

eCounting 2022 – Q&As

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eCounting project team contact details:

Jack Lochans, Project Manager (Email: jack.lochans@gov.scot; Mobile 07717733460)
Liz Ure, Technical and Assurance Lead (Email: liz.ure@gov.scot; Mobile 07769239206)
Aileen Knudsen, Local Government Liaison (Email: aileen.knudsen@edinburgh.gov.uk;
Mobile 07912 615832)

COUNTDOWN TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION ON 5 MAY 2022



Project Status Update: Summary

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

- The Project is proceeding well and everything that should be in place at this point is already delivered or on track.
- Bulletins which are sent to the Council User Group are available on the EMB website at [eCounting Bulletins 2022](#)
- The EMB met on Thursday 28 October 2021 and a subsequent email was sent to Councils on Thursday 4 November 2021 attaching a letter from the Convener of the EMB, Directions and the Print timetable available at [link](#). As required by legislation the Directions have been the subject of formal consultation with the EMB, which includes both ROs and EROs, and with the Electoral Commission. The final Directions reflect comments from those consultations.
- Briefing Event - A Joint Seminar with the Electoral Commission for ROs and EROs will be held on Thursday 27 January 2022 which will address a range of issues related to planning and delivery of the elections next year.

Project Status Update: Upcoming Dates - 1

eCount Face to Face Training

P&J Live, Aberdeen	Monday 14 February – Friday 18 February 2022
Silvan House, Edinburgh	Monday 21 February – Friday 25 March 2022
Lagoon Leisure Centre, Paisley	Monday 28 February – Friday 11 March 2022

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

eCount - Questions and Answers

EasyPrint

Q. What do I use EasyPrint for?

A. EasyPrint is an online portal which allows users to order and proof all election materials. Some Councils will already be Idox customers and be familiar with EasyPrint and others will not. EasyPrint training has been ongoing for the month of December to ensure your Council details, data uploads, proofing of print materials all runs smoothly.

Q. What is the naming convention for Ballot Boxes within eCount for 2022?

A. To distinguish between Station and Postal boxes it has been agreed to prepopulate all station boxes with the word 'Box' and all postal boxes with the prefix 'PV'. The key benefits of this are that station and postal boxes will be immediately distinguishable to observers and it will also enable the automated production of national results broken down into polling station and postal votes.

To ensure all Councils conform to this, Idox's Easyprint will prepopulate all station boxes with 'Box' and all postal boxes with 'PV' this will ensure the National Results Data can be collated (see National Results section of this Q&A).

Q. How do I get labels for Ballot Paper Trays and Ballot Paper Accounts?

A. Labels are produced from the data you provide to Idox for all ballot boxes. Idox produce the labels and they are stored on EasyPrint. You can print these labels as many times as you wish for whatever purpose you would find them useful, however, a label should be attached to each ballot paper account tray and the Ballot Paper Accounts. Advice on this, from the Ballot Paper Account Working Group supported by the User Group, is detailed in the eCount Process section of this Q&A.

Printing for the Election

Q. What's the timetable for the various print items?

A. The timetable was circulated to the User Group on 9 November 2021 and a copy of the [Print Timetable](#) is available on the EMB website.

Q. What are the arrangements for print materials for those who are not currently Idox customers?

A. The Idox team are currently working with contractors and customers to ensure appropriate arrangement are in place. More information on this will follow shortly.

Q. What are the arrangements for print inspection?

A. The print inspection process will be advised shortly.

eCount Team

Q. What are the roles for eCounting?

- A. **Registration/Verification Operator** – To register each tray and then verify the number of ballot papers scanned matches the number of ballot papers registered.
- Scanning Operator** – Scan ballot papers for processing by the eCounting system
- Marshal** – moves ballot paper trays from awaiting scanning racking to Scanning Operators and then to scanning complete racking.
- Scanning Supervisor** - Will solve any issues at a scanning station and will be required to use their credentials in order for scanning to continue when the issue has been resolved.
- 1st Level Adjudicator** – To adjudicate on ballot papers which cannot be processed by the system. Acceptance only or defer to RO adjudication.
- RO Adjudicator** – Adjudicate on ballot papers which cannot be processed by the system and 1st level adjudicators.
- Count Centre Manager** – responsible for operational delivery of the electronic Count, escalation management and direct interface with the RO/DRO.
- RO/DRO** - responsible for the overall election, has the final decision on doubtful Ballot Papers, ensures the Count is administered in accordance with the rules and declares the results or they may appoint one (or more) of their team to act as a Depute Returning Officer.

Q. How many Operators should there be at each Workstation?

- A. This varies from Council to Council, however, the following is recommended as a minimum:
- Registration/Verification - 2 per workstation – one for keying and the other for checking
 - Scanning Operators – one per workstation
 - Scanning Supervisors – one for small Councils and two for larger Councils
 - 1st Level Adjudicators/RO Adjudicators – one per workstation, some Councils opt for two Adjudicators per workstation – one for keying and the other for checking.
 - Count Centre Manager – one as a minimum, more for larger Councils. This role can be undertaken by the Returning Officer, their Depute or Election Manager/Co-ordinator/Officer – usually someone who is key to the election team with knowledge of the poll, postal votes and Count arrangements.

eCount Training

Q. What have been/are the training/familiarisation opportunities for eCounting Teams?

- A. There have been/are a number of training opportunities provided as follows:
- Software changes demonstrations (online) – August/September 2021
 - Drop-In Sessions – September 2021
 - End to End Count Demonstration (online) – September 2021
 - Performance Testing – November 2021
 - eCounting System Videos are available at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/9004620>

(password is available from your User Group member). The videos must not be made publicly available.

- eLearning for Roles – scheduled for January 2022
- Face to Face Training scheduled for:
 - ✓ P&J Live, Aberdeen – Monday 14 February – Friday 18 February 2022
 - ✓ Silvan House, Edinburgh – Monday 21 February – Friday 25 March 2022
 - ✓ Lagoon Leisure Centre, Paisley – Monday 28 February – Friday 11 March 2022
- Familiarisation Session at Council Count Venues – Wednesday 4 May 2022

Count Centre Venues

Q. What arrangements need to be in place in preparation for the eCounting system set up and removal of equipment?

A. The following should be in place:

- Count Venue Availability – the set-up of the eCounting system will commence at 9am on Monday 2 May 2022. Councils must ensure that power, tables, chairs and racking are available by 9am on Monday 2 May 2022.
- End of Election – we expect that in almost all circumstances the eCounting equipment will be removed from the premises by 10pm on Friday 6 May 2022. Council are asked to ensure their premises are available until that time.
- Contingency days – You should consider whether to include any addition/ contingency days in your booking in case of unforeseen delays or where it is unlikely your eCounting equipment can be removed by 10pm.
- Delivery of equipment – an appropriate delivery schedule for your equipment should be discussed and agreed with your Regional Manager
- Count Centre Security – as a general rule, we would advise that your Count venue should have one of the following security arrangements in place for the whole of Count week when the Count venue is unoccupied:
 - ✓ A monitored CCTV/intruder alarm system; or
 - ✓ An external security guard presence/patrols; or
 - ✓ Internal security guard/patrols.
- Please advise the Project Team or your Regional Manager if these requirements cannot be met and we will aim to agree a practical alternative with you.
- Additional Equipment – where a Council has agreed to provide their own additional equipment e.g. large screens, these should be in place in the Count Venue on Monday 2 May 2022.

Q. What power needs to be in place at Count Venues?

A. It is the responsibility of each Council to ensure that power supplies are sufficient to support your Count. Your RM will provide support to work out the power requirements for the eCounting system. If you have any concerns about power, please let your RM or the Project team know.

Q. What do Councils need to provide for eCounting?

A. Councils provide the following:

- Venue for the count
- Operator staff

- Power to each of the workstations
- Tables
- Any table covers necessary
- Chairs
- Trays for ballot papers (one per ballot box with barcode labels on them)
- Racking to store ballot papers (One set for awaiting scanning. Another set for scanning complete)
- Signage for trays and desks
- Ballot Paper Account folder(s)
- Scotch Removable tape

Q. Can the Postal Vote Management System be in the same location as the eCount set up?

A. Yes. There is no problem in principal with setting up PVMS/doing opening sessions in the same hall that the count centre is located in, so long as the 2 activities can be fitted into the space. We suggest that rope/tape barriers or similar should be used to separate the Count area from the PVMS area wherever possible. But please bear in mind that candidates and agents may be present at PVMS opening sessions, so they need to be kept away from the count centre itself.

Q. Can a Polling Place be run in the same building at the Count Venue?

A. Yes. However, if you have a Polling Place in your Count Venue you must ensure separate entrance/exits are in the place with tight security at the count venue and no permissible access from the Polling Place to the Count Venue.

eCount Process: RO Preview App

Q. How can the RO privately preview ballot papers requiring RO adjudication?

A. Returning Officer Application – All RO users will have access to a browser which provides them with the functionality to preview/inspect all the ballots in the RO queue on a contest by contest basis. This is a viewer only and no actions can be taken in it. ROs will need to go through all doubtful ballot papers in their queue using the eCounting system as normal.

eCount Process

Q. What are the agreed recommendations by the User Group for dealing with Ballot Paper Accounts at the eCount?

A. The User Group supported the Ballot Paper Account Working Group's recommendations which were as follows:

- A full set of Ballot Paper Accounts should sit with Registration/Verification Operators in addition to any other copies of the Ballot Paper Account at the Count venue.
- Returning Officers to choose how they record their discrepancies and ensure discrepancies are available to the Registration/Verification Operator.
- A copy of Ballot Paper Account should be placed in Ballot Paper Trays as per arrangements for eCounting in 2017.

- The Returning Officer's team are responsible for ensuring barcodes are on the Ballot Paper Accounts in the Folder for Registration/Verification (and also on the Ballot Paper Trays).
- Checking Barcodes - in terms of checking the barcodes are accurate, whether this is from the label or from the Ballot Paper Accounts the process is the same as it has always been i.e. you can scan the barcode in notepad or excel (if you have a handheld scanner) and the information will be displayed OR if you use Idox PVMS this check can be done at that point using the Idox equipment OR on the week of the poll once your eCount is set up the labels can be checked at that point.
- Note that barcode labels are available from Easyprint for download and printing from Monday 4 April 2022.
- Printing barcodes on documents – if you wish to print your barcode directly onto your Ballot Paper Account the following may be of assistance to you:
 - ✓ Good tutorial here with a link to download the font - https://www.majorgeeks.com/content/page/barcode_word.html
 - ✓ Alternative download link - <https://www.barcodesinc.com/free-barcode-font/>
 - ✓ Online Code39 barcode generator - <https://www.barcodesinc.com/generator/index.php>
- Registration/Verification Operators should be provided with as much poll and count info as possible and is helpful.

Q. What happens in the event of a re-count?

A. In the event of a re-count the system needs fully cleared down, and the count for that ward would need to start again from Registration. A factsheet explaining the process which can be shared with candidates and agents if required will be available in due course.

eCount Reports

Q. What reports do I have to publish once the Count is completed?

- A.** There are 7 eCount Results Reports for publication, as directed by the EMB, namely:
- Declaration of Results (pdf)
 - Candidate Votes per Stage (pdf)
 - First Preference (pdf)
 - Preference by Ballot Box (pdf) (also in csv to merge boxes under 200).
 - Preference Summary (pdf)
 - Transfers (pdf)
 - Preference Profile (blt file)

Q. Which reports are run before the start of the eCount?

- A.** Before the start of the eCount, confirmation is given by the Count Centre Manager to the Fujitsu Technical Engineer to run the following 2 reports from the management workstation:
- System Readiness Report
 - Master Clear Down Report

These reports will be printed and passed to the RO.

Q. Which reports are run during the eCount (on demand)?

A. During the eCount the Fujitsu Technical Engineer can generate the following 3 reports for each contest:

- Registration report
- Percentage Turnout report
- Reconciliation report

These reports can be printed.

Q. Which reports are run at the end of each contest (after all pre-count checks are successful and the Count has been run)?

A. On completion of each contest, the RO/Count Centre Manager will request the Fujitsu Technical Engineer to run the pre-count checks in private, on the management workstation. The Count tab will be enabled when the Pre-Count completes successfully, and the RO can then run the Count. The RO/Count Centre Manager should instruct the Fujitsu Technical Engineer how many copies of each report they require to be printed to hand out to Candidates, Agents and other Observers:

- Candidate Votes per Stage (pdf)
- Declaration of Results (pdf) (Note: *EMB Direction 11 – read first page only and second page for electronic or printed versions only*).

As soon as each Contest is declared, PDF copies of these reports will be transferred onto an unencrypted USB device which will be handed to the agreed Council Official and can be used for publication. A separate USB will be used for every Contest and you do not need to return these devices.

Q. Which reports are run at the end of election (ie all contests have been completed and declared)?

A. When all contests have been completed and declared, the Fujitsu Technical Engineer will prepare a full suite of eCount reports. These reports will be saved onto 2 separate encrypted portable devices which will be passed to the RO (or DRO) for the Council's use/retention. Again, you do not need to return these devices.

The reports will be grouped into the following folder structure:

- reports-for-council-use-only (reports that are NOT published)
- reports-for-publication
- national-results
- a copy of the database

Q. How long does it take to run the end of election reports?

A. In most cases, the full set of reports will be available for Councils, on their portable drives, within 1 hour of the Election being completed.

Q. Which reports are published after the election and when?

A. In addition to publishing the 2 reports run at the end of each contest, the following reports should be published as soon as possible after the declaration [exception being the Preference by Ballot Box report which must legally be published within one week] of the election:

- First Preference (pdf)
- Preference Profile (blt file)
- Preference Summary (pdf)
- Transfers (pdf)
- Preference by Ballot Box

It is critically important to note that the preference by ballot box report **MUST** be checked prior to publication to ensure no ballot boxes contain fewer than 200 votes. If there are any boxes with fewer than 200 votes, these must be amalgamated with another ballot box prior to publication. **See below for instructions on how to do this.** This report will be in a separate folder on your portable drive to make checking as easy as possible.

Q. What steps are required for the Preference by Ballot Box report before publishing it?

A. The report will be available in a separate 'Preference by Ballot Box' zipped folder in the portable drive containing all your eCount data. There are a few steps which must be carried out as follows:

- The folder contains a .csv report for each contest.
- This folder must be uploaded to easyprint (Idox will provide an instruction guide for this).
- Each contest report must be checked to ensure that if any ballot boxes are under 200 ballot papers they must be merged with another ballot box.
- When all contests have been checked and merged if required you will export the reports from Easyprint and publish them with all the other reports required to be published for each contest.
- Detailed instructions on how to do merging will be provided.

Q. How do I access the Preference Profile report which is a .blt file?

A. Open the .blt file in 'notepad'.

Candidates and Agents

Q. Will candidates and their agents get an opportunity to review the e-counting system before the actual elections?

A. Yes. In each of the Count Centres there will be a Candidates and Agents demonstration of eCounting on Wednesday of election week (i.e. 4 May 2022). However, if you feel that any of your prospective candidates might like an earlier opportunity to see the eCount system and are willing to come to Edinburgh, we will be arranging 1 or 2 demo days in Silvan House during the training period in February/March, subject to demand being sufficient. We will provide further information on general demo days in due course.

National Results

Q. In 2017 each Council had to complete and submit a data collection form to Scottish Government for the purposes of collating National Results - will Councils be required to do this again in 2022?

A. The information requested in 2017 i.e. candidate, turnout, party affiliation, postal voting, etc will now be taken directly from the Results Reports by Fujitsu staff once your election is complete, so you will no longer be required to do anything after your election to support the collation of National Results. The new naming convention for ballot boxes is key to enabling the publication of National level data on postal voting (see Easyprint Section of this Q&A). Once all elections have been completed the National Results data will be published to the EMB website.

Payment to Fujitsu for eCounting

Q. What are the payment arrangements for eCounting?

A. Councils are responsible for payment all elements of print and this will be invoiced directly by Fujitsu to each individual Council based on order quantities. Contract print prices were advised in an email to the User Group on Friday 10 September 2021 to allow Councils to forecast costs for printing.

Q. When will Fujitsu invoice me?

A. Fujitsu will invoice each council on conclusion of the election in May 2022 for all print material.