



ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR SCOTLAND

REPORT

e-Counting Project 2017 – Update as at July 2015

MEETING

31 July 2015

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the latest update on the current status of the preparatory work which is underway in relation to the next local government elections which are expected to be held on 4 May 2017.

PROCUREMENT PROCESS

2. The revised deadline for the submission of tenders was Tuesday 30 June, and two submissions were received. Tenders have been received from the following companies:

- **CGI** – CGI are a global IT and business process provider. They acquired Logica in 2012, and have selected the following partners if selected for the 2017 local elections: Idox, The Lettershop Group, with Dacoll and Avnet providing ICT hardware and delivery services. Members will be aware that Idox purchased Opt2Vote in 2012.
- **Indra** – Indra are a leading consultancy and technology company. Their bid proposes the establishment of a special purpose vehicle comprising Modern Democracy, Fujitsu, and GI Solutions to deliver print services.

3. Although three tenders were received in 2010 for the 2012 elections, the two current bids represent three of the six companies who responded to the Request for Supplier Information (RFI) stage earlier in the procurement process. The three remaining companies who responded to the RFI did not submit bids were ScytI, Smartmatic and IntElect.

4. At the time of writing, the tenders are being reviewed by an evaluation team, comprising Alex Mowat, and Liz Ure from the Scottish Government, with Barbara MacGregor, David Miller, and James Mathieson representing the election community, and Dougie McGregor representing the EMB. Although there are only two bids the volume of documentation is very extensive and we are indebted to the local government officers for giving up so much of their time to participate in the evaluation process, particularly given the fact that all are involved in organising by-elections so soon

after the UK General Election. Douglas Martin from the Scottish Government is providing expert advice on procurement and contract matters. Both bidders have been invited to demonstrate their proposed solutions and these sessions are scheduled to take place on 10 and 11 August within Saughton House.

5. The following table sets out the key stages and dates associated with the procurement process:

e-COUNTING FOR THE 2017 SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Procurement Process	Date (all in 2015)
Publish advertisement in OJEU and issue Invitation to Tender (ITT)	21 May
Question and Answer Period	22 May – 19 June
Deadline for return of ITT	30 June
Evaluation of Tenders (including clarifications)	1 July – 24 July
Tender Evaluation Panel Meeting	16 July
Tenderers Presentations / Technical Demonstrations	10 – 14 August
Internal Scottish Government Approval Process	17 August – 4 September
10 Day Standstill Period	7 –17 September
Issue Contract Award Letter	18 September
Lead- in Period	21 September – 1 November
Contract Start Date	2 November

OTHER MATTERS

6. The Project Team are seeking a reaction from the Board in relation to a desire to utilise pens within polling stations in preference to pencils for the 2017 poll. While accepting that ROs have vigorously defended the use of pencils in previous electoral events, there are compelling arguments to support the use of pens arising from the use of scanning technology for local government elections. In addition, Members of the Board will recall a number of comments relating to the use of pencils in the recent referendum which fuelled a number of the long-running conspiracy theories.

Indeed, it is understood that most ROs routinely opt to make pens available to Presiding Officers for issue to voters in accordance with Electoral Commission guidance.

7. The Project Board previously decided that ROs would be free to utilise existing stocks of ballot boxes, therefore ballot papers ought to be folded prior to being placed in the ballot box. It is anticipated that polling station staff will be encouraged to make every effort to see the reverse of each ballot paper as it is being deposited in the ballot box. This was also a significant issue in the 2014 referendum with a number of voters alleging that the reverse of their paper was blank, and that somehow the process was open to abuse. Where pencils are utilised the resolution of the scanners has to set at a level which will also detect folds in the ballot papers, with the result that a significant proportion of papers will be submitted for adjudication. This will both undermine confidence in the e-counting process, as the intention of the voter will invariably be clear to the human eye, and increase the time taken to conduct counts.

8. The vast majority of postal votes are completed by pen, and indeed voters are requested to complete the Postal Voting Statement using a black pen. Inevitably, the same instrument is almost always used to complete the ballot paper. On the assumption that the overall level of turnout in 2017 is 45% (39% in 2012) and 70% of absent voters use their vote, around one in four of all ballot papers processed via e-counting will be postal votes and be completed by pen. It is logical that polling station ballots should also be completed by pen. A supply of pencils could be retained to provide on request.

9. Preliminary enquiries have been made to source plastic caps with holes which would fit standard pens to allow them to be attached to polling booths in the same way as pencils. This would allow pens to be utilised in a cost-effective way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The Board is invited to:

- note the current status of preparatory work to procure an e-counting solution for the 2017 local government elections, and
- agree that pens be utilised as the default method of completing ballot papers within polling stations to optimise the efficiency of the e-counting system.

D McGregor,

Edinburgh,

21 July 2015