

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

25 NOVEMBER 2010

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

COUNCIL DECISION

Corporate Management and Finance Portfolio Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Laing

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION – 6 MAY 2010 AND EMERGING ISSUES FOR 2011

1. Summary

To provide feedback from the review of the Parliamentary General Election 2010 and to highlight next steps in readiness for the Local and Parish Elections 2011 and consider arrangements for the Referendum and the possibility of a Mayoral election at the same time.

2. Recommendations

1. Continue to renew corporate commitment to encourage SBC staff to undertake election duties
2. Continue to work with Architects to establish best use of floor space to accommodate the Count for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections and the area designated for the adjudication of ballot papers for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections
3. To report to CMT the impact of additional legislation for the 2011 multiple elections as relevant information becomes available

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To ensure compliance with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. The proposals highlighted within this report will assist in ensuring compliance with any additional legislative requirements relating to elections.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to

prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

To provide feedback from the review of the Parliamentary General Election 2010 and to highlight next steps in readiness for the Local and Parish Elections 2011 and consider arrangements for the Referendum and the possibility of a Mayoral election at the same time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to renew corporate commitment to encourage SBC staff to undertake election duties
2. Continue to work with Architects to establish best use of floor space to accommodate the Count for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections and the area designated for the adjudication of ballot papers for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections
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DETAIL

BACKGROUND

1. The Parliamentary General Election was held on 6 May 2010. This report highlights what went well, what could be done better and the next steps needed to allow SBC to undertake successful Local and Parish Elections 2011. The report highlights the complexity of providing for the proposed Referendum in conjunction with the local and parish elections and a possible Mayoral election, in particular the complexity of the procedures for postal vote opening and the count.

REGIONAL AND SUB REGIONAL FEEDBACK

2. The Head of Democratic Services (HODS) and the Team Leader for Elections (Deputy Returning Officer) attended an Electoral Commission post election seminar on Monday 24 May 2010.
3. The Team Leader for Elections (Deputy Returning Officer) attended a branch meeting of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) North East and Yorkshire Branch on Monday 7 June. The meetings reviewed the 2010 General Election. Colleagues were open and frank with their comments on one of the most difficult elections yet and also critical of

the Electoral Commission's report on Polling Station issues and their post election comments in general.

4. The Electoral Commission published an interim report into polling station queues on 20 May 2010. This full report into the UK General Election covering all aspects of the running of these elections was published on 27 July. The report addresses problems reported such as polling stations running out of ballot papers, ballot papers for the wrong constituency, incorrect information on ballot papers and poll cards, further detail is shown at paragraphs 41 to 43 in this report. In comparison to other parts of the country SBC experienced no particular difficulties in relation to queues at polling stations prior to the close of poll at 10pm or with regard to insufficient supply of ballot papers.
5. At the AEA Management Team meeting held on 15 June 2010 the Chief Executive reported that he had written to the Electoral Commission severely criticising their report on problems at Polling Stations at the close of poll at the recent elections and sought justification from the Electoral Commission of the statements made. The AEA have compiled a post election report the details of which are considered further in this report. The AEA report will be supplied to MP's, MEP's, Leaders of Councils, Chief Executives of Local Authorities and the usual media outlets.
6. At the Adare (election printers) lessons learned seminar held on 7 July 2010 early discussions took place regarding printing requirements for 2011. The need for early planning and a production timetable for next May's elections were discussed. Capacity issues for combined elections next May was raised from both sides, especially if the Referendum is to be held on the same day as local and parish and Mayoral elections in the region.

LOCAL ISSUES

7. Following the Parliamentary General Election questionnaires were sent to all Stockton North and Stockton South candidates and agents asking for comments. They were asked if they received a satisfactory response from the elections office, for comments on the information given to them, the location of polling stations and the count. Overall there was a very positive response and many commendations were received. Negative comments were to do with the cramped conditions in the mobile polling stations and the area designated for adjudication of the ballot papers at the Count being too cramped.
8. Questionnaires were sent to all staff who took part in the election asking for feedback in respect of the categories in which they were involved. The categories were training, collection of polling screens, the final presiding officer briefing and collection of ballot boxes and the count process. Respondents were asked to complete the form by grading their answers on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very good and 1 being very poor.
9. Training achieved 85% response rate of grades 4 and 5 and none at grade 1. Arrangements for the collection of polling screens achieved a 70% rate of grades 4 and 5 and none at grade 1. Final presiding officer briefing and collection of ballot boxes achieved 84% rate of grades 4 and 5 and 1 feedback sheet completed grade 1. The count process achieved 88% rate of grades 4 and 5 and 1 feedback sheet completed grade 1. One negative comment related to the location of the Pavilion being a less than adequate venue for the final Presiding Officer briefing due to the long walk to the car park with the ballot boxes and equipment. The second related to the large polling station sign falling down outside due to the rain.
10. The feedback illustrates what went well and identifies areas for improvement for the future elections. Many additional comments and suggestions were also put forward and these will be considered in the future.

WHAT WENT WELL

11. Acting Returning Officer /Deputy Acting Returning Officers project team. A year's worth of planning, working with partners and suppliers paid dividends with a successful election outcome. Clear roles and good communications contributed to this success.
12. Close working relationship with the ICT Business Account Manager enabled several options to be explored regarding the facilitation of postal voting. In addition to the usual difficulties this presents we had the added complication of needing to move the final postal vote opening session to the count venue to ensure a timely result. Not knowing the date of the election and the date for the library refurbishment there was the possibility that the library may not be available for opening sessions and therefore a contingency plan was required. Several alternative premises were considered, the Education Centre was selected as the best alternative and arrangements were put in place should we need it. Through working with our software provider, our printers and ICT we were able to successfully test a new remote way of postal vote verification. This would have enabled us to conduct the count in any premises without access to ICT servers.
13. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will continue to work with ICT to eliminate potential ICT difficulties for combined elections during the postal vote opening process for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections
14. To comply with the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007 it was necessary to alter the parliamentary boundaries of 6 of our polling districts. The Boundary changes could not come into effect until the proclamation was issued by Her Majesty summoning a new parliament. The transition went smoothly.
15. The communication with and delivery of information to Candidates and Agents was reviewed to further improve the services offered and improve our performance against the Electoral Commission Performance Standards framework for Returning Officers.
16. Staffing - The appointment of polling station staff began last autumn due to speculation regarding the election date. This was a very successful exercise and polling station staff were recruited and trained prior to the announcement of the May date. This saved valuable time within the short statutory timetable.
17. It is proposed that corporate commitment is renewed to encourage SBC staff to undertake election duties
18. Printers - Following the successful partnership with the NEPO contractors Adare at the European elections the project team continued to maintain our good relations with the company to ensure their best service. Several meetings were held to plan the best approach for Stockton. We will continue to work with Adare re SBC service requirements for the 2011 elections.
19. Royal Mail – Following from the European election, work continued on the design and production of postal vote envelopes to ensure we maximised all available efficiencies. Arrangements were put in place to utilise Walksort discount if we were given more than the statutory notice of the election date. An additional licence meant that postal vote envelopes were delivered ready sorted into the two constituencies saving several hours of staff time. We will continue to work with Royal Mail re SBC service requirements to ensure the most efficient and economical product is selected.
20. Venues -The Verification and Count were held at The Pavilion. An initial accommodation problem regarding access to the Pavilion was overcome by using a nearby service road and employing couriers to assist Presiding Officers to transport all of the election materials from their cars. The venue proved to be an excellent facility for its large, open interior space

that allowed both counts to take place simultaneously. In addition we were able to meet the request from Candidates to receive a larger number of guest passes, thereby increasing transparency and participation in the democratic process. It is recommended we use this building for all future major elections. Architects worked with us to ensure the best use of the space to accommodate the verification and count process.

21. We propose to continue to work with Architects to establish best use of floor space to accommodate the Count for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections and the area designated for the adjudication of ballot papers for the local and parish elections
22. Procedures – Further improvements were introduced for opening of postal votes to improve speed and efficiency whilst providing a clear audit trail. The ARO delegated powers for adjudication of statements at postal vote opening sessions; this increased the flexibility and therefore the speed of the process. Feedback from Candidates and agents is that the opening sessions were well conducted.
23. The count procedure was reviewed and adapted for the two constituencies to ensure an accurate and timely result. Additional training for Count Supervisors to deal with some doubtful ballot papers reduced the time spent on adjudication at the end of the count process.
24. On the whole the count went well; the final verification of postal votes was completed by midnight however the close result and the subsequent recount in Stockton South meant a later than anticipated finish. Stockton North was declared at 2.30 am and Stockton South at 4.00 am on Friday 7 May.
25. Now that a general election count has been undertaken using the mini count method and staff have a better understanding of the different roles and responsibilities the process can be further improved upon next time. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will ensure Election procedures are retained and adapted in readiness for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections
26. Targets - A project management approach to the election was implemented almost a year ago which allowed us to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the key resource inputs and business processes involved in the delivery. As a result of early and extensive planning, all critical dates and milestones were met.
27. Performance Indicators - The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Electoral Commission (EC) powers to set standards of performance for Electoral Registration Officers, returning Officers and Referendum Counting Officers in Great Britain. The framework is intended to provide a clear picture of what needs to be achieved to support a well run election, and to provide an objective process for assessing performance against commonly agreed standards. The framework consists of 7 self assessment performance standards. SBC have improved upon last years' assessment and have now attained the standard for 2 and attained above standard for 5.
28. Accounts - The ministry of Justice introduced a new system both for assessing entitlement to funds and for processing election claims at the European election. The new system has been adopted for the General Election and plans are in place to submit the accounts well in advance of the deadline of one year after the election. Xentrall assisted with the production of the cheques for polling staff to comply with the internal audit recommendation that payments to staff and polling stations could then be made through the Council's financial system.
29. Department of Neighbourhood Services- An early project planning meeting and the production of an agreed schedule contributed to the smooth running of arrangements leading up to, before and after Election Day. DNS staff provided us with excellent support.

30. Police – An early project planning meeting meant we worked with the police to produce the Cleveland Police Operations Order, ensuring it was extensive and suitable for purpose. Arrangements were confirmed regarding the use of a police cell to store ballot boxes after the opening of postal vote sessions ensuring the secure storage of the votes. Meetings were also held with the police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to discuss security and integrity issues and to conduct a risk assessment to identify and address potential concerns about electoral malpractice to comply with EC advice.

WHAT WENT NOT SO WELL

31. Mobile polling stations – Despite the improvements made by using mobile units with an internal generator, complaints were again received from Councillors, staff and members of the public. The cost to hire each mobile is £611 and there are also additional Care for your Area set up costs and security costs for each.
32. Preference will always be to use buildings where we can to improve access and reduce risk to the electors. Polling stations should be located in public buildings wherever possible and the support of schools and community centres is vital in this process. Every effort needs to be made to further reduce the number of mobile polling stations for 2011.
33. A specific project was held in September 2010, with the support of the Director of CESC, to identify schools that could be utilised as polling stations to reduce the number of mobile polling stations. The results of which to inform the current Polling Station Review.

AUDIT OF ELECTORAL SERVICES

34. Following the election Internal Audit undertook an audit of electoral services. They carried out an audit on the categories listed below and we gained Full Assurance in all areas.
- Financial Management
 - Electoral Register
 - Polling Facilities
 - Security of Votes
 - Count Supervision
 - Performance Management
 - Service Improvement
 - Monitoring and Review

CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS

35. Returning Officers appointed for each constituency are responsible for the administration of elections in accordance with the rules set out in legislation. The detailed planning and administration of the election is usually carried out by members of the local authority's permanent staff.
36. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and has since established itself as a professional body to represent the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has 1648 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services.
37. The Electoral Commission is responsible for guidance, performance monitoring and review and provides advice and assistance on electoral matters to all those involved in elections, including Returning Officers at UK general elections in Great Britain and Returning Officers at local government elections in England. They publish a range of manuals, circulars, templates and online resources; provide briefings and seminars, and an enquiries service,

for those who run elections. Their guidance is advisory rather than binding, and there is no legal requirement for Returning Officers to follow the guidance that they provide, although a court would have regard to any guidance provided.

38. The Electoral Commission also have powers to set and monitor performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain. These standards set out what needs to be achieved in order to support a well-run election. They cover planning and organising for an election, the integrity of the election locally, and participation in the election through public awareness, the accessibility of information for electors, and support to candidates and agents.
39. Other key partners involved in supporting the delivery of the 2010 UK general election included: the Association of Chief Police Officers for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO), which helped to develop and maintain a network of specialist officers to coordinate work, and prevent and detect possible electoral malpractice; Royal Mail, which played a major role in ensuring campaign literature and voting materials including poll cards and postal ballot packs were delivered to voters.
40. The legal framework for UK general elections, including the detailed election rules, is set out in the Representation of the People Act 1983. Following the election, the Cabinet Office has assumed the responsibilities for electoral policy, previously held by the Ministry of Justice. Because the rules are set out in primary legislation, changes can only be made in a further Act: this means that any problems or errors in the rules can be difficult to correct in advance of any election.

EMERGING ISSUES

THE ASSOCIATION OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATORS (AEA) REPORT 'BEYOND 2010: THE FUTURE OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE UK'

41. This report produced by the AEA in July 2010 considers the increasingly complex and challenging environment in which we are asked to deliver elections with the prospect of more elections and referendums, and a trend for holding these on the same day, there is also the likelihood of fewer resources with which to deliver them.
42. The AEA strongly supports and advocates the principle that all those with a role in organising elections should consider the voters' interests above all other considerations and are concerned that, unless the issues identified in their report are properly considered and addressed, the structures, processes and people delivering electoral administration will not be able to cope with the additional burdens being placed upon them.
43. They recommend that a thorough and systemic review of the electoral process in the UK is undertaken that integrates with the development and implementation of the new individual electoral registration system. This should deliver measurable outcomes before the date fixed for the next UK Parliamentary General Election. It should specifically include:
 - Consultation to identify a model for the structure and delivery of electoral administration in the UK in the 21st century – with the aim of achieving agreed key outcomes and founded on agreed principles. This will need to reflect the diversity of the four nations of the UK. The AEA will initiate a wide and inclusive debate amongst its membership and with a range of stakeholders as to what form a new model for electoral administration might take and will seek innovative solutions to this complex question.
 - The creation of a single Electoral Administration Act in accessible language setting out the high-level framework with the operational detail contained in secondary legislation. The key aim should be the simplification and consistency of rules across all elections. Except in cases of unforeseen emergencies, changes to election law should not be

applicable to any elections within a six-month period from the date the legislation comes into effect.

- A UK-wide review of funding and resources with the aim of delivering a coherent and efficient structure, cost effectiveness over time and that funding for new responsibilities reaches electoral services. The AEA will undertake a staffing survey to inform the wider debate on funding and resourcing any new structure of electoral administration.
- The design of a clearer and local system of accountability and challenge through the introduction in election law of a formal complaints system. This should establish a court of first resort to deal with complaints arising from the conduct of elections.
- The implications for voters and for the administration of polls of holding elections and referendums on the same day should be reviewed. This should particularly consider the scenarios arising from the proposals for a UK referendum on 5 May 2011, and a UK Parliamentary General Election in May 2015.
- A review of statutory election timetables and in particular the statutory election timetable for UK Parliamentary elections to achieve consistency across all elections and to lengthen the current UK Parliamentary General Election timetable.
- Equal access should be central to the electoral process and future policy development and implementation. The Electoral Commission should consult on what types of buildings should be made available for Returning Officers to use *by right* as polling stations. All voter materials should undergo appropriate usability analysis, and relevant representative groups consulted as part of their development.

44. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will continue to contribute to shaping electoral reform through active membership of the AEA.

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION REPORT ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2010 UK GENERAL ELECTION

45. The report produced by the EC in July 2010 is intended to provide an accurate account and assessment of how the May 2010 UK general election was conducted, and in particular to reflect the experiences of voters, candidates and the electoral administrators responsible for delivering the elections. They have drawn on evidence from a range of sources to inform this report, including:
- public opinion research
 - analysis of feedback from candidates and agents
 - feedback from Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers and other electoral administrators
 - electoral data submitted by Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, although complete data have not been supplied for all constituencies
 - feedback from electors and others, including candidates, submitted directly to the Commission either by post, email or through their website
 - the performance standards and improvement framework
 - their observation of the preparation by electoral administrators and the proceedings on polling day and the count, from a selection of constituencies across the UK

46. The report concludes that at the 2010 UK general election:
- In the vast majority of constituencies the elections were well run, without major problems.
 - Their initial analysis of the performance of Returning Officers in Great Britain suggests that there has been a general improvement since 2009 when measured against the current set of standards, with particular improvement in relation to maintaining the integrity of elections and delivering public awareness activities.
 - Queues formed at several polling stations on polling day (6 May), and some people in those queues were unable to vote when the polls closed at 10pm. Just over 1,200 people were affected at 27 polling places in 16 constituencies. The main contributory factors were poor planning, the use of unsuitable buildings, inadequate staffing arrangements and the failure of contingency plans.
 - There were further isolated instances of poor administration which led to problems for voters and candidates, including inadequate staffing of polling stations, errors in printing poll cards and ballot papers, and errors in counting votes.
 - Two-thirds of voters surveyed were confident that the 2010 elections were well run, but confidence may be fragile – three in 10 voters said that they were not very or not at all confident that these elections were well run, compared with just 4% of voters at the 2009 elections.
 - Of the UK general election candidates who responded to their survey, 78% were satisfied that the elections were well run.
 - Returning Officers have – as in previous elections – expressed concerns about the statutory timetable for UK general elections, and in particular the challenges of key deadlines within the timetable. Where combined polls occurred there were competing strains on resources from the different election timetables.
47. The report also sets out their agenda for the next five years. They want the UK Government to respond to the recommendations that were made in 2008 to bring forward a comprehensive plan for ensuring consistently effective management and delivery of future elections, in particular to ensure that:
- There is effective management and coordination of the delivery of statutory functions by Returning Officers across the UK, rather than relying on trust in the effectiveness of several hundred individual Returning Officers.
 - There are appropriate mechanisms to hold Returning Officers to account for the delivery of their statutory functions, including mechanisms to direct them to ensure action is taken to address poor administration.
 - The current election petition process is reformed to provide proportionate and accessible procedures for challenging the result of an election where poor-quality administration may have affected the outcome.
 - The costs of running elections are properly met through comprehensive and transparent funding mechanisms.
 - They welcome the joint commitment of the Scottish Government and the UK Government to recognise the Interim Electoral Management Board (IEMB) in statute and provide the Convener of the Board with powers to issue directions to Returning Officers, but they want to see early legislation to consolidate this commitment.
 - They will work with the local government associations across Great Britain to consider how best to support more effective scrutiny of the delivery of elections by local authorities. They are pleased that some authorities have used their report on the problems experienced by people queuing at the close of polls on 6 May to initiate local reviews aimed at identifying how best to support Returning Officers and electoral administrators at future elections.

48. The Cabinet Office will be looking closely at the reports and recommendations of the AEA and the Electoral Commission and will want to take into account the views and experience of electoral administrators in considering the recommendations and any changes that could flow from them.
49. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will take into account all comments and recommendations of the Electoral Commission report when planning for the 2011 elections and referendum.

NEW GOVERNMENT BILLS

50. The Government published two Bills on constitutional reform on 22 July 2010. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill and the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill.
51. **The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill** was introduced into the House of Commons on 22 July 2010 and completed its Second Reading on 6 September.
52. The first reading in the House of Lords took place on 3 November. This stage is a formality that signals the start of the Bill's journey through the Lords. The Second reading which is the general debate on all aspects of the Bill takes place on 15 November.
53. The Bill provides for a referendum on 5 May 2011 on whether to adopt the "alternative vote" system instead of the current "first past the post" system for Westminster parliamentary elections. It also provides for a review of the current constituency boundaries to equalise the size of constituencies and reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600
54. The date chosen to hold the referendum is 5 May 2011; the same day as local and parish elections. In order to allow administrators adequate time to prepare for that poll the Bill needs to achieve Royal Assent by January.
55. The Bill has now completed the Committee Stage in the House of Commons and contains the rules for running the referendum and for campaigners.
56. The Electoral Commission have now introduced a new suite of guidance for referendum campaigners who want to know more about referendums, including how to register, the rules on spending and some dos and don'ts. They have published the initial guidance for campaigners in the Parliamentary Voting System Referendum and will publish final guidance when the legislation is in place.
57. The question voters will be asked in next year's referendum on whether or not the country should adopt the Alternative Vote system was made public on 22 July. Voters will be asked: Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the 'alternative vote' system instead of the current 'first past the post' system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?
58. The EC have a responsibility to assess the intelligibility of the proposed referendum question, to ensure that people can understand the question they will vote on. Following research to gauge people's understanding of the question, they have proposed some changes to its wording.
59. Under the "alternative vote" system for electing MPs voters would be able to mark candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference using 1, 2, 3 etc. A candidate would be elected if they gained more than 50% of the vote. If no one gained 50% of the vote the candidate with the fewest votes would be eliminated and their second preferences re-allocated to the remaining candidates. This process is repeated until a candidate receives more than 50% of the votes.

60. Under the rules to equalise boundary sizes a UK electoral quota will be established based on the electoral register. Each constituency would be required to be within 5% either side of the quota.
61. If a simple majority of voters in the referendum vote to change to the “alternative vote” system the provisions to effect this change will be brought into force on the same day as the boundary changes to constituencies. The boundary review is to be completed by October 2013 in time to make changes for the 2015 general election.
62. The Electoral Commission, which will have responsibility for running the referendum, and will be consulting with the AEA to ensure that the statutory framework supports the conduct of that poll effectively. They will continue to provide updated details as and when they become available.
63. **The Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill** had its Second Reading on 13 September and is due to go to the committee stage in the House of Commons on 16 November. The Bill provides that Parliamentary general elections are to occur every five years on the first Thursday in May with the next election occurring on 7 May 2015. General elections are only to be held earlier than this if either two-thirds of all MPs vote in favour of dissolution or there has been a vote of no confidence in the Government and an alternative Government has failed to gain the confidence of the House of Commons within 14 days.
64. The Bill also provides for:
 - The automatic dissolution of Parliament in advance of scheduled general elections;
 - The abolition of the Queen’s prerogative power to dissolve Parliament;
 - Power for the date of the poll for a scheduled General Election to be moved by two months either before or after the scheduled date of poll by the Prime Minister by affirmative Order approved by both Houses.
65. The Bill will not alter the arrangements for a vote of no confidence in the Government, which will continue to be passed with a simple majority. Such a vote will trigger a period of 14 days and if an alternative Government is unable to secure the confidence of the House of Commons during this time, the Prime Minister will recommend a day to the Queen for a general election to occur and Parliament will be dissolved.
66. **The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000** (PPERA) sets out the legal framework for UK-wide, national and regional referendums. The Chair of the Electoral Commission will be the Chief Counting Officer (CCO), responsible for the conduct of the referendum and ensuring the accuracy of the overall result. The EC will be setting out their approach to the management and coordination of the referendum, including the delivery structures they plan to put in place.
67. The EC have produced guidance for campaigners but, as yet, no information or guidance is available for the poll, postal voting, the count or funding.
68. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will continue to follow progress of the new bills and the EC’s approach to the Referendum and assess the impact on electoral services.

NEXT STEPS

69. The EC recommend that legislation should be introduced to amend the relevant rules for all elections in the UK to make clear that any elector who is entitled to vote at a polling station and who is in the queue to enter the polling station will be allowed to vote. There is a private members bill to enable electors in the precincts of a polling station before the time designated for the closing of the poll to vote; and for connected purposes. This Bill was

presented to Parliament on 5 July 2010. The Bill is a Private Member's Bill which is often not printed until close to a Second Reading debate.

70. The Bill was debated on 22 October 2010 but ran out of time. The next scheduled date for the second reading is 17 June 2011.
71. The decision to hold a national referendum on using the alternative vote system at the same time as local and parish elections and potentially a Mayoral election/referendum at the same time, raises significant logistical problems in particular the resources needed at the polling station and the complexity of the procedures for postal votes opening and the count.
72. Currently the regulations do not allow the postponement of parish council elections. This means that potentially the elector may be presented with up to 3 ballot papers requiring different rules to mark their vote:
 - a referendum ballot paper to say yes or no to the referendum question
 - a local ballot paper to vote for the number of vacant seats eg 'vote for no more than 3'
 - a parish ballot paper to vote for the number of vacant seats eg 'vote for no more than 13'
73. To avoid the problems experienced in other areas by the 27 polling stations that had queues at close of poll, there will need to be provision of additional staffing capacity in order to provide an information and guidance service to voters and also to provide contingency in the event of queues or other exceptional circumstances. Therefore some of the smaller premises used in the Borough of Stockton may be unsuitable, especially mobile polling stations, and this will need to be taken into account in the polling station review later this year.
74. The opening of postal votes will need to be processed in the short time frame available to us within the statutory timetable. To date Adare, our elections printer, only have experience of combining two elections in their postal pack product. Initial discussions indicate they have concerns about increasing the number of elections in one pack to more than two. The first is the space available on the postal vote mailer to incorporate all of the information required to comply with regulations, particularly the instructions to the voter. Secondly the physical enclosing of postal packs. During production the ballot papers are enclosed automatically and camera recognition is used to ensure the number on every item matches. Increasing the number of inserts may impact upon the printer's capacity to produce the packs in the short time frame available.
75. We will continue to work with Adare to eliminate potential difficulties for combined elections for a combined postal vote pack for the Referendum, Local and Parish elections.
76. The count will be delayed until all ballot boxes have been received from the polling stations and have been verified. The logistics of the polling station staff transporting all ballot boxes used to the count venue will take longer than usual. The verification of postal votes handed in at the polling stations will take longer than usual because of the number of possible combinations of returned ballot papers and dealing with the mix and match process.
77. To speed up the count as much as possible we are investigation the different combinations of ballot boxes and processes. However, it is the case that all boxes would have to be verified before any of the ballot papers can be counted, in case a paper is placed in the 'wrong' box. More ballot boxes may need to be purchased and additional arrangements for transportation of several ballot boxes to the count venue will have to be considered.
78. The development of the 2011 multiple elections project plan is in progress and we will report the impact of additional legislation as it becomes available to CMT.

Individual Electoral Registration

79. The Coalition Agreement published in May 2010 committed to speeding up the implementation of individual electoral registration, to tackle electoral fraud. The Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, made a statement to the House of Commons on 15 September 2010, which set out the Government's plans to bring individual registration into force in 2014, during the lifetime of this Parliament. There will be no 'voluntary phase' of collecting electors' personal identifiers prior to this.
80. This will mean that during the 2014 annual canvass all existing registered electors and others who may be eligible to vote, will be invited to register individually and provide personal identifiers (signature, date of birth and national insurance number) that will be used to authenticate their identity before they are added to the register. Electors will be given time to get used to the new provisions: anyone who is already on the register, but does not register individually or who fails to adequately provide their identifiers in 2014 will be carried forward until after the General Election and only removed from the register if, on conclusion of the 2015 canvass they have failed to individually register. However it will be a requirement for any new registrations or any person seeking an absent vote to be registered individually from 2014 onwards.
81. The Government also intends to take the opportunity of introducing individual registration to tackle problems of under-registration. In his statement to the Commons on 15 September, the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform announced that the government will be trialling data matching – allowing electoral registers to be compared to other public databases to identify people missing from the register – over the course of 2011. The Minister will be writing out to local authorities to invite them to get involved in these pilots, further primary legislation will be needed to replace the current provisions in the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 and the government intend to publish a draft Bill next year before legislation is introduced into Parliament. Much of the detail has yet to be worked out but they intend to consult electoral administrators, suppliers and other key stakeholders over the coming months to assist in the development.
82. The Head of Democratic services and the Team Leader for Electoral Services will continue to contribute to shaping electoral reform through active membership of the AEA.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

83. The estimated cost of the Local and Parish elections is £250K; contested parishes will pay 50 % of costs for their area. In addition, it is expected that if the referendum takes place on 5 May a contribution to the costs will be made by the central government. A successful petition for a Mayoral referendum would also have an impact on budget provision. The estimated cost of a stand alone mayoral referendum is £250K, in the event of a mayoral referendum being held on 5 May next year the costs would be equally proportioned.
84. In areas where there is a referendum and ward elections the costs for that area would be equally proportioned, i.e. 50% each. A mayoral referendum would further divide the costs to 33.3%, 66.6% being borne by the authority and 33.3% by central government.
85. In the areas where there are also parish elections, the costs for that area would be equally proportioned, i.e.: 33.3% each. A mayoral referendum would further divide the costs to 25%, 50% being borne by the authority 25% by parish and 25% by central government.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

86. Duty to comply with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006. The proposals highlighted within this report will assist in ensuring compliance with the legislative requirements relating to elections.

RISK ASSESSMENT

87. The Development and implementation of the 2011 Multiple Elections project plan is categorised as medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

88. **Stronger Communities** The delivery of a public awareness activity to promote the public's democratic right to vote and to communicate election information to electors.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

89. This report is not subject to an Equality Impact Assessment because it is not seeking Cabinet approval for a new policy, strategy or change in the delivery of a service

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

90. The implementation of any revised arrangements will be consulted upon with CMT and elected members.

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Education related? No

Background Papers EC report on the Administration of the 2010 UK General Election
AEA report 'Beyond 2010: The future of Electoral Administration in the UK
Cabinet Office Elections and Democracy update briefings

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: Not ward specific