming European elections. **Action CO**

5. PAYE online reporting and pension auto-enrolment for Returning Officers and Election staff

- 5.1 HMRC gave a presentation on the implications of PAYE online reporting. There were some concerns raised and CO undertook to forward written information from HMRC to EROs. **Action: CO**
- 5.2 CO confirmed that it was due to meet with the Pensions Regulator on the question of the auto-enrolment in pensions of staff working on elections. CO will circulate an outcome on this point to the Group. **Action: CO**

6. Democratic Engagement Project

- 6.1 CO provided an update on the democratic engagement programme. The group emphasised the importance of engaging communities and sharing best practice in order to increase democratic participation. CO agreed.
- 6.2 Simon Woolley from Operation Black Vote spoke about the organisation's work to increase and retain registration rates within BME groups, and its wish to work with EROs to increase democratic engagement.

7. Individual Electoral Registration

- 7.1 CO updated the meeting about the plans and timetable for delivery of Individual Electoral Registration. The Dry Run of the confirmation process was now underway and making good progress. There had been some concerns before

starting with download speeds, but on the whole these had been much improved following testing. There had been, as expected local software and IT issues to resolve which were being picked up day to day. Engagement work was in place and CO appreciated the support the County Leads had received from the RROs. Readiness Monitoring was in place and the Assessment was scheduled for November this year. It was hoped that the Regional Delivery Managers would liaise with the RROs throughout the process.

7.2 It was anticipated that the IER regulations would be laid before Parliament in July alongside the Regulations for European polls. CO would advise on progress. *(Post-meeting note – the regulations were laid on 17th and 18th July and will be debated after the summer Parliamentary recess)*

8. Any Other Business

8.1 CO advised colleagues to ensure claims for the PCC elections were made promptly. Home Office undertook to advise the group of outstanding claims through CO. **Action: HO/CO**

9. Date of Next Meeting

9.1 The next meeting would be held on 10 September 2013.