



ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR SCOTLAND

REPORT e-Counting Project 2017 – Update as at August 2016

MEETING 26 August 2016

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the latest update on the current status of the preparatory work which is underway in relation to the e-Counting Project 2017.

STAGE 2 TECHNICAL TESTING

2. Since the last update to the May meeting the work of the Project Team has continued to focus on Stage 2 System Refinement and Acceptance Testing. This work first commenced on 1 March and consisted of a series of tests covering scanner settings, ballot mark-up with different instruments, known results validation, system accessibility and usability, security and penetration testing, disaster recovery, software enhancements and other performance tests.
3. In order to assist with the progression of the Stage 2 tests and in advance of the printing of 250,000 ballot papers required for Stages 2 and 3, the Scottish Government secured some surplus ballot papers from a by-election within South Lanarkshire Council. These were marked up and utilised in a number of Stage 2 tests prior to the printing and delivery of the planned 250,000 ballot paper set, which has now been marked-up.
4. A number of system refinements were suggested to optimise and enhance the performance of the e-counting system and these have virtually all been delivered and tested. Work is continuing on the facility to streamline the consolidation of ballot boxes containing fewer than 200 ballot papers. The entire suite of reports generated by the system has been reviewed and a number of changes to format and content have been made. It is hoped that the electoral community will welcome the new functionality when attending the mock counts in September.
5. With the exception of a couple of minor matters, Stage 2 activities have been completed within schedule even though additional activity in relation to the 140,000 ballot paper testing was incorporated into this stage. Three such tests were carried out to demonstrate consistent system performance at this scale. The Project Board formally approved the completion of Stage

2 on 19 August. It is envisaged that the new and final version of the e-counting software will be utilised in two forthcoming by-elections, one of which is prior to the mock counts.

6. Some time ago I referred to the potential to utilise pens to mark ballot papers within polling stations. Tests carried out indicate that the use of pen rather than pencil results in a lower adjudication rate, although when the standard polling booth pencil is utilised there is no material difference in adjudication rates.

MOCK COUNTS & BULK TESTS

7. Work is underway to make the necessary arrangements for the bulk tests and mock counts (Stage 3) which are taking place within the Dewars Centre, Perth from 29 August to the end of September. Only 3 authorities are now planning to conduct a full count, with fifteen opting to collaborate with other authorities to run mock counts over 5 days. In addition, 11 authorities have opted to participate in an observer capacity and they have been invited to attend over any of the eight days on which mock counts are scheduled. The remaining authorities have indicated that they wish to attend the event to be held in Aberdeen during the week commencing 20 February 2017.
8. Prior to the mock counts commencing on 2 September, two bulk tests will be undertaken, with each test processing 160,000 ballot papers to demonstrate system performance at this scale. In addition, CGI will undertake a system recovery and completion under simulated disaster recovery conditions.
9. The Minister for Parliamentary Business is attending the mock count on Friday 9 September.
10. Representatives of the Maltese Electoral Commission are attending the mock counts on 13 and 14 September as they are in the process of introducing electronic counting for their elections, all of which use the STV system.

OTHER MATTERS

11. The Board is invited to note the position in relation to a number of other elements of the project:
 - Call-Off Contracts – Returning Officers were provided with a copy of the Services Contract which each local authority will have to enter into within a letter from Heather McCauley the Chair of the Project Board. At the time of writing very few enquiries have been received.
 - Portal – CGI have completed an updated version of the portal which will be launched shortly and will be demonstrated in Perth next month.
 - Role-specific training – This will be delivered over a four week period commencing 20 February 2017, with the first week in the Beach Ballroom, Aberdeen and the following three weeks within Pentland House, Edinburgh.

RECOMMENDATION

12. The Board is invited to:

- Note the current status of the key tasks within the e-Counting Project 2017.

D McGregor,

Edinburgh,

19 August 2016

