



**Cabinet Office Elections Policy and Co-ordination Group**

**9<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 13.00-14:30, Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012  
Cabinet Office, 1 Horse Guards Road**

**Attendees**

**UK Government**

**Alex Thomas** Head of Elections and Parliament Division, Cabinet Office (Chair)  
**Paul Docker** Head of Electoral Administration, Cabinet Office  
**Mark Hughes** (Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)  
**Matt Carey** Elections and Parliament Division, Cabinet Office  
**Eileen Vagg** Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office  
**Roy Williams** Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office  
**Emily Miles** Home Office, Chair PCC Elections Panel  
**Neil King** Home Office  
**Roddy Angus** Scotland Office

**Welsh Government**

**Hugh Rawlings** Director, Constitutional Affairs and Inter-Governmental Relations,  
Department for the First Minister and Cabinet

**Returning Officers (and/or representatives)**

**John Bennett (GLRO)** – Greater London Returning Officer  
**Emma Burnett (EB)** – Manchester City Council  
**Michelle Chard (MC)** – Manchester City Council  
**Robert Connelly (RC)** – Birmingham City Council  
**David Cook (DC)** – Kettering Borough Council  
**Lindsey Dixon (LD)** – Sunderland City Council  
**Mark Heath (MH)** – Southampton City Council  
**Laura Lock (LL)** – Luton Borough Council  
**Paul Morris (PM)** – Borough of Poole Council  
**Shirley Plenderleith (SP)** – Kettering Borough Council  
**Graham Shields (GS)** – Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

**Association of Electoral Administrators**

**Karen Quaintmere** Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)

**Electoral Commission**

**Peter Wardle** Chief Executive  
**Andrew Scallan** – Director of Electoral Administration  
**Tom Hawthorn** – Head of Electoral Policy  
**Alex Robertson** Director of Communications  
**Matt Longley** – Campaigns Manager  
**Ailsa Irvine** – Head of Guidance and Performance

**Chris Morgan** Policy Adviser (Electoral Policy)

## **Apologies**

**Ian Barber** Department for Communities and Local Government

**Sir Howard Bernstein** Manchester City Council

**Trevor Holden** Luton Borough Council

**Stephen Hughes** Birmingham City Council

**Peter Newbitt** Wales Office

**Bryn Parry-Jones** Pembrokeshire County Council

**Mary Pitcaithly** Convener of Electoral Management Board (Falkirk)

**Barry Quirk** Lewisham Council

**Paul Rowsell** Department for Communities and Local Government

**Joanne Roney** Wakefield Council

**Philippa Saunders** Northern Ireland Office

**Dave Smith** Sunderland City Council (and SOLACE representative)

**John Turner** Association of Electoral Administrators

**Rebecca Waite** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## **Minutes**

### **1. Minutes and matters arising**

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed, subject to a small modification to make it clear Returning Officers, not local councillors, are ultimately responsible for resourcing elections.
- 1.2 It was noted that the action point to report back on the appointment process for Regional Returning Officers (RROs) would be covered at item 6 on the agenda. DCLG was unable to attend to present the item on neighbourhood planning referendums due to illness so item 2 would be covered by CO.

### **2. Neighbourhood Planning Referendums**

- 2.1 CO set out the current position on preparations being taken forward by DCLG for neighbourhood planning referendums. The rules for 'residential' neighbourhood planning referendums are already in place and the current focus of DCLG's work is to finalise the rules for the corresponding business referendums (which will take place alongside residential polls in a neighbourhood area designated as wholly or predominantly business in character). DCLG has established a task group to consider the practicalities of the rules for the polls, consisting of local authority representatives (from electoral services, planning and business rates teams) and the Electoral Commission and AEA. The Group has provided valuable feedback around the practicalities of registering businesses in the referendum area to vote and on the conduct rules for the polls.
- 2.2 MH asked whether a mechanism could be in place to ensure planning authorities have regard to existing polling district boundaries when setting the referendum area for neighbourhood planning polls. CO agreed to consider with DCLG whether a mechanism could be in place in either Government or sector-based guidance on neighbourhood planning to ensure planning authorities have regard

to existing polling district boundaries when setting the referendum area for neighbourhood planning polls. The key factors taken into account by the local planning authority in determining the boundary must relate to neighbourhood planning as required by the Localism Act but that process could recognise that in setting electoral ward boundaries various planning-related factors are considered (e.g. population). **Action: CO/DCLG**

2.3 MH queried whether it would be possible for neighbourhood planning referendums to be combined with other polls. CO confirmed it would be possible for residential polls to be combined with other polls.

2.4 The EC noted that an effective public awareness strategy will be needed at a local level to ensure electors are aware of a forthcoming neighbourhood planning poll and have sufficient information to make an informed choice when voting. The EC also noted with concern that the current timetable for the business referendum regulations could result in those regulations coming into force shortly before a business poll (subject to the timing of such a poll being finalised). CO said it would be for local authorities to decide how practicable it would be to hold a poll soon after the regulations come into force should that situation arise, as the exact timing of a neighbourhood planning referendum is a matter for individual local authorities to decide.

2.5 MH and DC questioned whether the substantial set of regulations under development to support the administration of business referendums (including provisions around registering businesses to vote ahead of each given poll) was proportionate to the subject of the poll, and queried whether business referendums could be run on a simpler basis. CO commented that the rules need to be robust and comparable in rigour to those of the corresponding residential poll which will sit alongside a business poll, to ensure both are conducted on a similar basis. CO recognised the importance of the regulations being clear on the lines of responsibility for those running the polls.

### **3. Feedback on Police and Crime Commissioner Elections**

3.1 The Home Office (HO) thanked the Police Area Returning Officers (PAROs) present and their colleagues for their hard work to deliver the first Police and Crime Commissioner Elections across England and Wales. HO welcomed comments from the Group on the legislative and administrative frameworks for the polls. There was discussion of the public awareness structures at the polls. LL, MH and the AEA suggested the helpline for members of the public to obtain hard-copies of candidates' election addresses had not been effective in all cases.

3.2 There was also discussion about the additional requirement at PCC elections for candidates not to have been convicted of an imprisonable offence, and it was suggested this should be considered in the light of the wider requirements around candidates' disqualifications at other polls. The EC commented that the legislation and fees and charges guidance for the polls was delivered close to the polls. Both the AEA and EC would be reporting on the administration of the elections and HO & CO confirmed the reports would be considered when looking at possible future policy developments. HO also confirmed it was planning a wash-up session for Police Area Returning Officers (PAROs) and would use that to draw-out further views and evidence on these and other matters related to the conduct of the polls. HO invited members of the Group to raise any further points they might have outside the meeting. **Action: All**

3.3 HO would consider the feedback received in the context of any potential adjustments which could be made to the rules for the polls, and CO would consider feedback in the wider electoral policy context as well. **Action: HO/CO**

#### **4. Update on Individual Electoral Registration**

4.1 CO provided an update on Individual electoral registration (“IER”). The key points were that:

- (i) CO was considering funding options and will communicate Ministers’ decisions to EROs when they are made
  - (ii) CO was preparing to consult on IER process maps with its expert panel and key elections suppliers
  - (iii) The Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (ERTP) team within Cabinet Office was adjusting its focus from policy development to supporting effective implementation, with a particular focus on IT pilots
  - (iv) CO was looking forward to progress of the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill in the House of Lords
  - (v) CO agreed with MH that joint working with SOLACE was needed to ensure communications around IER could reach EROs effectively.
- Action: CO/SOLACE**

#### **5. European Parliamentary Elections 2014**

5.1 CO explained it had begun project planning for the European Parliamentary Elections, and shared a draft project-plan for the Group’s consideration and views. There were a number of points made, including: the EC felt there should be some additional contingency within the project plan in case the delivery of legislation for the polls should slip; MH suggested DCLG’s date of poll order should be included on the plan; and the EC queried whether HO would produce security guidance for the polls, and noted that actions for the EC might be best represented on its own separate plan. CO agreed to take these points on board and revise the project plan accordingly. **Action: CO**

5.2 CO invited members of the Group to submit any further views on the project plan either inside or outside committee. **Action: All**

5.3 CO outlined the process for recruiting and designating Regional Returning Officers (RROs) for the European polls, following feedback it had received from the Group both inside and outside committee. The process was subject to the views of Ministers, but the key elements were:

- (i) CO proposes to undertake a formal interview process for the designation of RROs where more than one candidate puts themselves forward for the role in a voting region.
- (ii) In a region where only one candidate expressed an interest in taking on the role, Cabinet Office does not propose to automatically undertake a formal interview process, but will consider the need to hold one or not. This may not be necessary for example where an existing RRO has a proven record of delivering well-run polls, wishes

to remain in the role, and has support for doing so from the their local authority and LROs within their region.

- (iii) Local authorities should provide adequate assurance to Cabinet Office that each prospective candidate has their full support, in order to maintain due diligence across the selection process. A letter of endorsement from the leader of the candidate's council and/or a local elected mayor will suffice. Where a candidate is not the chief executive of the council, a letter from the chief executive will be acceptable.
- (iv) RROs may identify and designate a deputy in advance of the elections. Cabinet Office proposes that RROs should be encouraged to designate a deputy as soon as practicable following their own designation, so that the deputy could if appropriate take over the responsibilities of the RRO in the event that the RRO become unavailable for whatever reason. The RRO should ensure that the deputy (whether they are employed by the RRO's local authority or another authority in the region) is suitably qualified and they should be able to provide assurance, where necessary, about the deputy's ability to undertake the role.
- (v) Having considered comments made by the EPCG group, CO does not intend to make any changes to the existing legislative arrangements and the existing statutory powers of direction which RROs currently have for European Parliamentary elections.

5.2 The Group was content with the process outlined. DC suggested the importance of the RRO role should be expressed to local authorities in advance of the designation of RROs to ensure there is an appreciation of the resources required to take forward regional co-ordination of polls. CO and HO commented there is an opportunity to do this following the PCC elections, and HO planned to send letters of thanks to PARO's authorities. **Action: HO**

5.3 The EC asked whether the timing of the European Parliamentary elections was yet known. CO advised that the exact timing was yet to be confirmed at a European level.

## 6. Any other Business

6.1 It was agreed that the EPCG would aim to continue to meet regularly in 2013 and a programme of dates had been circulated in advance of the meeting. These would be confirmed with members and where possible, co-ordination with the timing of the Electoral Commission's meetings would be looked at.