

Electoral Matters – 20 July 2022

In attendance:

Elliot Hogan

Tom Stannard

Iolanda Puzio

Alison Watt

Cllr Lancaster

Cllr Kelly

Cllr Shama

Cllr Amana-ghola

Cllr Mullen

Cllr Pepper

Cllr Walters

Cllr King

Cllr Saunders

1) Apologies: *[Please note we had no access to Sara's emails, so could not see any apologies sent]*

Cllr Fletcher

Cllr Bentham

2) Declarations of interest

Nothing to declare

3) Minutes of previous meeting

Agreed

4) Matters Arising

Cllr Lancaster: Reviewing polling stations –What is the timescale for consultation?

Elliot: If the Elections Bill comes in we will do a full review. We will know November/December, and do a full or partial review then.

5) Elections Bill Recap and Update

As per Elliot's presentation (presentation to be circulated after the meeting)

Cllr Lancaster: Why are postal vote refreshed being changed to every three years?

Elliot: We don't yet know why; we are waiting for more information.

Cllr Lancaster: What forms of ID will be allowed for postal vote applications?

Elliot: We need clarification about this. We don't know what forms of ID yet. The government portal will allow electors to submit ID online; if they come to hand in applications, we will be able to deal with it in person.

Tom: We need to bear in mind (re postal refresh) the amount of time, resources etc, that will be needed.

Elliot: Regarding EU citizens and their eligibility – practicalities relating to their right to register will be managed by our electoral management system. More information is needed about how the process will take place. We as a council will inform ineligible EU citizens, but there will be a process laid out for that. We know very little about this yet, need clarification.

Elliot: A letter has been written from the AEA to government stating major concerns as to how the Elections Bill can go ahead, particularly in the current climate and with such tight timescales.

Cllr Lancaster: How often are meetings about the Elections Bill taking place with political parties?

Elliot: This presentation from AEA is being shared; there are regular AGMA meetings – representatives are meeting with DLUHC. We will feed back to you when there is anything to share. Elliot is working closely with Xpress, acting as regional champion for the Northwest, so hopefully we will receive information about electronic management processes early.

Tom: AEA is still pushing to delay, not aware if DLUHC has responded yet. We need to prepare as much as we can and wait. For Members' reassurance, we will produce and share a risk assessment around this work. We do recognise that there are multiple risks – capacity, eligibility, we should work on that.

Elliot: noted

Cllr Mullen: Some concerns about data protection. If it is done right, government portal will download passport number etc, and pull through all details, re signature etc. However, there are concerns that the burden will lie with local government. How much is this going to be automated rather than it being our burden?

Elliot: We will have a preview of the system in September, but we have also queried how it will work with our system. Our management system provider has not yet signed a contract with government, so seeing the portal is a priority. We will update as soon as we know more.

Cllr Saunders: Some councillors will need to be told that they will be ineligible to stand in the future, and they will need to be told.

Elliot: EU councillors will be allowed to complete their terms.

Cllr Lancaster: Does the LGA have a view about this? National organisation should have had meetings about it.

Tom: LGA is political so finding it challenging. We will implement as required but we do recognise the risks. The more LGA member authorities who do risk assessments ahead of time the better.

Cllr Lancaster: Please keep us updated/informed about any links with LGA.

Cllr Amana-ghola: Concern, many people have no passport, driving licence, ID etc. Hard for them to apply, voter ID relies on ID first.

Elliot: We share the concerns. When we have more clarification, it will be a big focus of our comm s plan.

Cllr Shama: Moving to digital, using the government portal, what about people with low level IT skills?

Elliot: Individuals will still be able to apply in person; we are waiting for clarification of the paper process. We may have to complete the online process for them.

Cllr Lancaster: Will there be recompense for the financial burden of this?

Elliot: It is a new financial burden for LAs, which will initially be covered by government, but again we don't know what it will look like. They will fund partition screens, but that is all confirmed to us.

Cllr Mullen: I am very unhappy with the principle, the government making it difficult for individuals to vote. **Cllr Kelly:** Some people will be disenfranchised.

Cllr Lancaster: Is there any say on how we do consultation with community, particularly relating to postal votes and voter ID? It is important that information gets out to people.

Elliot: We will have a say. We will work with AGMA but will have our own way of doing things. It is important to get as much information out as possible; there is nothing stopping us to do what we think is necessary.

Tom: It is a risk that we get too far down the line before a deferral is decided. We have to prepare for this within the given timescale, but there is a risk we may have to rush on with it regardless.

6) Returning Officer Performance Standards Consultation

As per Elliot's presentation – a basic presentation (presentation has been circulated with this meeting's agenda)

Elliot: Would you like to go through them now or in your own time? The standards are more specific than previous and focused on objectives.

Agreed to review the standards individually.

Tom: We will continue to do this as a self-assessment and share with Electoral Commission to get their feedback. We did that last year and had good engagement.

Cllr Lancaster: Closing date for comments?

Elliot: 26 August

7) Any Other Business

Elliot: An update on Sara, all doing well. She and the baby are doing well.

Elections Count

Cllr Lancaster: Other LAs were speedier with the count. We could look at good practice to speed up our counting.

Elliot: There were two causes this year that we are addressing. There was a large number of postal votes; we are looking at the set-up to deal with that. Also, we will be asking DLROs to do some of the preliminary results with candidates/agents, which should speed up the declarations. I will ask other councils (AGMA) when they finished, and ask for thoughts/ideas from them.

Cllr Mullen: Working lifts would help.

Elliot: That was also a major factor. We weren't informed, so in the future we will talk to them ahead of time about that.

Elections Expenses

Cllr Mullen: Looking for guidance – process for monitoring/querying elections expense returns.

Elliot: Elections Expenses can be viewed in our office, or you can have copies. If anything needs to be taken further, you would go directly to the Electoral Commission. We are holders of expenses, not responsible for them. There is a cost for copies (20p per side). Send an email to Elliot to arrange viewing expenses.

Annual Canvass

Elliot: The annual canvass is starting, forms being posted out tomorrow. We will be focusing on HMOs, as well as resuming comms (Twitter, Facebook), with a focus on attainers.

Meeting Adjourned