

# Preparing for a UK Parliamentary general election and beyond

What you do, what you face and some solutions

# Programme

- 1 The roles & responsibilities of the RO & ERO

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- 2 Preparing Scotland for the next UKPGE / Elections Act 2022

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- 3 Constituency boundary changes & implications

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- 4 Update on fees and charges

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- 5 Preparations for the UKPGE – electoral fraud and integrity

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- Lunch & accessibility showcase

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- 6 Capacity building & resilience workshop

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- 7 Accessibility

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- 8 Looking beyond the UKPGE...

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# Welcome

Malcolm Burr, Convener, EMB

Dame Sue Bruce, Electoral Commissioner, Scotland

# Preparation under pressure

- Elections are always complex public events: legal and administrative processes combined with major logistical operations, exposing ROs and EROs to extreme scrutiny and personal risk
- The next UKPGE brings unique challenges
  - No fixed date
  - Revised constituency boundaries
  - Voter ID and other legislative change
  - Limited and diminishing capacity within councils
  - A volatile political, social and cultural context
- Awareness and preparation is vital

# Perspective and support

- Voter must remain at the centre of all our planning, preparation and delivery
- Electoral Commission and EMB support throughout the process
- Electoral Commission
  - Guidance
  - Advice
  - Public Awareness etc.
- EMB
  - Consistency, best practice
  - No directions but recommendations
  - Working Groups

# Preparing for a UK Parliamentary general election - and beyond

A joint event hosted by the Electoral Management  
Board for Scotland and the Electoral Commission

6 October 2023

# 01 The role & responsibilities of the RO & ERO

Malcolm Burr, Convener, Electoral Management Board for Scotland

Pete Wildman, President, Scottish Assessors Association

# Overview of the session

Many ROs and EROs are facing their first election. For others this is their first UKPGE.

Understand your role, the risks you need to manage and the training and support available

**Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer roles are unlike anything else in local government. This session will cover the personal responsibilities, the legal elements and the support available**

- Malcolm Burr - Convener of EMB, RO for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Peter Wildman – Member of EMB, President of the SAA & ERO for Central VJB



# Returning Officer

**Responsible**

**Accountable**

**Independent**

# Returning Officers – new and old

Many ROs are facing their first election. For others this is their first UKPGE.

Understand your role and the risks you need to manage

**The post of Returning Officer is unlike any other role in Local Government. You need to understand and prepare for this unique challenge**

- Significant turnover of Returning Officers
- **8** new in post since May 2022; **13** have **never** been responsible for a UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE)
  - What do new Returning Officers need to **know**?
  - What do the more experienced need to **remember**?

# Returning Officer – A unique role

Being Returning Officer is a unique role – responsible, independent and accountable to the courts

**Appointment as an RO usually a consequence of appointment as Chief Executive. But it is a distinct and quite different role**

- **Responsible** for running the election
- **Independent** of political control
- **Personally** responsible to the courts
  - complex range of tasks, multiple concurrent workstreams
  - strict timetable, that cannot be flexed
  - budget control (note new UK Government funding regime)
  - high profile and political sensitivity

# RO - Legal risks and legal powers

## Returning Officer has the ultimate responsibility

Returning Officer has **sole legal responsibility** for running the election, a fundamental democratic function

- RO can be subject to Breach of Official Duty provisions
- power to appoint Deputies (DROs) but you cannot delegate your personal responsibility for delivering the election
- power to correct **procedural** errors: an important power – that can save an election - but one that has limits
- You must have a working knowledge of the relevant legislation governing the conduct of the election, and sufficient knowledge to quality assure the process

# Returning Officer – Your duties

Returning Officer has **sole legal responsibility** for running the election, a fundamental democratic function

The RO ensures that the election is administered efficiently, in accordance with the rules, to deliver a result which will be accepted as accurate and in which all reasonable people can have confidence

- RO is not responsible to Council or Government but directly accountable to the courts as an **independent** statutory office holder
- Personal liability for the conduct of the election
  - RO must ensure that as an individual they are appropriately insured.
  - any claim is against the RO personally, not against the Council;
- Election Petitions name the RO personally, even where conduct of the election is not questioned;
- must be able to show evidence of robust planning

# Returning Officer or Project Manager?

Skills needed are also around public safety and event management

Returning Officer is  
Project Manager.

Election is a legal  
and administrative  
process combined  
with a complex  
logistical operation.

- A complex and demanding work programme
  - high profile: media and politicians
  - time critical tasks
  - quasi-judicial decisions – e.g. validity of nominations, adjudication of ballot papers
- Familiarity with legislation – and all of the current changes
- Communications and public awareness
- Can delegate responsibility for tasks, e.g. to a printer, but accountability is **personal**

# Returning Officer – appointed by Council

Every Council must appoint an officer of the Council to be the RO for elections of councillors...

**The RO for a UK Parliamentary election in Scotland is the same person who has been appointed RO for the election of councillors in the local authority in which the constituency is situated**

- Where a constituency is contained wholly within a single local authority area, that local authority will provide the RO for the constituency.
- Where a constituency falls within more one than local authority area, the Secretary of State will designate by Order the lead local authority for the constituency which will provide the RO for the constituency

# Returning Officer – NOT Chief Executive

RO does not act as the Chief Executive ...for free and fair electoral events the RO cannot be accountable for electoral duties to those whose election s/he administers

**Election must be a “Whole Council Project” led by RO, expectation is that all resources of Council will be brought into play to support delivery of election. But RO does NOT act as Chief Exec when delivering!**

- legal separation of duties
- independence of the RO demands that the role is separate from that of the Chief Executive;

*Section 27(1) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983, has the effect of making the office of RO totally distinct from the office by virtue of which an individual has become Returning Officer*

- authority to direct the resources of the Council derives from this provision



# Election is a ‘whole council’ project

Workstreams across  
whole Council: HR,  
Finance, Legal,  
Property etc

**Expectation is that the resources, staff and infrastructure of the Council will be at your disposal**

- Not as a consequence of the RO being Chief Executive
- Councils must make available to the RO the necessary resources to enable the RO to discharge their functions.
- RO is not bound by Council’s normal procedures in terms of conducting the election, e.g. with respect to employment
- RO is not subject to direction or instruction from members of the Council
- **Challenge that resources are tighter than ever – there often simply is not the capacity to release resources anymore!**

# Returning Officer in charge – you get the praise and the blame!

Elections don't necessarily further your career...but they can do a great deal of damage to it!

**Returning Officer owns the process. You lead a team, but ultimately responsibility is yours alone**

- Project plan, Risk register, Contingency plan
- not responsible for performance of each task **BUT** you must make sure they are all completed.
- Returning Officer is accountable should the election fail
- reputational risk is significant **personally** and **organisationally**

# When it all goes horribly wrong...

Suppliers, staff and systems can fail but the Returning Officer remains accountable, but

Elections are complex with multiple dependencies. Things can go wrong. What should you do?

- consider options – consult EMB, colleagues and take legal advice if needed – and it would be!
  - if election conducted ***substantially in accordance with rules***, and if the act or omission did not affect the result, then challenge likely to fail
- Power to correct procedural errors
  - broad power
  - does not extend to recount
  - does not extend to errors made by candidates/agents

# Particular challenges for 2024

As Returning Officer for UKPGE in 2024 you are dealing with new legislation, intense scrutiny and limited capacity!

## Elections are always a challenge but new risks for 2024

- UK Elections Act 2022 introduced new processes some never before applied at high turnout UKPGE
- ever more scrutiny from and interaction with social media
- teams inexperienced with new rules
- reduced capacity in councils – fragile structures with limited resilience
- more cross-boundary constituencies

**All issues to be addressed through this conference**

# Support is available...

There is infrastructure in place to support you. Raise issues early, seek support, advice and allocate resources as YOU need them

You are not alone as RO. The Election Community is small but supportive and committed

- **Recommendations** from the Convener – to assist with planning and consistency (optional)
  - support and advice on an *ad hoc* level at **any time**
- Use the community of your peers – mentors available
- **Guidance from the Electoral Commission**
  - Electoral Commission performance standards
    - Outcome focussed: should inform your decisions and help your planning
  - Electoral Commission observers

# ERO is a vital part of your team

**The Returning Officer is responsible for the delivery of the election, but relies on the work of the ERO**

The RO and ERO teams must work closely together.

Elections start with a valid electorate

- also independent and answerable to the courts, with personal duty and responsibility
- a sound election begins with a valid electorate: the franchise and registration are vital

# EROs in Scotland

## 15 EROs for 32 local authority areas

- **Independent** and answerable to courts
- **Personal** duty and responsibility
- Quasi-Judicial – registration hearings
- Funded by local authorities
- SAA comprises all Scottish EROs
- Electoral Commission – performance monitoring & non-statutory guidance
- Electoral Management Board – coordination and directions

# The role of the ERO

- Compile and maintain a complete and accurate electoral register for their area
- Registers are published annually (usually 1 December)
- Registers updated at the start of each month (usually Jan- Nov)
- Annual Household Enquiries (July to November)
- Issues 'Invitations to Register' throughout the year
- Registration isn't compulsory
- Maintain absent voter records i.e. who can vote by post or by proxy
- **Approves Voter Authority Certificate applications – new Elections Act 2022**



# Other matters

- Anonymous registration
- Anonymous Elector Documents
- Declarations of local connection
- Armed services voters
- Overseas electors
- Absent voting without a signature check
- Elections Act 2022
  - Future Divergence

# ERO's role at elections

- Close working with Returning Officers and their teams
- Advance **i**ndicator of elector engagement
- Produces data files for poll card / postal vote issues
- Three updates to the register ahead of an election
- Produces ballot box registers for polling stations

# ERO's role at elections

- Determines if an elector should be granted an emergency proxy
- On polling day, support for polling station teams in identifying electors on register
- Determining clerical errors
- Temporary Voter Authority Certificates
- Register is definitive as to who can vote

# Discussion – challenged, excited or put off?

These are complex,  
demanding but  
rewarding roles

**These are big jobs that expose you personally. But they are rewarding: making democracy function, returning Members to the UK and Scottish Parliament. If there's no RO or ERO, there are no Members returned. So risk is mixed with adrenalin!**

- Is a whole organisation approach viable in the context of limited Council resources?
- Councils all now have skills in Project/Programme Management. Are you using it to benefit your elections team?
  - Project Plans, Risk Registers, Contingency Plans etc

# Preparing Scotland for the next UKPGE / Elections Act 2022

Chair:

Malcolm Burr, Convener of the EMB

Presenters:

Alison Davidson & Sarah Mackie, Electoral Commission

Tracey Hurst, Sandwell MBC

Mhairi Copeland, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Chris Highcock, Electoral Management Board

# Overview

- Introductions and policy background – Malcolm Burr
- What has happened and what is coming – Alison Davidson
- An administrator's experience during LGE 2023 – Tracey Hurst
- An observer's experience of LGE 2023 – Mhairi Copeland
- What we have learnt - Sarah Mackie
- 10 points to takeaway – Chris Highcock
- Discussion

# 01 Policy background

Malcolm Burr, Convener EMB

# Policy

## Elections Act 2002

- 2019 manifesto commitment on electoral reform ‘to protect the integrity of our democracy’ .....:
  - introducing identification to vote at polling stations
  - introducing appropriate absent voting safeguards
  - measures to prevent foreign interference in elections.....alongside further provisions for overseas voters and measures around intimidation



# 02 What has happened and what is coming?

Elections Act 2022

# Elections Act 2022

## What it means for Scotland – headline changes

- Requirement to show ID at polling stations and Voter Authority Certificates – from May 2023
- Improving accessibility of elections – from May 2023
- Apply for a UKPE postal and some types of proxy vote online – from 31 Oct 2023
- Postal vote handling and secrecy – from 1 Dec 2023
- Limits to how many people a voter can act as a proxy for – Oct 2023
- Changes that simplify and clarify the offence of undue influence – Nov 2023
- Changes to overseas voting – Jan 2024

# Divergence

Divergence introduces a further complexity and risk for administration and elector engagement in the electoral process

Reserved	Devolved
Voter ID at polling stations	-
Postal votes – reapply every 3 yrs	Postal Votes – refresh every 5 yrs
AV - Online application portal	AV - Paper application / different forms
AV applications – ID check	-
Limits on postal vote handling	-

Reserved polls:

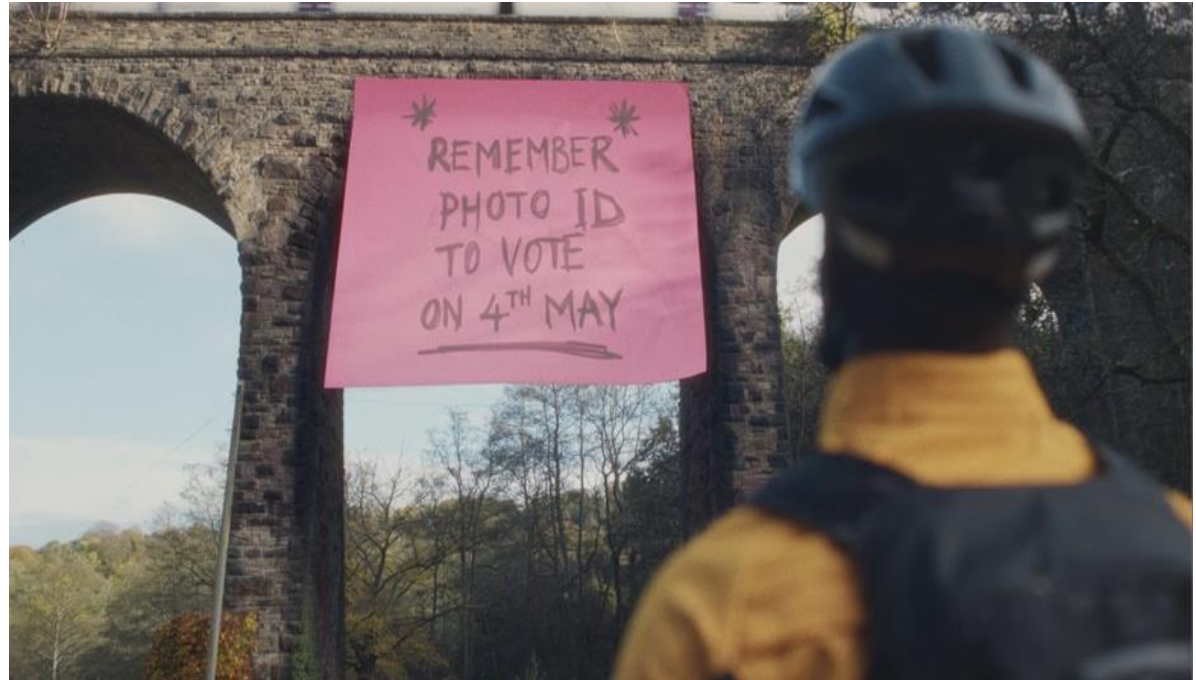
- UK Parliamentary
- Recall petitions

Devolved polls:

- Scottish Parliamentary
- Council

# Communication and awareness

'Note to Self'  
campaign -  
May 2023



# Resources

Range of  
resources  
available now:

- Voter ID
- Apply for VAC
- Accessible  
formats

New creative to  
follow



# 02 An administrator's experience

Tracey Hurst - Depute Returning Officer,  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

# Reflections and lessons going forward

## Reflections

- Highest number of VAC applications in West Midlands and one of the highest in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Increased in number of first time voter registrations.
- Forged links with hard to reach groups.

## Lessons

- This is a whole-council effort – all areas of the authority had to be engaged.
- Digitally excluded can be hardest to reach.
- Think outside the box with your communications.
- Cost of Local Comms plan
- Prepare, prepare, prepare.
- Audit trails



# About Sandwell



- Core team 4 full time members 3 seasonal support
- In the heart of the Black Country in the West Midlands - electorate of 232,000
- Home to Sandwell Aquatics Centre - host venue of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games swimming and diving events
- A culturally diverse, welcoming place to live
- A growing borough - in terms of population and regeneration
- Home to 340,000+ people
- 12th most deprived area in the country
- One in four residents are born outside the UK
- 84% of residents speak English proficiently or as a first language





# VAC issue and use

- Early engagement and customer journey pathways
- Sandwell had the highest number of VAC applications (around 1,300 - 80 on the first day) in West Midlands.
- 135 VAC applications rejected. Agreed approach on photo use.
- Highest number of applications by population in the West Midlands and one of the highest in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Around 37,229 people voted at a polling station. It's estimated between 2% and 6% of voters may not have accepted photographic ID.
- We issued VACs to around 3.5% of electors voting at a polling station.



# Staffing

- Female staff in all polling stations
- An extra member of staff at most station
  - Decision about meeters / greeters
- Accessibility awareness training for staff
- Polling staff training - including videos of real-life situations
- Do not underestimate the amount of information staff need
- Approved resources - Have a back-up plan for additional staff



# Challenges on the day

- No significant challenges.
- Staff were well prepared.
- There were no significant incidents on the day at polling stations.
- 99+% voters showed valid photo ID.
- Candidates, agents and tellers outside polling stations.
- Situation reports – have prepared comms to address issues
- Repeat your message and manage expectations.



# Practical issues in preparation for Voter ID

- Tight timescales
- A significant number of Sandwell residents were unlikely to have valid photographic ID
- Deprivation linked with likelihood of having ID
- High proportion of residents who don't have English as a first language
- Digital divide meant that some people would be hard to reach
- Privacy screens/religious considerations
- Accessibility



# 03 An observer's experience – LGE 2023

Mairi Copeland, Elections Coordinator,  
Dumfries & Galloway Council

# EMB Observation on 4 May

Voter ID introduced for council elections in England 4 May 2023. opportunity for teams in Scotland to learn from planning, preparation and implementation ahead of UKPGE

- 18 Council across North of England identified
- 21 of the 32 Councils in Scotland provided observers
  - Pre-meeting to discuss planning
  - Attendance at polling staff training
  - Observation on Polling Day (EC accreditation)
  - Debrief post-election
- Useful practical lessons

- Prior to Polling Day
- Observation Plan
- Polling Day Observations
- Good Practice
- Follow Up
- Dumfries and Galloway Council Next Steps

# Kirklees Council

- Located in West Yorkshire
- Mix of rural and urban settlements
- Diverse population
- 194 polling places
- 14 in large towns
- 19 rural/small village



# Prior to Polling day

## Discussions with Kirklees

- Get a feel for the area and demographics
- What their preparations had been
- What training they had undertaken
- What issues they had
- What issues they expected

# Observation plan

We planned our visits to maximise our learning

- Rural / Urban Mix
- Single and Multiple Stations
- Stations with high level of diversity
- Potential “hot spots”
- EMB template
- What we wanted to find out

# Polling day observations

## Voter ID

- Lots of signage
- Staff informed and knowledgeable
- Private areas
- Process worked well

# Polling Day observations

## Staffing.

- 3 Polling Clerks
- Role of the Presiding Officer
- Meeters / Greeters

# Polling day observations

## Station layouts

- Location of private area
- Location of ballot box
- Signage

# Good practice summary

- Training
- Staff attitude
- Processes
- Posters
- Polling Place Inspectors

# Kirklees follow-up

- 32% turnout
- 600+ voters turned away
- 400+ returned
- Commonwealth passports
- Unexpected items
- Training on forms
- Video training

# Dumfries and Galloway Council

## Next Steps

- Poll Staffing scheme what does it look like and where are our gaps
- Communication
- Staff awareness sessions
- Recruitment
- Training
- Paperwork



# Dumfries and Galloway Council

## Next Steps

- Resources
- Accessibility
- Lead Polling Place Inspectors
- SPOC
- Candidates / Agents

# 04 What have we learnt?

Sarah Mackie, Electoral Commission

# Electoral Commission Report

We have a statutory duty to collect data and publish reports about elections that take place across the UK.

- Interim analysis in June 2023 followed by full report in September
- First elections in Great Britain where changes introduced by the Elections Act 2022 were in place.
  - increased flexibility as to what support could be provided in polling stations to enable, or make it easier for, disabled people to vote **independently** and **in secret**
  - Requirement to show photographic identification (ID) to vote in polling stations
- Observations and recommendations

The Electoral Commission



# Electoral Commission Observations

## Levels of voter confidence and satisfaction remain high

- Awareness of the need to bring ID to vote at a polling station was high
- Awareness and take-up of the Voter Authority Certificate was low
- Most who wanted to vote were able to do so
  - At least 0.25% of people who tried to vote at a polling station in May 2023 were not able to because of the ID requirement
  - Around 4% of all non-voters said they didn't vote because of the voter ID requirement

The  
Electoral  
Commission



# Electoral Commission Observations

Levels of voter confidence and satisfaction remain high **BUT**

- Some groups struggled with ID requirement; these overlap
  - Variation in levels of ownership of accepted ID
  - Lack of awareness of the new requirement
- Accessibility measures – voter awareness remains low
- Changes to voting process adds layers of complexity and risk
- Electoral administration infrastructure is already stretched
- **Capacity** and **resilience** key risk for future

The  
Electoral  
Commission

## Report on the May 2023 local elections in England

September 2023



# Electoral Commission Recommendations

## Recommended actions for Government, ROs and EROs

- Increase awareness of support for disabled
- Review list of accepted ID
- Improve access to VACs
- Options for those without ID – including attestation / "vouching"
- Polling staff to collect data on impact of Voter ID
- Protect trust and confidence in system (role of parties and campaigners)
- ICT systems need set up and tested well ahead of elections
- Dependencies and delivery risks need careful management

The  
Electoral  
Commission

### Report on the May 2023 local elections in England

September 2023



# Electoral Commission

## Further changes from the Elections Act to be implemented ahead of the UKPGE

- introduction of online absent vote application processes
- changes to commonly used names that can be used on ballot papers by candidates
- changes to arrangements and time limits for postal and proxy voting appointments
- the removal of the 15-year registration limit for overseas voters
- Gould Principle needs to be applied
- legislation should be in place at least six months before it comes into effect to reduce risks to the electoral process

The  
Electoral  
Commission



# Concerns ahead of next UKPGE

**The context for implementing these changes for elections during 2024 is particularly complex. Increases risks to delivery of polls**

- electoral law is already fragmented and complex, and the capacity and resilience of electoral administration teams are already stretched
- the electoral administration community is highly dependent on commercial suppliers and external partners
- UKPGE could be called at any time and, once it is, must be delivered within a short timescale of less than six weeks
- impact of the new online absent vote application option on application volumes in the weeks ahead of a major poll is unknown but may be significant
- widespread changes to UK Parliament constituencies must be implemented from late 2023, alongside a required review of local polling districts and polling places
- confusion - some new absent voting changes will only be implemented in Scotland and Wales for voters at UK parliamentary elections (and PCC elections in Wales), and not for voters at devolved elections



# 05 10 points to takeaway

Chris Highcock, Secretary to the Electoral Management Board  
for Scotland

# What have we learnt from 4 May 2023?

Experience of 4 May English Council Elections (plus 5 October By-election) must inform our planning for the next UKPGE with the implementation of the new measures

- Electoral Commission report(s)
- AEA Report
- EMB's own observation and debrief discussions
- **10 Key Take Aways**
  - **Practical Actions**

*Putting the voter first in all planning and implementation*

# Practical Actions 1- 5

## 10 Action Points

1. **Public Awareness** – creative local actions aligned with national campaign, targeting key groups, involving parties, councillors etc; phased approach starting early
2. **Perspective** – take a proportionate approach; do not let focus on Voter ID etc distract from the usual ‘bread and butter’ tasks; there is more the Elections Act than voter ID
3. **Polling staff recruitment** – start early, build a reserve to anticipate late call-offs; whole council approach
4. **Polling Staff training** – prepare the staff – include enhanced ‘customer care’ - but do not scare them off; ID check a minor additional admin task in most cases
5. **Polling Places** – ensure capacity for privacy but be proportionate; useful and effective signage

# Practical Actions 6-10

## 10 Action Points

- 6. Accessibility** – key part of training for staff and need to make all voters aware, new recommendations coming from EMB
- 7. VACs** - sufficient ERO capacity to provide, but demand was low in England and rarely used during polling
- 8. Voter ID forms** - BPRL and VIDEF used throughout the day to capture information in relation to the voter ID requirement; staff confusion and errors in completion
- 9. Additional Day of Poll Inspectors** – consider additional mobile staff for problem solving and dealing with "conflict"
- 10. Candidates and Agents** - briefings are vital, they need to understand and support process

# Constituency boundary changes & implications

Chair: Kenneth Lawrie with Robert Nicol

Presenters: Dale Robb and Caroline Burton

# Overview

## Objectives:

- To highlight the impact of the boundary changes
- To emphasise the considerations arising from the Elections Act 2022
- To convey considerations for cross constituency working

## What will we cover?

- Implications of the boundary changes
  - New constituencies, new partners?
- Working across boundaries
  - Different partners, different practices?

# Implications of the boundary changes

- UK Parliamentary Constituency review and process for laying boundaries formally
- Implications for EROs, ROs, candidates and voters
- Statutory reviews of polling places and polling districts
  - Resources for polling place review and new updated guidance – more later
  - Nod to forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary boundary review



# Working across boundaries (1)

- Cross constituency guidance – Electoral Commission
- Formal appointment of DRO(s) for shared constituencies
- Joint Constituency project plan and responsibilities for different elements of the poll – “taking in” -vs- “giving away”
- Risk register
- Staffing and training
- Websites / online information
- Awareness for voters and candidates / agents – parties / campaign

## Working across boundaries (2)

- ERO and registration issues
  - Different practices but same level of service
- Absent vote processes including OAVA
- Registers
  - Use of registers for subscribers
  - Consistent dates and deadlines
- Differing Electoral Management Systems (EMS)
- Data sharing issues

# Resources

Useful resources  
provided by the  
Electoral  
Commission

- [Polling place reviews](#)
- [Cross Constituency working](#)
- [Data Protection Guidance](#)

# Discussion

Any questions? Sharing of experiences? Tips and hints?

# Fees, charges and funding

Malcolm Burr, Convener, EMB

Chris Highcock, Secretary to the EMB

# Funding updates

## Funding changes for your awareness

- **Background**
  - Scrutiny – EMB engagement with DLUHC
- **Funding of UKPGE – New guidance**
- **Digital portal**
- **New Burdens funding**

# Funding of the UKPGE

- Assumption that local authorities must put their resources at the disposal of the RO for the conduct of elections
- Revised Funding Model – proportionate allocation model for to reflect Boundary changes
  - New MRA
  - Settled figure will be basis for future allocations
- Advances
- **RO entitled to recover their charges in respect of services rendered or expenses incurred for the efficient and effective conduct of the poll. However, this does not entitle RO to spend without constraint.**
  - **Value for money emphasis**

# New RO funding guidance

- Draft being revised based on feedback from Working Group
- DLUHC working on the remaining parts of the RO guidance
  - Aim to have at least the first part of the guidance finalised by start of October
  - Second part shared with the UK Funding Working Group for comment
- **Holiday Pay guidance** finalised and will be part of new guidance
- Returning Officer Fees



# UKPGE – Pay bands for election roles

- Introduction of a set of indicative fees for key elections roles in UK Parliamentary elections
- Significant variance in the rates paid to staff across the UK for similar roles - some very low and some very high
- Aim to have a system which avoids significant disparities
  - more transparent
  - fairer for elections staff overall
  - speedier settlement of claims

# UKPGE pay bands – latest update

## Update as at 29 September

- Pay bands will be included in the guidance and circulated by the end of October/early November as soon as the latter has been finalised.
- UK Government are making our final changes at present.
- Pay bands will need to be further updated once the new national minimum wage is announced by the government later this year
- Therefore a new set will be ready before year end

# Digital portal to submit claims to ECU

- Current set of Excel spreadsheets to be replaced by a **digital portal**
- **Should improve process – limit errors and support accuracy**
- Supplier appointed and working on the development of additional features
- User testing commences early October
- System to be fully configured and ready for wider testing by the end of December
- The aim to have **Go/No-Go** decision by the **end of January 2024**
- The system would be first used for the PCC elections May 2024 then the next UKPGE, whenever that takes place.

# New Burdens Funding

- New Burdens Funding - provided to **local authorities and VJBs** to cover the additional costs as a result of the UK Elections Act 2022 changes
- Grant Determination Letters (GDLs) were sent to all **local authorities and VJBs** (both RO and ERO)
  - updated GDL sent to all **local authorities and VJBs** July 2023 with funding allocations for the next set of changes, **grant payment in August 2023**
- Funding is **not ringfenced** and may be used at the **RO and ERO's** discretion (Voter ID, Accessibility etc)
- Justification led bids – for additional funding if the grant is insufficient for the **RO or ERO.**
  - Window opens again post May 2024

# Preparing for a UKPGE – Electoral fraud & integrity

Chair: Andy O'Neill, Electoral Commission

# Police Scotland - role in elections

Work with Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, often with the Commission and EMB, to ensure elections are conducted in a **fair and inclusive** manner and in **accordance with the law**

- **Minimise the risk of disruption** to the democratic process and the impact on the community
- **Maximise the safety and security** of candidates, their staff, and wider public figures.
- **Minimise risk of electoral malpractice** and **secure evidence** relating to electoral malpractice
- **Maximise public confidence** in Police Scotland's ability to support the delivery of an election
- During the election, with planning, ensure Police Scotland can **respond efficiently** to incidents
- **Minimise the likelihood of public disorder**, and where such disorder does occur, respond in a proportionate manner

# Single Point of Contact

- National Elections  
Lead – SI Darren  
Faulds
- National Elections  
SPOC – Sgt Robyn  
Lyle
- Divisional Elections  
SPOCs

## Force control and reduction measures

- establish **Command Structure**
- ensure availability of **Divisional SPOCs**
- allocate roles before event
- identify locations warranting a high visibility police presence
- establish contingency reserves in the event of an incident
- **training** for Divisional SPOCs
- **pocket guide** for those on election duties

# Pre event planning

Electoral malpractice  
is rare

Malpractice can  
attract considerable  
media attention and  
undermine  
confidence in the  
electoral process

Prevention is better  
than prosecution

- Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers **pre-meet** SPOC
  - threat assessment and control strategy
  - preventative measures highlighted
  - understand your local community profile and community intelligence
  - identify vulnerable communities, e.g. care homes, assisted living
- EC / Police Scotland guidance on **Preventing and detecting electoral fraud in Scotland**
- Electoral fraud and malpractice plan
- EC performance standards



# Elections Act 2022 changes

## From November 2023

- Intimidation sanctions
- Undue influence
- Digital Imprints

## For **May 2024 polls** (subject to secondary legislation)

- Changes to postal vote handling and secrecy

# Comments

# Accessibility

Chair:

Monica Patterson - Returning Officer, East Lothian Council

Presenters:

Chris Highcock, Electoral Management Board

Sarah Mackie, Electoral Commission

Tracey Hurst, Sandwell MBC

# 01 Accessibility responsibilities

Chris Highcock - Secretary, EMB

# Responsibility

**Context: keeping the voter at the centre of all our planning and delivery; but we also have legal responsibilities to fulfil**

- Equality Act 2010
  - anticipate the needs of disabled voters / **reasonable adjustments**
- Representation of the People Act 1983
  - election notices - translated or provided in alternative formats
  - accessibility of polling places
- Elections Act 2022
  - provide equipment as it is reasonable to...enabling persons to vote **independently** and **in secret**
  - requires you to have regard to **EC guidance** on polling station equipment

# EMB Accessibility Sub-group

Exploring the scope for improving the accessibility of the electoral process for people who experience barriers; to facilitate the trialling and implementation of practical and deliverable improvements.

- Representative groups with different interests have lobbied for accessibility improvements for many years
- The legal judgment in England and Wales which said that the TVD was not **of itself** enough to support people with sight loss to vote without assistance.
- Changes made by the Elections Act to the UK Government approach to accessibility and devolved legislation on accessibility.
- New burdens funding arising from the Elections Act changes
  - Pencil grips?!

# Accessibility Sub-group – Work programme

Current issues reviewed across different electors and different accessibility needs; three workstreams identified

- **Short-term/Immediate actions** – measures that can be implemented **now** for the next UKPGE; recommendations from the EMB
- **Medium-term actions** – measures for investigation and implementation by the next Scottish Parliament Election (2026)
  - New tactile/audio solutions – ideas under development to replace TVD
  - Consistent accessible website – options under investigation
- **Longer term actions** – options for more radical modernisation

# 02 Supporting the voter journey

Sarah Mackie, Electoral Commission



# Electoral Commission report on May 2023

".... Returning Officers provided a range of support at polling stations, voter awareness of what is available continues to be low and more can be done to ensure disabled voters receive the support they need."

- **Recommendation 1: Increase awareness of the support available for disabled voters** There is some evidence that levels of awareness of the support and equipment available, especially in polling stations, is still lower than it could be. This includes awareness of both the new accessibility measures and the existing provisions that are available (such as the possibility of asking a companion or polling station staff for help with voting).

The Electoral Commission



# 03 Innovative solutions in practice

Tracey Hurst, Sandwell MBC

# Our approach

- What are we doing currently?
- Where are the gaps?
- Engagement with impacted groups
- Test the success



# Starting point

- Set up Voter ID and Accessibility Working Group
- Voter ID and Accessibility Champions
- Consult with groups including Sandwell Visually Impaired
- Focus on making voting more accessible BEFORE polling day



# What we did

- Tackled physical access issues at polling stations
- Provided equipment including audio support
- Recorded audio versions of candidates
- My Voting Passport for voters with learning difficulties
- Additional resources for portable buildings
- Specific training with polling station staff to support electors
- Hidden disabilities
- Costs



# What we learned

- Survey helped identify areas for improvement
- People impacted by accessibility issues are the experts
- Don't assume
- Take feedback from polling day to make future improvements
- Don't stand still on technology



# 04 Discussion

# And beyond the UKPGE

Chair: Malcolm Burr

Speakers:

- Maria McCann - Scottish Government
- Chris Highcock - Secretary, EMB



# What next?

In the service \_\_\_\_\_  
**of Scotland**



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

# Legislation

- Consultation ran from mid-December 2022 to mid-March 2023, with 517 responses analysed independently
- Upcoming Electoral Reform Bill
- Bill to be introduced to Parliament early 2024
- Bill passage during 2024
- Secondary legislation on several important issues
- Measures in force well in advance of relevant Scottish Parliament or local government election (exceeding the 6 month Gould Principle)

# 02 eCounting 2027

Chris Highcock – Secretary, EMB

# eCounting Project 2027

- Lessons learned
- Requirements specification
- 32 counts
- Invitation to tender
- Contract awarded
- Governance

# eCounting Project 2027 - Roadmap

2024

January - April 2024	May 2024	end May 2024	July 2024	August 2024	August- November 2024	November 2024	December 2024
Initial strategy formulation and initial procurement engagement	<b>Assurance: Business justification gate</b>	Project Board: Agree Project initiation	Supplier Information Day	Project Board: Sign off procurement strategy	Draft ITT	<b>Assurance: Pre-procurement gate</b>	Project Board: Sign off ITT

2025-2027

January 2025	Mid-end February 2025	February-May 2025	October 2025 - August 2026	September 2026	October 2026	November 2026-May 2027	May 2027
Issue ITT	Receipt of tenders	Evaluation of bids, contract award & standstill	Changes, User testing, technical Testing	<b>Assurance: Go-live gate</b>	Sign off elections specification; Software available for by-elections	Stage 4: Final preparations for election delivery	May 2027 Elections day and Count day

# Scottish Parliament Election 2026

- No voter ID
- Postal vote issue
- Conduct order
- Fees and charges
- Accessibility

# Any Questions?

# Closing remarks

Malcolm Burr, Convener, EMB

Sue Bruce, Electoral Commissioner, Scotland



# What will follow



Link to conference *feedback* survey



Slide set



Link to recording - YouTube



Link to EC resources on each of the session topics



Capacity & resilience workshop feedback document



Information on our 'Note to self' awareness campaign

# Contacts

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