



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

**12<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 15.00-17.00 Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013  
The Electoral Commission, 3 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8YZ**

**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)  
**Carol Gokce**, Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)  
**Ian Barber** Department for Communities and Local Government  
**Gareth Bradford** Department for Communities and Local Government  
**Tim Hayward** Department for Communities and Local Government  
**Ashton Cotter** Home Office  
**Roddy Angus** Scotland Office  
**Peter Newbitt** Wales Office  
**Moira Anderson** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

**Welsh Government**

**Hugh Rawlings (HR)** Director, Constitutional Affairs and Inter-Governmental Relations, Department for the First Minister and Cabinet, Welsh Government

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

**John Bennett (JB)** Greater London Returning Officer  
**Michelle Chard (MC)** Manchester City Council (North West)  
**Stephen Hughes (SH)** Birmingham City Council (West Midlands)  
**Mark Heath (MH)** Southampton City Council (South East)  
**Paul Morris (PM)** Borough of Poole Council (South West)  
**Steve Packham (SP)** Chelmsford City Council (Eastern)  
**Bryn Parry-Jones (BPJ)** Pembrokeshire County Council (Wales)  
**Mary Pitcaithly (MP)** Falkirk Council and Convener, Electoral Management Board for Scotland (Scotland)  
**Shirley Plenderleith (SP)** Kettering Borough Council (East Midlands)  
**Graham Shields (GS)** Chief Electoral Officer (Northern Ireland)  
**Barry Quirk (BQ)** Lewisham Council  
**Joanne Roney (JR)** Wakefield Council  
**Bill Crawford (BC)** Sunderland City Council (North East)

## **Association of Electoral Administrators**

**John Turner** Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)

## **Electoral Commission**

**Peter Wardle** Chief Executive

**Andrew Scallan** Director of Electoral Administration

**Tom Hawthorn** Head of Electoral Policy

## **Apologies**

**Sir Howard Bernstein** Manchester City Council (North West)

**David Cook** Kettering Borough Council (East Midlands)

**Tom Riordan** Leeds City Council (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**Philippa Saunders** Northern Ireland Office

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

## **Minutes**

### **1. Welcome and Introductions.**

1.1 Alex Thomas introduced Carol Gokce, the new Head of Policy and Legislation, Electoral Registration Transformation Programme.

### **2. Minutes**

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### **3. European Parliamentary Elections**

3.1 CO confirmed that a decision about the timing of the European Elections is expected next month. The Council of the EU has recommended that the elections be moved to take place over the period of 22-25 May 2014. The European Parliament has yet to consider the recommendation. Although it was noted that in an indicative vote in November 2012, the European Parliament had been supportive of such a change. CO noted that the DCLG consultation on moving the date of the local elections in May 2014 had closed on 13 May. [*Note: the European Council has now confirmed that the next European Parliamentary elections will take place from 22 to 25 May 2014. For the UK, that means a polling day of Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May, which will be confirmed by legislative order.*]

3.2 CO hoped to have the Draft Order designating the RROs for the European Elections finalised by the end of May in terms of its content. CO is now finalising the details of support for the London region. Following that it will be sent to the Electoral Commission for approval before submission to Ministers for signature.

3.3 There was discussion about holding the European elections at the end of May as there was concern that exams would make procurement of school space difficult. There were also concerns raised about recruiting staff over a Bank Holiday weekend.

- 3.4 The issue of out of country voting at the European elections was raised. CO confirmed that this was a matter for the relevant Member State or its embassy to arrange.
- 3.5 There was discussion about the collation and presentation of results at the European elections. It was noted that RROs had used a variety of systems in 2009 and intended to do so again in 2014. It was felt that there is some merit in having greater uniformity in the presentation of results once they have been collated, in order to allow consistency in production and analysis of the results. It was suggested that this should be discussed further at the Electoral Commission's Working Group or, if it was felt necessary, to establish a separate forum to look at this issue. **Action: CO**
- 3.6. It was also suggested that it would be useful to conduct resilience tests with suppliers. **Action: RROs to lead**
- 3.7 CO presented a paper on the key milestones for electoral legislation over the course of 2013. The key aim was to lay before Parliament the amendments to the European Parliamentary elections conduct rules before the 2013 summer Parliamentary recess in July. The plan is for those regulations to have completed their Parliamentary passage six months before the poll.
- 3.8 CO was currently consulting on revisions to electoral forms and once agreed, these will be appended to the Regulations. CO also intended to lay a separate Statutory Instrument to commence and apply the provision in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 which will enable voters waiting in a queue at the close of poll to be issued with ballot papers and vote. CO confirmed the intention is to work closely with ROs and EROs post legislation, to assist its smooth implementation.
- 3.9 CO Finance had agreed the Indemnity option to cover Returning Officers at the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, and this was now with the Treasury for consideration. CO hoped to be able to update the Group at the next meeting.

#### 4. Funding review

- 4.1 CO outlined proposals and strategy for its Funding review. A consultation document will be issued in June seeking views from electoral administrators over the summer on various proposals. The review is examining a number of issues including better targeting allocation amounts, the scrutiny process and deadline for submitting claims, and transparency of payments. The group agreed with the need to ensure there is transparency in the spending of public funds on elections.
- 4.2 BQ confirmed he agreed with the aims of the review but asked that there be proportionality in the level of scrutiny adopted. He also confirmed that he appreciated that analysis was important but there needed to be an awareness of the varying conditions across the different areas. JR mentioned the role that local Internal Audit teams played and how that could be used effectively.

## 5. Neighbourhood Planning Referendums

- 5.1 DCLG noted that there had been Neighbourhood Planning Referendums in Eden, Cumbria, Thame, Oxfordshire and Exeter St. James. Turnout for these referendums was 34%, 40%, and 21% respectively. These had all resulted in “Yes” votes. Where an area is designated as a business area an additional referendum must be held. The local planning authority must consider whether an area should be designated as a business (neighbourhood) area if the proposed area is wholly or predominantly business in nature. The first Business Neighbourhood planning referendum had the potential to occur in late 2013. There are 312 formal neighbourhood planning areas across the country. So far there have been 7 business neighbourhood planning areas designated. There is one vote per non-domestic rate payer, regardless of the number of rateable properties or assets (‘hereditaments’). Businesses will nominate an individual to vote on their behalf. The legislation for both ‘residential’ and ‘business’ referendums is now in place.
- 5.2 SH asked why the rules for Business Improvement District referendums were not used as a model for business neighbourhood planning referendums. DCLG confirmed that there was a need to ensure a parity of process between the rules for residential and business referendums, as in business areas, both residential and business polls will be held concurrently. DCLG also confirmed that the City of London was exempt from the referendum regulations.
- 5.3 PW asked about regulation of campaign spending and the nature of sanctions at the polls. **Action: CO/DCLG to report back**

## 6. National Park Authority Elections

- 6.1 Defra explained that the Government has been considering its response to the outcomes of the consultation on changes to the governance of National Parks. The consultation included a proposal to legislate to enable direct elections to National Park Authorities, and to trial the elections initially in two National Park Authorities. If it was decided to proceed with legislation, Defra and CO would work closely together in developing it.

## 7. Individual Electoral Registration

- 7.1 CO presented further information about the plans and timetable for delivery of Individual Electoral Registration. The plan to invite Regional Returning Officers to act as Regional ERO Delivery Champions had been welcomed although there was widespread agreement that the role should be kept as light-touch as possible. The Cabinet Office Regional Delivery Manager role is also intended to help ensure alignment of communications between the Programme, EROs, their staff and the Regional Champion.
- 7.2 Progress was being made on the main IER regulations , which were planned to be laid in July. The first tranche of funding has been sent out. CO has invited bids over the summer where there may be a shortfall. It will provide more information on funding in 2014/15 after the Confirmation Dry Run has concluded in September. Preparation for the Dry Run is on track, with suppliers connecting areas to the IER digital services. Over half of local authorities and Valuation Joint Boards are now connected.

7.3 The Electoral Commission confirmed that it will consult on new IER-related performance standards for EROs..

7.4 BQ said there was a need for more awareness and information about the transition to IER amongst local political leadership. CO confirmed it is aware of the need to focus more engagement at a political level, although the focus had, rightly been on communicating with electoral services managers, Chief Executives and EROs in the first part of the year.

## **8. Any Other Business**

8.1 CO confirmed that discussions had taken place with HMRC about the application of new rules around PAYE and online reporting to elections staff, and would commission and circulate a note from HRC to the group. **Action: CO**

8.2 CO confirmed that it was taking forward discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions 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**

## **9. Date of Next Meeting**

9.1 CO confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be 2 July 2013.