



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

**11<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 13.00-15.00 Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 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)  
**David Olima** Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (Cabinet Office)  
**Paul Docker** Head of Electoral Administration, (Cabinet Office)  
**Adam Shoemith** Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)  
**Eileen Vagg** Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)  
**Roy Williams** Elections and Parliament Division, (Cabinet Office)  
**Paul Rowsell** Department for Communities and Local Government  
**Ian Barber** Department for Communities and Local Government  
**Ann Marie Field** Home Office  
**Ashton Cotier** Home Office  
**Roddy Angus** Scotland Office  
**Philippa Saunders** Northern Ireland Office

**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  
**David Cook (DC)** Kettering Borough Council (East Midlands)  
**Michelle Chard (MC)** Manchester City Council (North West)  
**Lindsay Dixon (LD)** Sunderland City Council (North East)  
**Stephen Hughes (SH)** Birmingham City Council (West Midlands)  
**Mark Heath (MH)** Southampton City Council (South East)  
**Bernadette Livesey (BL)** Wakefield Council  
**Paul Morris (PM)** Borough of Poole Council (South West)  
**Steve Packham (SP)** Chelmsford City Council (Eastern)  
**Bryn Parry-Jones (BPJ)** Pembrokeshire County Council (Wales)  
**Shirley Plenderleith (SP)** Kettering Borough Council  
**Tom Riordan (TR)** Leeds City Council (Yorkshire & the Humber)  
**Graham Shields (GS)** Chief Electoral Officer (Northern Ireland)  
**Barry Quirk (BQ)** Lewisham Council

## **Association of Electoral Administrators**

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

## **Electoral Commission**

**Peter Wardle** Chief Executive

**Andrew Scallan** Director of Electoral Administration

**Samantha Mills** Head of Campaigns and Corporate Communication

## **National Union of Students (for item 9)**

**Lewis Cooper** Public Affairs Officer

**Lucy Hawthorn** Campaigning Partnership and Policy Officer

**Katie Shaw** Campaigns and Policy Officer

## **Apologies**

**Sir Howard Bernstein** Manchester City Council

**Mary Pitcaithly** Falkirk County, Convener of the Electoral Management Board  
(Scotland)

**Joanne Roney** Wakefield Council

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

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

## **Minutes**

### **1. Welcome, Introductions and address by the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, Chloë Smith MP**

1.1 The Minister thanked all those present for their continued work in delivering elections. Ms Smith also reiterated her support for Individual Electoral Registration (IER), acknowledging the ongoing work this will entail. The Minister expressed her enthusiasm for work which Cabinet Office officials and electoral administrators do together to develop electoral policy which can be implemented effectively in practice. The Minister also noted the positive joint working which could be done between Government and administrators and other delivery partners in order to maximise voter registration and participation. The Minister agreed that access to elections for all citizens remained an important issue to sustain public confidence in the electoral system.

1.2 Ms Smith also acknowledged the work being done in preparation for the European elections and thanked those who were to undertake the responsibility of the RRO role.

1.3 DC asked whether the rules could be consolidated, particularly given the frequent rule changes ahead of elections. The Minister confirmed that, although there was no appropriate legislative vehicle to allow this in the short term, the Law Commission is conducting a review, the aim of which is to consolidate electoral law. The Minister confirmed that the Electoral Administration Team is the first contact point for best practice advice on electoral policy.

## 2. Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

## 3. Revised Terms of Reference for the Elections Policy and Co-ordination Group

3.1 The Terms of Reference for the Group had been updated slightly to reflect the fact that the Group's focus will now be on planning for the 2014 European Parliamentary elections. These were approved.

## 4. Welcome to Regional Returning Officers (Designate) for 2014

4.1 CO thanked those who had put themselves forward for the RRO role for the European Elections. CO also thanked Peter Wardle from the Electoral Commission and the former Returning Officer Tom Aitchison for their assistance as interview-panel members in the RRO selection process. The meeting agreed to aim to make one consolidated order approving the RRO appointments. A submission would be made to the Minister by the end of April seeking approval of the panel's recommendations. It was hoped that this order would designate all the RROs across Great Britain, but if any individual candidate could not confirm the support of their authority by that time, it may be necessary to designate them separately at a later date.

4.2 CO confirmed that The European Parliament elections are currently scheduled to be held on 5 – 8 June, unless the European Council unanimously acts to change the date. In order to accommodate the Pentecost holiday in 2014, the Council has proposed moving the date of the 2014 European Parliament elections to 22 – 25 May. The European Parliament will now be consulted on this amendment before the Council formally adopts any decision to change the date. In an indicative vote in November 2012, the European Parliament was supportive of such a change.

## 5. Individual Electoral Registration

5.1 CO presented information about the plans and timetable for delivery of the Individual Electoral Registration. This included information about recruiting Regional Delivery Managers (RDMs) and County Leads across Great Britain. The RROs agreed with the proposal for RROs to act as IER Regional Champions and to work with the appointed RDMs, subject to further information being provided to them on the RDM role by CO. **Action: CO**

5.2 TR suggested that national-level Regional Champions meetings and work should be coordinated with the wider meetings and work of the RROs ahead of the European Elections. CO agreed with this.

## 6. European Parliamentary Elections

6.1 CO introduced a paper setting out indicative milestones within CO's preparations for the 2014 European Parliamentary elections and proposing a draft plan for consulting the Elections Policy & Coordination Group on specific topics at each of its meetings over the coming months.

- 6.2 Issues raised included those around paper supply and on whether electronic results collation systems could be used. CO confirmed that it would welcome information on the subject and suggested colleagues emailed relevant information to Paul Docker. **Action: All**
- 6.3 The EC queried whether there was an integrated programme plan in place across Government to coordinate and manage the implementation of the legislative changes in advance of the elections in 2014. CO confirmed that significant ongoing planning and preparation was in place, particularly coordinating work with ERTP colleagues. CO also reminded colleagues in other Government Departments and the Territorial Offices to provide updates on their work programmes so these can be factored into planning. CO also noted that it would provide a fuller update on the planned amendments to the conduct rules for the European Parliamentary elections at the next meeting of the EPCG. The aim is to lay the regulations before the summer Parliamentary recess.
- 6.4 CO undertook to send information out to the group on the issue of pension contributions for election staff. The AEA also queried the impact of changes to on-line tax returns for electoral administrators. CO agreed to consult HMRC colleagues on these points and report back to the Group. **Action: CO**
- 6.5 The AEA asked whether any changes were envisaged to the rules for parish elections ahead of 2014. CO agreed to report back on this matter. **Action: CO**
- 6.6 The AEA expressed concerns that a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum might be scheduled for the same day as the European elections. CO confirmed that the exact timing of a referendum and a decision on combination with other polls is a matter for individual local authorities to decide. DCLG confirmed that there are more than 550 plans in development and that the AEA and SOLACE had been informed. CO noted that it is vital that local election staff liaise closely with their planning department colleagues.

## 7. Local Elections 2014

- 7.1 In response to concerns that a decision had not yet been taken by DCLG Ministers as to whether or not the local elections would be combined with European elections, DCLG confirmed that a Ministerial decision was pending before a consultation on the date of the 2014 local elections could be launched. *[Note: Since the meeting, it was announced that the consultation on moving the date of the local elections in 2014 was launched on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> March.]*

## 8. Funding Review

- 8.1 CO gave a presentation on the remit of the CO's funding review. The overarching aim is to contribute to having well run, properly funded, elections. CO suggested there needs to be more uniformity in the claiming of and accounting for spending at national elections. CO intends to share with members what a revised funding model for the European Elections in 2014 might look like at the next EPCG meeting in May before a wider consultation over the summer.
- 8.2 BQ confirmed that he appreciated that analysis was important but there needed to be an awareness of the varying conditions across the different areas as well as consideration of external factors such as rising postage costs. CO

acknowledged this point, and confirmed that the review would also include consideration of the role of the Elections Claims Unit.

## **9. National Union of Students presentation**

9.1 The National Union of Students gave a presentation on its work around voter engagement. The aim is to maximise the student registration and participation in elections and encourage a habit of life long voting. Colleagues confirmed that improving voter engagement of young people was crucial. The Electoral Registration Officer members of the Group confirmed there were initiatives in some areas to involve young people in the election process, such as using students to assist in the election counts. PM observed that where this took place, there were tangible improvements to students' engagement with future elections.

9.2 The EC confirmed it would encourage EROs to make partnerships with various groups to encourage elector registration.

## **10. Any Other Business**

10.1 DCLG noted that there had been a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum in Eden, Cumbria. This resulted in a "Yes" vote on a turnout of 34%. Two further referendums would take place in Thame and Exeter on 2 May. Regulations had been laid in Parliament on 20 February to provide for the administration of the corresponding business referendums which would be held in areas designated as wholly or mainly business in character, and noted that these regulations are scheduled to pass through both Houses next week. DCLG thanked Cabinet Office and an external reference Group, some of whose members also sit on the EPCG, for their input during the preparation of the regulations.

10.2 CO confirmed that any Council tax referendums which occur in 2013 would take place on the first Thursday in May unless there were requests to defer them.

10.3 CO encouraged colleagues to submit their claims to the Elections Claims Unit for the November 2012 PCC elections as soon as possible.

## **11. Date of Next Meeting**

11.1 CO confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be 15 May 2013.