



**Key Learning Points
following the**

**“MOVING TO CRITICAL”
POLICE SCOTLAND / EMB JOINT SEMINAR**

at the

Scottish Police College, Tulliallan

Tuesday 28 November 2017

1.0 Background – The Issue

- 1.1 The UK is in the unfortunate position that there is an ongoing threat of international terrorism. This threat is likely to continue such that planning for electoral events needs to be in the context of recognising these threats.
- 1.2 The UK Parliamentary General Election on 7 June 2017 was conducted facing a threat level that had been raised to “Critical” following attacks in London and Manchester. However, there was some confusion among Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) with respect to what this meant in practice. In particular, there was a lack of understanding of the difference between the assessed threat level and what the appropriate response should be in the light of local circumstances and other intelligence. This led to a degree of confusion around issues such as the presence of armed police and the potential search and seal of count and polling venues.

2.0 A Joint Seminar

- 2.1 During the post-election review undertaken by the EMB in consultation with ROs across Scotland, the confusion around the move to critical, what it meant and how it was communicated emerged as a key issue.
- 2.2 It was clear that future election planning needs to recognise the realities of these enhanced threat levels with Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, Police Scotland and other partners working to deliver safe, free and accessible electoral events in which voters can have full confidence.
- 2.3 To address this issue a joint EMB / Police Scotland seminar was planned, to give Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) the background they need to plan and deliver electoral events in the context of enhanced threat levels for terrorist attack.
- 2.4 This was to be achieved through both briefings on key issues and practical table top planning exercises. The event took place on 28 November 2017 at the Police Scotland College – Tulliallan with all EROs and ROs represented along with their Police Scotland SPOCs for elections.

3.0 Objectives of the Seminar

- 3.1 EMB representatives met with the Police Scotland leads on elections to plan the event. A series of learning objectives were identified for the seminar. Following the event ROs, EROs and key officers in Police Scotland should:
 - Understand the nature and extent of Police Intelligence with respect to terrorist threat.
 - Appreciate the different roles and responsibilities of RO, ERO, Police Scotland, Local Authority etc with respect to the delivery of electoral events.

- Understand a range of threats including “cyber-attacks” and “insider threats” as well as more explicit attacks on polling or the count, considering how each should be addressed.
- Understand the key issues associated with communications around the threat levels and responses.
- Through practical scenario planning exercises, identify key issues to address within each organisation for inclusion within relevant Contingency Plans. These may include reactions to an attack during an election and how that would be handled differently if the attack was in a neighbouring constituency.

4.0 Briefings on Key Issues

4.1 The initial part of the seminar was a series of briefings from subject experts aimed at providing the key knowledge and information to support these learning objectives. These included

- **Roles and Responsibilities** of RO, ERO, Police Scotland and other stakeholders – delivered by Elma Murray a Returning Officer and member of the EMB. The legal responsibility of the RO for the delivery of the election was made clear as was the limits of the Police powers around the election. However, it was stressed that the ROs would always take seriously their duty of care around staff and electors and so must engage closely with Police Scotland and their intelligence as they determine how to deliver these events.
- **Intelligence Input** - D/SUPT Raymond Higgins, Police Scotland – gave a briefing on the nature and extend of police intelligence and how it is handled and judged. This stressed that Police Scotland will always seek to engage closely with ROs around such major public events as elections, taking appropriate and proportionate notice of the intelligence that they have. The nature of the [Threat Levels](#) was discussed, but also made clear was the nature of response. The response to a particular threat level may vary depending on intelligence, local circumstances, or other factors. There always needs to be discussion with Police Scotland colleagues around appropriate responses.
- **Communications** - Chris Starrs, Head of Corporate Communications, Police Scotland – explained the way in which communications are handled across Police Scotland and the care which must be taken in shaping and transmitting those key messages. Consistent messages, to the right people at the right time are essential to deliver safe events that still uphold democracy.
- **Operational Issues** – two topics of Insider Threat and general guidance from NaCTSO were covered by Mr Neil Phillips, Police Scotland and DS Andrew Cameron, Police Scotland. There is [extensive useful guidance](#) from the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) about the delivery of elections and prior to the election the Electoral Commission circulated NaCTSO Election Security for Polling Stations (Updated for 2017) and National Cyber Security Centre advice for Local Authorities.

5.0 Electoral Commission Material

- 5.1 The Electoral Commission's Electoral Administration [Bulletin 174 \(Scotland\)](#) was also referred to, which provided a reminder of the security advice and guidance that was available to assist ROs in determining the level of risk and putting in place appropriate mitigations and contingency arrangements in their local area. This also stressed that it is ultimately for the RO to make decisions on what arrangements are appropriate for a local area.
- 5.2 The move to critical also highlighted the general need for attention to be paid to resilience and contingency planning. As part of an RO's planning for the election it is important that the RO and ERO determine the level of risk on a local level, and work with relevant local stakeholders to respond appropriately to mitigate that risk accordingly. This means that in addition to working with your Police Scotland the RO must ensure that they develop contingency plans and business continuity arrangements, alongside local partners and stakeholders, to ensure they are well placed to respond to any emerging issues.
- 5.3 The standard Electoral Commission Guidance includes material on [risk management](#) and contingency planning and the full set of this guidance should be reviewed and implemented as appropriate for each event.

6.0 Seminar – Desktop Exercises

- 6.1 Following these briefings there were a series of three desktop exercises, working through some different scenarios. These allowed ROs, DROs, EROs and the local SPOCs to work together to discuss how the different incidents would be handled. The specific scenarios are provided in Appendix 1, but in brief they dealt with:
- **Scenario 1: Before Polling Day** – Cybersecurity. How would EROs and ROs react to accusations that an electoral register had been hacked and corrupted?
 - **Scenario 2: Polling Day** - Knife attack at a Polling Station. How would ROs, EROs and Police react to reports of a knife attack at a polling place in a neighbouring constituency.
 - **Scenario 3 – The Count** – Knife attack at the Count. How would the RO and Police handle a knife attack at the count venue during the count, with boxes opened and papers being counted.
- 6.2 The discussions were facilitated with in groups arranged by region involving ROs, EROs, the local Police SPOC and some Council emergency planners.

7.0 Issues identified and actions to be taken

- 7.1 In Appendix 1 "likely actions" are suggested for each of the scenarios. In addition to these, the discussions identified other points to be considered and addressed. These are noted below.

Scenario 1: Potential “hacking” of the electoral register.

- Returning Officers would contact EMB for a consistent approach to deliver a corporate communications message. The Electoral Commission would also be informed.
- In the case of such a scenario once it had been established that claims are legitimate, the attack would be dealt with nationally and not locally.
- Initial contact would be made with the Returning Officers to advise them of the situations.
- Contact would be made with the police to provide assistance and advice in relation to an electronic crime.
- Register checks would have to be carried out to determine if there had really been a hack or modification to Electoral Roll. If there were errors identified, this would be enough to undermine the security of, and confidence in the ballot.
- There would be concerns that valid electors had been removed from the register and turn up to vote, this would need to be dealt with by the PO and ERO.
- Delegates agreed as a group if such a complex enough process for hacking the Electoral Register that anything could be possible and there could well be names added to the register.
- All agreed that giving assurances to the public that there had not been a hacking incident would be difficult – even if it was found to be a false claim then there could be a serious challenge to confidence in the event.

7.2 The whole scenario was a significant challenge that prompted much discussion and debate. The electoral process starts with the electoral register. If access was gained to the systems such that the roll was amended then it might be difficult to identify the corruption of the records initially, although checks would be possible.

7.3 However, a major risk would be simply that the confidence in the event would be eroded by the claim that there had been a hack – irrespective of whether anything had been done. A recovery of confidence in the security of the system might be difficult to achieve given this challenge to confidence.

7.4 The cybersecurity of the registers is a very high priority.

Scenario 2: Knife attack at a Polling Place

- Returning Officers would again contact EMB to gain information and the understanding of any emerging national threat.
- Returning Officers would look to have a consistent response, and to identify if the threat is local or national.
- Delegates all expressed that they would look to get a set of consistent communication lines out quickly to update and provide advice.
- ROs should ensure that staff are aware of the processes for protecting the security of the ballot boxes if they need to exit a polling place.

- This information should be found within ROs' contingency emergency plans and is in guidance form the Electoral Commission. All Staff would receive the Electoral Commission Handbook.
- Should a move to critical occur the amount of information passed to staff might have to be carefully managed to avoid scaring staff and potentially losing staff, meaning that polling places might have to be closed.
- Although it is the individual Presiding Officer's decision to close a polling station, more guidance/ rules could produce real "fear" and make staff recruitment and retention very difficult.
- Staff must ensure that they do not use the handbook as a passive set of rules. Potentially a personal message should be delivered to staff.
- Policing practices were also discussed. During Polling Day each local authority has an Elections Single Point of Contact (SPoC) who would hold meetings with their Returning Officer as standard throughout the day. If at any point there was intelligence or information of an increasing risk to the elections this would be brought forward at a meeting and a response determined.
- The response level and threat level was also discussed. When the country was at Critical in May 2017 Police Scotland's **response** level did not change (with regards building security etc.)
- A RO shared that prior to the last election she showed the "Run, Hide, Tell" video to polling staff and included the "Run, Hide, Tell" leaflet in staff handouts. This was well received by delegates and but was not being replicated across the country. This should be best practice and rolled out by all ROs.

Scenario 3: Knife Attack at a Count

- Despite structures responses in place for fire alarm etc, if there is an attack in the count hall staff would be likely to run away and not come back. There would be not officers to secure papers etc. The venue would become a crime scene and would be under the control of the police rather than the RO.
- If a high-profile candidate was injured, observation of the count would be likely to be suspended.
- When discussing suspending the count if there is a major incident it was agreed that the RO should take into consideration the welfare and wellbeing of count staff who may or may not be affected in some form.
- In the event of a major incident being declared police would liaise with the Crown Office preservation of the scene. The crime scene would take priority over the count.

7.5 In such circumstances safety of staff and public would take priority over the electoral process. While it may be possible to preserve the security of the papers etc. in such circumstances the integrity of the event might be difficult to guarantee.

8.0 Feedback

- 8.1 Following the seminar feedback was collected from all participants. All participants found the event to have been useful and to have provided valuable information, clarification around the idea of threat vs response and an opportunity to engage with stakeholders (RO/ERO/Police SPOC) around realistic scenarios. It was agreed that the learning objectives of the event had been met.

- 8.2 The most important outcome of the day however was opportunity for RO, ERO and Police Scotland SPoCs to work together and develop an understand of the issues that each face in the delivery of electoral events. This common understanding and approach will benefit the operation of all in the planning and implementation of future electoral events.

9.0 Issues to take forward

9.1 The discussions around the table top exercises and the preceding briefings stressed several points for ROs, EROs and SPOCs to address in their future planning and delivery of electoral events, many of which should already be part of the work. These included:

- Regular early meetings with SPOCs
- Comprehensive contingency plans
- Consideration of and planning around risk
- Understanding of cybersecurity threats
- The important distinction between threat and response
- The need for appropriate responses so as not to scare staff or make staff retention more difficult
- The importance of clear consistent communications
- The primacy of staff and public safety, for both of which the RO has a duty of care
- The danger of rumour and conspiracy which can undermine confidence in the election without any real issue having been experienced.
- The importance of reviewing, understanding and applying all existing guidance from Electoral Commission, NaCTSO, NCSC etc.

10.0 Contacts

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Appendix 1 - Scenarios

Scenario 1: Before Polling Day – Cybersecurity threat to Electoral Registers

It is five days before a UK Parliamentary election. Registers for the ballot boxes have been produced and distributed to Returning Officers and postal packs have been issued. The boxes of equipment and materials have been compiled ready for distribution to Polling Places.

At 7pm news channels begin to report that via Twitter the Hackers group Anonymous are claiming that the register in a major city has been hacked over the last 6-months and details of electors on the register have been changed as well as names added to the Register. The major city is in your local area.

ACTIONS

OUTCOMES

FACILITATORS NOTES

General Prompts

- What are your initial actions upon receiving this information?
- Discuss your roles and responsibilities?
- Where do you seek advice from and who do you provide advice to?
- What communication method would you use to inform and update your staff?

Likely Actions

- ERO/RO establish an Emergency Action Team
- Communication teams to be fully briefed
- IT teams asked to investigate if any evidence of hack.
- Data copy of register matched against data copy of register 12 months ago to identify changes. (spot checks to see if any fake/hacked additions)
- Spot checks carried out to establish source of changes
- Spot checks to see if confirmation letters were sent to unsolicited applications
- Spot checks against returned HEFs to see if householders have confirmed details of changes
- Based on evidence from IT and checks determine if allegation is real or not
- If real engage with RO as to possibility of suspending/countermanding poll
- If not real advise public no evidence
- Stringent postal vote personal ID checking
- Polling Station staff to be alerted to possible personation attempts
- Polling Staff to be reminded of procedure for Clerical Errors
- ERO/RO increase staff resourcing in case of increase queries from polling stations

Potential Outcomes

- Ensure BCP has all RO/ERO teams out of office contact details
- Emergency Communications Strategy to be developed.
- Review IT procedures to ensure systems are up to date and have audit logs regularly checked and any hacks would be identified
- Review monthly check process to see if fake additions would be picked up
- Voter ID at polling station would mitigate this risk

Scenario 2: Polling Day - Attack at a Polling Place

Breaking News just in: The UK terror threat level has been raised from severe to critical, the highest possible level, meaning an attack is “expected imminently”.

The Prime Minister announced the threat level had been raised, it means that troops will patrol the streets and security will also be stepped up at major public events and terrorist targets such as railway stations and airports.

The Prime Minister said military personnel would replace police officers "on guard duties at certain protected sites which are not accessible to the public, the public will see more armed police on the transport network and on our streets, providing extra protection, this is a proportionate and sensible step which will provide extra reassurance and protection”

Breaking News just in: Emergency services are in attendance at a Polling place in Newcastle city centre. Initial reporting stating there has been an attack with a knife.

Northumbria Police have released a statement on their social media forums “Emergency services are currently responding to reports of a knife attack at a Polling station. **We are treating this as a terrorist attack.** Please avoid the area as first responders work at the scene. For more updated on this incident please follow @npnewcastle”

ACTIONS

OUTCOMES

FACILITATORS NOTES

ALL THIS SHOULD BE COVERED IN EXISTING CONTINGENCY PLANS. HOWEVER, THE FOCUS SHOULD BE TO THINK THROUGH THE PRIORITIES AND HOW PUBLIC, STAFF AND THEN THE POLL (IN THAT ORDER) CAN BE PROTECTED.

General Prompts

- What are your initial actions upon receiving this information?
- Discuss your roles and responsibilities?
- What communication method would you use to inform and update your staff?
- What are your initial actions upon receiving this information?
- Where do you seek advice from and who do you provide advice to?
- Would the time of day have an impact?
- What if the attack was inside out outside of a polling station?
- What are your main priorities i.e. Public/Staff/Ballot Box?
- How would you communicate safety advice to staff? For example, with respect to counting staff how would you communicate changing security information prior to attending the count venue?
- The perfect response deals with the local situation BUT we need to factor in a national answer. For example, if one RO decides to postpone the election due to local intelligence linking the area to the Newcastle event but another decides to continue. EMB, Cabinet Office etc need to be informed/consulted as it could influence the result of the UK election. i.e. if one area suspends the poll when the rest of the country has declared then re runs "could" decide the government

Likely Actions

- Safety of staff and voters is paramount
- Then integrity of poll
- Convene Crisis team minimum RO, Comms & SPOC
- What local intelligence exists?
- Contact polling staff – polling inspectors, logistic partners, use call centre for automatic texts / call?
- Message on all social media and all comms channels
- Scenarios of false calls that it has happened in your area
- Essential point - keep stations open unless absolutely necessary

Potential Outcomes

- Revise contingency plans

6.5 Evacuation and Lockdown Procedures

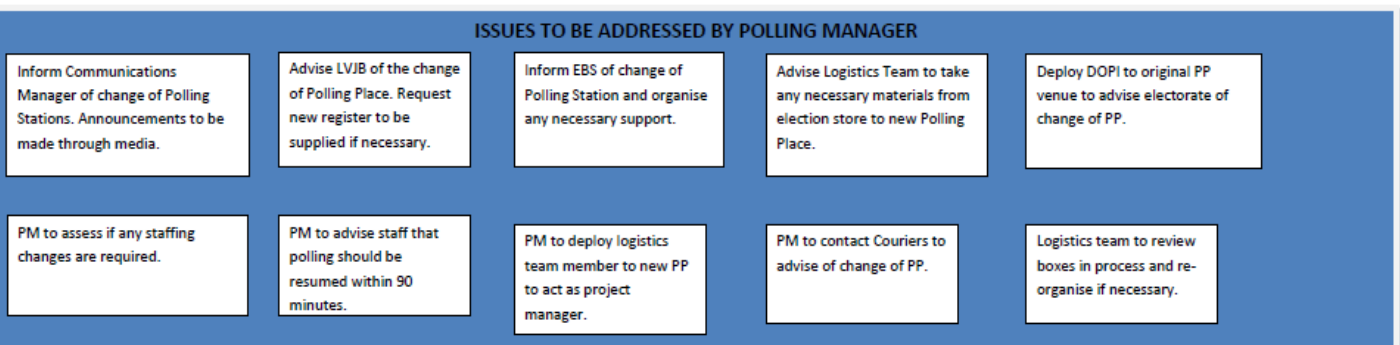
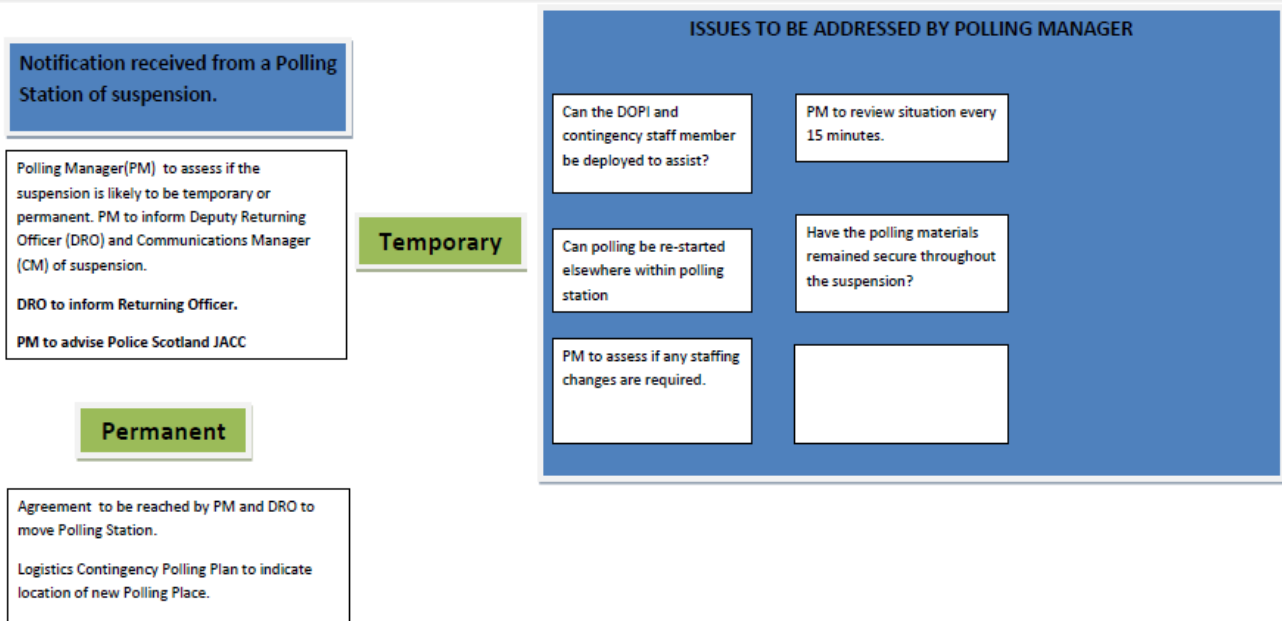
When considering evacuation and the security of ballot boxes it must be noted that the safety of all present is of paramount importance.

- Designate specified personnel who will in the event of an evacuation be tasked with removing ballot boxes and voting forms etc. **Remember personal safety comes first**
- Prepare a contingency plan for arrangements for receiving and protecting ballot boxes in case of evacuation
- Prepare a contingency plan to identify alternate means of access and egress to the counting stations in cases of emergency
- Identify a designated evacuation rendezvous point?

If you are required to evacuate or lockdown the venue - use your judgement

- Stay calm
- Assess the situation , the type of incident, its location, attackers and hazards
- Is the incident or device inside the venue or outside the venue?
- Establish where is the safest place
- If you evacuate take the safest route, do so in an orderly manner, insisting others go with you
- If you lockdown, go to a safer area, secure all entrances and exits to the premises where possible
- Communicate to all present what is happening and advise as to the most appropriate action

Follow the RUN HIDE TELL principles – Inform the police and call 999



Appendix 6

Security at the polling station

The Presiding Officer is responsible for the security of the polling station. Voters expect polling stations to be run in a calm and orderly manner.

Keeping order

Presiding Officers must maintain order in the polling station. They have the power to order a person's removal from the polling station. Eligible voters must nevertheless be allowed to vote before they are removed. A Presiding Officer who orders the removal of a person should record the details of the incident and pass them on to the (Acting) Returning Officer.

A person who has been removed from the polling station and has not voted may only be re-admitted on the authority of the Presiding Officer. If the person returns and conducts themselves in an orderly manner, they must be given the opportunity to vote.

There is no legal definition of the extent of the polling station but, at a minimum, it is the room in which voting takes place.

The (Acting) Returning Officer will have briefed you should there be a history of public order issues affecting your particular polling station and the surrounding area. In those circumstances in particular, you should carry out regular checks of the immediate surroundings of your polling station. This is to ensure that voters have unimpeded access to their polling station. Although it is important to carry out these checks, if the polling station is busy, wait until a quieter time before carrying out your next check.

Serious disturbances or incidents and the adjournment of the poll

The police will have been informed of the location of polling stations. Police officers (and, in England and Wales, police community support officers) may be assigned polling station duties and may visit them during the day. If there is disorder at the polling station during the day, contact the (Acting) Returning Officer and inform them of the situation. If necessary, call the police to deal with the problem.

In the event of a serious disturbance or incident e.g. bomb scare, fire, flood, etc., the Presiding Officer may be asked to vacate the premises or may decide to do so. If the emergency services ask for the building to be evacuated, it must be done. Inform the (Acting) Returning Officer immediately and seek guidance on further actions that should be taken.

Never put the personal safety of voters or the rest of the polling station team at risk, or risk any injury to any person. If it is possible to do so without putting personal safety at risk, then all the sensitive election materials (the ballot box, ballot papers, register of electors, etc.) may be removed from the building and kept under the care of the polling station staff. You should keep any agents or observers present informed of your actions.

If forced to leave the premises, establish a temporary polling station at a safe distance from the serious disturbance or incident. Regardless of whether there has been an interruption in polling, the polling station must still close at 10pm. However, a note should be made of the time during which the polling station was unable to operate.

In the most extreme case, the (Acting) Returning Officer will permit the Presiding Officer to adjourn the poll until the following day. If the poll is adjourned, then the (Acting) Returning Officer will arrange for the election materials to be collected.

Presiding Officers must not adjourn the poll without the (Acting) Returning Officer's consent.

Scenario 3: The Count – Attack at a Count

We are now at 2330 hrs on election day at the count venue, you get an alert on your phone..... “Breaking News: UKPGE Knife attack at Scottish count venue numerous casualties.”

Police Scotland have released a statement on their social media account stating “We are currently responding to reports of a knife attack at Scottish count venue. **We are treating this as a terrorist attack.** Please avoid the area as first responders work at the scene”

“To round up, following a JTAC assessment the UK threat level was raised to critical this morning, Police Scotland are now dealing with a terrorist incident at an election count venue.”

ACTIONS

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ALL THIS SHOULD BE COVERED IN EXISTING CONTINGENCY PLANS. HOWEVER, THE FOCUS SHOULD BE TO THINK THROUGH THE PRIORITIES AND HOW PUBLIC, STAFF AND THEN THE POLL (IN THAT ORDER) CAN BE PROTECTED.

General Prompts

- What are your initial actions upon receiving this information?
- Discuss your roles and responsibilities?
- Where do you seek advice from and who do you provide advice to?
- What communication method would you use to inform and update your staff?
- What if this was YOUR count venue vs a neighbouring local authority count venue?
- Would the time of the incident have an impact? (i.e. start of count, after verification, during actual count)
- How do you communicate with your staff and key partners?
- What are your main priorities i.e. Public/Staff/Ballot Papers?
- What are your initial actions upon receiving this information?
- Are all staff / candidates/agents in the hall or are some on their way?
- Have all boxes been received or are some in transit?
- For counts with long travel i.e. Highland / Islands where do you divert vans that have not arrived
- For counts with short travel - stacking and racked outside venue how do you secure them if police order evacuation.
- Have votes been contaminated i.e. do they have blood on them?
- Is there a safe evacuation point?

Likely Actions

- Control Centre room to activate evacuation procedures
 - Is it safe to evacuate?
- Election staff to ensure sensitive materials are secure (see appendix)
- RO Comms to prepare media release
- Determine facts
 - Is it in count hall
 - Is it in venue
- Can media assist – e.g. leave TV cameras running to support integrity if there is an evacuation

Proposed Outcomes

- Review contingency plan

6.4 Stay Safe – Weapons and Firearms Attack

If you are alerted to a firearms or weapons attack, stay calm, RUN or HIDE, only when it is safe TELL the police

RUN

- Consider your safest options
- Escape if you can
- Is there a safe route? RUN, if not HIDE
- Can you get there without exposing yourself to greater danger?
- Insist other leave with you
- Leave belongings behind

HIDE

- If you cannot RUN, then HIDE
- Find cover from gunfire
- If you can see the attacker, they may be able to see you
- Cover from view does not mean you are safe, bullets go through glass, brick, wood and metal
- Find cover from gunfire e.g. substantial brickwork / heavy reinforced walls
- Be aware of your exits
- Try not to get trapped
- Be quiet, silence your phone
- Lock / barricade yourself in
- Move away from the door

TELL

- Call 999 - What do the police need to know? If you cannot speak or make a noise listen to the instructions given to you by the call taker
- Location - Where are the suspects?
- Direction - Where did you last see the suspects?
- Descriptions – Describe the attacker, numbers, features, clothing, weapons etc.
- Further information – Casualties, type of injury, building information, entrances, exits, hostages etc.
- Stop other people entering the building if it is safe to do so

ARMED POLICE RESPONSE

- Follow officers' instructions
- Remain calm
- Can you move to a safer area?
- Keep your hands in view

OFFICERS MAY

- Point guns at you
- Treat you firmly
- Question you
- Not be able to distinguish you from the attacker
- Officers will evacuate you when it is safe to do so

When it is safe give first aid www.citizenaid.org

Appendix 8 – Procedure for securing of sensitive materials during count

If an evacuation of any of the counting areas in Meadowbank was required for any reason, the following procedure would be followed:

1. If possible, the Count Managers should be given some warning in advance of the fire alarm sounding or an evacuation message being announced over the PA system.
2. On the call to evacuate and if safe to do so, the Count Manager should:
 - a. Press “Save” for the spreadsheet
 - b. Ensure the observers are evacuated
 - c. Ensure the Count Assistants are evacuated
 - d. Ensure any Senior Staff are evacuated
3. Security personnel and the Count Managers should be last people within the Count Halls before the doors are closed/secured. Information Officers will secure doorways with tamper seals.
4. All vehicle movements must cease to allow safe evacuation of people from Meadowbank Stadium. All vans on their way to the site with election materials will be sent to a holding area until told otherwise.
5. Vehicles parked up outside Meadowbank Stadium will remain stationary and will be locked up.
6. On being able to re-enter Meadowbank Stadium, the Count Managers should enter first and ensure they are happy that their area has not been interfered with.
7. When the Count Managers are happy, they should radio into the Control Room.
8. Once the Control Room team has received positive notification from all Count Managers, the Control Room Manager will then alert the security staff who are with the rest of the staff and observers that they are allowed back into the building.