

Cabinet Office Elections Policy and Co-ordination Group

**8th Meeting, 13.00-15:00, Monday 17th September 2012
Cabinet Office, 1 Horse Guards Road**

Attendees**UK Government**

Alex Thomas Head of Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office (Chair)
Paul Brunton Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office
Paul Docker Head of Electoral Administration, Cabinet Office
Jon Hoare (Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office))
Eileen Vagg Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office
Roy Williams Elections and Democracy Division, Cabinet Office
Ian Barber Department for Communities and Local Government
Paul Rowsell Department for Communities and Local Government
Neil King Home Office
Peter Newbitt Wales Office
Philippa Saunders Northern Ireland Office

Returning Officers (and/or representatives)

John Bennett (GLRO) Greater London Returning Officer
Kate Brown (KB) – Manchester City Council
Michelle Chard (MC) Manchester City Council
Robert Connelly (RC) Birmingham City Council
Lindsey Dixon (LD) – Sunderland City Council
Trevor Holden (TH) Luton Borough Council
Barry Quirk (BQ)– Lewisham Council
Bernadette Livesey (BL) – Wakefield Council
Glynne Morgan (GM) – Pembrokeshire County Council
Paul Morris (PM) Borough of Poole Council
Mary Pitcaithley (MP) – Convener of Electoral Management Board (Falkirk)
Shirley Plenderleith (SP) Kettering Borough Council
Graham Shields (GS) – Chief Electoral Officer for 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
Andrew Scallan (AS) – Director of Electoral Administration
Tom Hawthorn (THa) – Head of Electoral Policy
Ailsa Irvine (AI) – Head of Guidance and Performance

Apologies

Roddy Angus Scotland Office

Sir Howard Bernstein Manchester City Council

Gareth Bradford Department for Communities and Local Government

David Cook Kettering Borough Council

Matthew Ellesmere Northern Ireland Office

Mark Heath Southampton City Council

Stephen Hughes Birmingham City Council

John Kilner Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Bryn Parry-Jones Pembrokeshire County Council

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

Joanne Roney Wakefield Council

Dave Smith Sunderland City Council (and SOLACE representative)

Minutes

1. Minutes and matters arising

1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. It was noted that the Cabinet Office had tabled an updated paper on the legislation and consultation which will support ongoing polls.

1.2 Turning to matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting CO confirmed that:

- No further action was envisaged on House of Lords Reform (Para 4.3 of the minutes from the previous meeting)
- The Home Office had laid an indemnity minute before Parliament (para 6.4)
- The first meeting of a group which DCLG had set up to consider the conduct rules for business neighbourhood planning polls would take place on 21 September (Paragraph 6.6)

2. Update on the electoral landscape

2.1 CO confirmed that Chloe Smith had taken over from Mark Harper as the Minister with responsibility for electoral policy and constitutional affairs. It was noted that she would be invited along to a future meeting of the group. CO provided an update on the latest position on House of Lords Reform (please see paragraph 2.2), recall, lobbying and party funding. CO advised that Defra was analysing responses to its consultation paper on changes to National Park governance and that no decisions had been taken on the proposed introduction of some directly elected members.

2.2 It was noted that DCLG Ministers had decided against allowing for superannuation to be paid on either the fees which Counting Officers received for the referendum on the voting system or the fees which Returning Officers will receive for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The Cabinet Office advised that it would be looking at the overall position of superannuation

payments to Returning Officers and Counting Officers as part of the funding review.

3. Delivery of November 2012 polls

Police and Crime Commissioner (“PCC”) elections

3.1 The Home Office provided an update on the preparations which were being put in place for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The key points were:

- Following consultation with Returning Officers the fees and charges order came into force last week;
- Sweeps for the elections would be purchased centrally by the Home Office;
- The order formally appointing PAROs came into force on 9 August;
- The Welsh Forms Order would be laid before Parliament on 15 October;
- The Candidate’s address website would go live in October;
- Helpful presentations by PAROs on the use of the powers of direction by PAROs and adjudication decisions on doubtful ballot papers had been provided at the PARO event which the HO held on 14 September;
- The Home Office’s main awareness campaign would be running between 5-24 October. This would include raising channels such as TV, radio, press, online and outdoor advertising. It was noted that the intention would also be to use satellite channels with appropriate disclaimers being in place for Northern Ireland and Scotland where no PCC elections would be taking place.

Further information can be found in the attached update (paper two) from the Home Office which was circulated with the agenda and other papers prior to the meeting.

Combination

3.2 It was noted that subject to writs being moved UK Parliamentary by-elections would be combined with PCC elections in Manchester, Corby and Cardiff. In addition to these polls there would be a combined PCC and Mayoral election in Bristol and a Mayoral referendum in Hartlepool. CLG advised that it was unlikely that any neighbourhood planning referendums would take place in November but advised that if any polls did take place the decision on whether or not to combine them with the PCC election would be up to the discretion of the Returning Officers and Counting Officers concerned. JT noted that before any neighbourhood planning referendums could take place further consideration would be required on a number of issues including those around the register and boundaries.

4. Update on Individual Electoral Registration

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

- (i) The Electoral Registration and Administration Bill would be debated in the House of Lords during October;

- (ii) One tranche of the secondary legislative IER provisions had been published. A further tranche would be published soon [update: has now been published];
- (iii) The CO were grateful to all individuals who had attended and provided input to the IER attendance at AEA Branch Meetings;
- (iv) The Data Matching pilots were up and running and the results to date were in the process of being analysed.

5. Funding Review

5.1 CO confirmed that it commenced a review of the funding mechanisms which support national polls, to make sure value for money is achieved whilst the effectiveness and efficiency of elections is maintained. One of the main drivers behind the review was to look at how the funding mechanism which was introduced for the 2009 European Parliamentary election and also used for the 2010 and 2011 national polls works in practice. It was noted that the work being taken forward included:

- (i) Reviewing the funding assumptions for future elections (most notably the 2014 European Parliamentary and 2015 UK Parliamentary elections) to ensure that they reflect the true cost of polls. This piece of work was particularly important due to the large underspends against the amounts which were allocated to Returning Officers and Counting Officers for the 2009, 2010 and 2011 national polls.
- (ii) Ensuring that value for money judgements are made by Returning Officers on all expenditure which is incurred for the polls (including the payments which are paid to local authority staff and the contracts which are in place with suppliers).
- (iii) Improving the quality and timeliness of claims from Returning Officers (including looking cutting the existing twelve month deadline for submitting claims to 6 months)
- (iv) Looking at whether any structural changes should be made to the existing funding arrangements;
- (v) Reviewing the position on Returning Officer's fees and superannuation payments.

5.2 CO confirmed that it would consider any findings and recommendations in the Electoral Commission's report on the cost of the referendum on the voting system as part of the review. It was agreed that CO would circulate a terms of reference for the review to the group. **Action: CO**

6. Planning for the European Parliamentary Elections in 2014

6.1 A discussion took place on the paper (paper 3 circulated with the minutes) which the CO tabled following its request for views on the options around the appointment of Regional Returning Officers ("RROs") for the European Parliamentary elections. The key points were that:

- (i) There should be an emphasis on candidates to provide assurance about their ability to do the role and the support which they will be provided with by the local authority. The decision on whether assurances should be provided by the leader of the Council or the Chief Executive should be left to the discretion of the applicant (whilst recognising ultimate responsibility for running and resourcing polls rests with independent Returning Officers);
- (ii) RROs should be appointed a year in advance of the poll;
- (iii) The support which can be provided by local authority staff would be pivotal to both the RRO and any deputies who were appointed. In addition to this it was clearly felt that the RRO should appoint a deputy from within their local authority.

6.2. It was agreed that the CO would reflect on the points raised on the appointment of RROs both inside and outside of committee and come back with a proposed approach at the next meeting. **Action: CO**

7. Any other Business

7.1 A discussion took place on the use of social media by those involved in the delivery of polls. Whilst no firm conclusions were reached it was agreed that social media should be allowed providing that appropriate controls were in place.

7.2 It was agreed that next EPCG on 3 October would be cancelled. Further to this the next meeting would take place on 21 November.