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| ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR SCOTLAND**NOTE OF MEETING OF 16 February 2024, 2PM*****MEETING HELD VIA MS TEAMS***  |
| Present: Malcolm Burr (Convener)Chris Highcock (Secretary)Andrew Kerr (RO City of Edinburgh)Milne, Pippa (RO Argyll and Bute)Kenneth Lawrie (RO Falkirk)Jim Savege (RO Aberdeenshire)Annemarie O'Donnell, (RO Glasgow)Peter Wildman (ERO Central Region)Andy Hunter (AEA)Mark Conaghan (SOLAR) Catherine Heggie (Electoral Commission)Andy O’Neill (Electoral Commission Alison Davidson (Electoral Commission)Maria McCann (Scottish Government)Angus Reid (Scottish Government)Iain Hockenhull (Scottish Government)Kenneth Pentland (Scottish Government)Paul Docker (UK Government) | ApologiesMark Adam (ERO Grampian)Jim Doig (ERO D&G) |
|  |  | **NOTE** | **ACTION** |
| **1.0/****2.0** | **Apologies/Matters Arising****Note of previous meeting** | * Apologies see above, noted
* Note of the meeting 131223 accepted as accurate.
	+ All matters arising dealt with on the agenda or complete
* Actions from January 23 Planning Day – **noted**.
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| **3.0** | **Accessibility Subgroup Update**  | Recommendations: Measures to improve accessibility during elections (Immediate Actions) – (*circulated)*Other Workstreams (*oral updates*)Medium Term (2026) – Tactile and Audio PilotsLonger Term (2027) – Digital optionsAccessibility Project Manager (*oral update*) |  |
| **4.0** | **EMB Forms Group (oral update)** | MS Teams channel for collaboration on forms  |  |
| **5.0** | **Preparation for UK Parliamentary General Election – (general oral update)**  | **Potential Recommendations for ROs and EROs for UKPGE in 2024** * As agreed at 13 December EMB meeting, once a UKPGE date is announced Convener will issue recommendations to ROs and EROs to cover areas identified: Date of Publication of Notice of Election; Date of Dispatch of Poll Cards; Date of dispatch of first and final issue of postal votes ;Date of publication of second interim electoral notice of alteration (SIENA).
* Convener has also made [recommendation](https://www.emb.scot/news/article/59/actions-to-improve-the-accessibility-of-elections)s with respect to basic accessibility measures to be adopted.

**Public Awareness – Voter ID & Postal Vote Handling*** Concern expressed by both RO and ERO members of the EMB that the Electoral Commission’s public awareness plans for Scotland around Voter ID were scheduled to take place too close to the election and that an earlier intervention was needed.
* EC plans are to commence public awareness in Scotland only when the UKPGE is announced. However this would leave limited time for applications for VACs which would come at the same time as other activity for EROs around postal vote application and registration.
* Public Awareness in England for the May 23 elections had commenced in the January.
* **ACTION** – clear message noted from the EMB that the Electoral Commission should consider an earlier public awareness programme around Voter ID in Scotland.
* **ACTION –** links to EC material to be circulated to ROs and EROs for them to cascade to their councillors, party contacts etc.
* With respect to postal vote handling awareness in general remains low and will need to be addressed ahead of the UKPGE.

**Elections Act 2022:– oral update on UK Elections Act issues (Voter ID, OAVA, Overseas Electors, Postal Vote Handling and Secrecy, Accessibility)*** PD and DLUHC aware of issues with the “user journey” from the online system e.g. overseas applications not automatically being directed to an absent vote.
* Some issues with respect to overseas applications and difficulties in proving previous residence. Note potential danger of false registration.
* Raft of major change for EROs around VAC, OAVA, Overseas applications, change in proxy rules, 3 year refresh for postals and postal vote handling rules, all presenting a risk due to volume of concurrent change. Risk particularly with respect to an early or short notice poll.

**Divergence issues*** Divergence issues around postal vote application and refresh noted. These are a consequence of devolution but in the interest of the voter both governments agree that a consistent practice would be an advantage with convergence on a 3 year refresh and access to the online portal for Scottish EROs.
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| **6.0** | **Electronic Vote Counting 2027 and by-elections** | * Paper circulated outlining plans to develop strategy, governance and Project Board arrangements for the 2027 Project which would be agreed at next EMB meeting. **ACTION** LU
* New indicative costs for ECounted by-elections noted, including reductions due to savings on transport costs resulting from store of equipment in Glasgow, although still some impact on costs due to contracted CPI increase.
 | **LU** |
| **7.0** | **EMB & Electoral Commission Joint Seminar** | * Previous seminars well-received and valuable, looking at funding, recall petitions and Voter ID.
* Seminar on Postal Vote Handling planned for 27 February to be delivered by AEA based on their workshop at the AEA January conference.
* **ACTION** EMB/EC to discuss potential future seminar topics
 | **CH/AD** |
| **8.0** | **Capacity Building and Resilience**  | * Discussion Paper circulated, picking up issues raised at the 6 October conference and proposing a number of actions to address challenges.
* All noted this was a good paper with important issues addressed.
* JS noted importance of sharing learning and promotion of peer support across Scotland.
* PM noted specific challenges to rural councils in delivering elections adding to costs, e.g. overnight accommodation for polling staff.
* PD noted the need to align with similar work underway across the rest of the UK.
* **ACTION AD** to revise paperpicking up additional learning points in coming months and from UK.
* **ACTION –** ALL important to highlight issues to new ROs given current turnover of ROs
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| **9.0** | **Scottish Government General Update**  | * Update circulated for information
	+ Electoral Reform Bill (Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill) now under scrutiny by Parliament. Introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 23 January 2024. Note that the Bill does not extend candidacy rights to foreign nationals. Covers postponement of polls and addresses a revised future structure of the EMB.
	+ Interministerial Group on Elections met on 23 January 2024 - Online Absent Vote Applications (OAVA), UK Minister noted the UK Government was continuing to consider how access could be arranged for OAVA for Scottish and Welsh local government elections and Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru elections.
	+ Electoral Registration - following the Roundtable held in December, the SG Elections Team are seeking to identify the range of online interactions with public services, which could be useful for signposted/integrated approach to registration.
	+ Accessibility remains important area of work of concern to Minister. Bill includes options for pilots; Minister and CH to speak at the meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment on 21 February on the Reform Bill and accessibility. To include providing Members with an update on the work of the EMB Accessibility sub-group and the range of possible improvements being considered.
 | **IH** |
| **10.0** | **Standards, Procedures, and Public Appointments Committee evidence session / written evidence - Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill 21 March 2024** | * Convener (MB) invited to give evidence to the SPPA Committee on 21 March on the - Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill in a panel to include AEA and SAA.
* Written evidence to be submitted by 7 March
* **ACTION** **CH** to draft and circulate to EMB before submission to Committee
 | **MB****CH** |
| **11.0** | **UK Government – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: Elections and Registration Update**  | **UK Funding Working Group – final guidance*** Revised funding guidance noted.
* Range of comments from the Funding Working Group had been incorporated in the new Guidance including cover for standby staff and travel for polling staff.

**Election Pay Rates - (circulated)*** Noted. Bands are proposed which allow RO to place staff within band to limit impact on costs of local elections.

**Response from Simon Hoare (UK Minister for Elections) with respect to Funding - (circulated)*** Response noted with disappointment. MB to consider response. Concern remains around the issues already noted in this meeting with respect to Capacity and Resilience of the sector and the need to fund fully the work of the councils in supporting elections, with many councils subsidising the parliamentary polls. **ACTION** **MB**
 | **MB** |
| **12.0** | **Electoral Commission General Update** | * Written update circulated
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| **13.0**  | **Electoral Registration Update from the Electoral Registration Committee of the SAA update – (to follow)** | **Actions from Registration Roundtable (Thursday 7 December 2023)*** Actions circulated and noted:
	+ **Action 1**: Looking ahead to the next Completeness and Accuracy report on registers in December 2026, Scottish Government will meet with EC to discuss how best to ensure data captured is relevant to Scotland and more readily capable of analysis (especially in regard to the under 30 age group and the impact of recent changes to the franchise). **ACTION** **Scottish Government & Electoral Commission**
	+ **Action 2**: Scottish Government to work with internal colleagues to identify: the range of public sector transactions which could be useful for signposted and integrated registration; the kinds of services where data could be shared; and feedback to the group. **ACTION** **Scottish Government**
 | **SG EC****SG** |
| **14.0** | **AEA update**  | * Note that Andy Hunter representing AEA would also be giving evidence to Standards, Procedures, and Public Appointments Committee on the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill at the session on 21 March 2024 with EMB and SAA.
 | **AH** |
| **15.0** | **Boundaries Issues**  | * A new Secretary has been appointed to replace Isabel Drummond-Murray; no start date as yet.

**Boundary Commission for Scotland*** Parliamentary Constituencies Order 2023 came into force on 29th November 2023. The new (UK) constituencies will take effect at the next General Election.

**Boundaries Scotland*** Second Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries is progressing – intention to consult on revised constituency boundaries after Easter.
* New Deputy Chair and new Commissioner appointed.
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| **16.0**  | **EMB Administration** | **Membership*** Vacancies arising due to retirement of current members (Pete Wildman (ERO), Andrew Kerr (RO), Annemarie O’Donell (RO) to be filled. **ACTION** Convener to identify suitable replacement members in discussion with ERO and RO bodies

**EMB Annual Report** * Noted and approved **ACTION** approved for submission to Scottish Parliament

**EMB Funding** * Funding for 2023/24 noted; work to focus on accessibility.
 | **MB****CH** |
| **17** | **Local Government By-elections** | **Updated Log of local government by-elections*** Noted

**Fujitsu Quarterly Review January 2024** * Noted key issues including new store for equipment and alternate courier both of which are containing costs. Both instigated by EMB and Scottish Government following engagement with supplier over costs.
* Continued monitoring of adjudication rates.
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| **18** | **AOB** | * None raised
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**DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS** (subject to confirmation of date of UKPGE) 10 May 1000-1130 / 7 August 1400-1530 / 12 November 1400-1530

Note 10 May proposed date likely to be changed due to clash with SAA meeting and potential by-election