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24 April 2025 2PM Action Note of Meeting

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| **Attendance/Apologies** | **Attendance**: Chris Highcock, James Newman, Jim Savege, Karen Greaves, Kirsty Mavor, Liz Ure, Maria McCann, Mark Adam, Mark Conaghan, Peter Hessett, Malcolm Burr, Paul Docker, Brian Rout, Pippa Milne, Andy Hunter, Sarah Mackie**Apologies**: Robert Nicol, kenneth Lawrie, Alison Davidson,  |
| **Action Note from 27 February 2025 / Action Outstanding**  | * Note accepted
* No actions outstanding
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| **UKPGE Funding Claims** | * Submission deadline of 4 April noted.
* Response awaited from UK Government
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| **UKPGE 2024 – Postal Vote/Print Roundtable** | * Summary of discussion circulated with set of proposed actions
* **ACTION** – CH to write to Ms Rushanara Ali MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Homelessness and Democracy) with respect the findings and recommendations
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| **Local Government By-elections** | * Continuing series of local by-elections noted. Electoral Commission have been observing at each with comment and report submitted to RO teams for action/improvement. RO Teams are offering comment to EMB on any issues of note for other RO teams across the country.
* Quarterly Review of by-election support from Fujitsu April 2025 for those Ros choosing to use eCount. Total charges to date for Fujitsu noted and average cost per event. SG and EMB are monitoring adjudication rates and discussing with Electoral Commission as part of their work on promoting literacy around STV. Note Council feedback generally positive regarding service. One issue of print delay but did not affect voter with all papers receive to schedule.
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| **Scottish Parliament By-election in the Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse constituency** | * Date of 5 June for the SP by-election.
* Both EMB and EC are providing some support to RO team who have limited experience as Election Manager role is vacant and no current concern regarding delivery of event.
* Engagement and support with RO team will continue.
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| **Manual Verification and Count: Good Practice** | * As agreed at August 2024 EMB Working Group to be established to identify and develop good practice with respect to manual verification and count processes.
* Progress has been delayed due to initial focus on postal vote roundtable.
* **ACTION** – CH and AD (Electoral Commission) to discuss work programme and establish group in the next 2 months
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| **Accessibility Subgroup** | * The Electoral Management Board for Scotland’s (EMB) accessibility sub-group met in March 2025 with a number of workstreams, including progress on the tactile ballot paper overlay and telephone lines that provide automated read outs of the candidate and party names.
* Ballot paper overlay – briefing note had been circulated to ROs on 17 April explaining the new overlay/template. ROs have been asked to support the trial of the new ballot paper overlay by providing it alongside the existing statutory TVD at polling stations at any council by-elections in the coming year. Use will be monitored by Accessibility Subgroup.
* Audio support - overlay sill be supplemented with an audio recording of the ballot paper. A telephone trial offered and funded by the EMB is already available and has been promoted to RO teams. This offers councils the opportunity to have a telephone line which contains a recording of the names of the candidates and political parties as they appear on the ballot paper to allow. Use of the service is being monitored through indicators provided by the digital support.
* Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment 27 May – EMB, SG and EC to attend and give update to the CPG on progress around these projects to support voters with visual impairment to vote independently and in secret. Draft agenda circulated.
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| **Future Status and Resourcing of the EMB** | * [Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2025/4/part/11) - received Royal Assent 29 January 2025. Part 11 provides for “the committee established and known as the Electoral Management Board for Scotland continues to exist and becomes a body corporate to be known under the same name”.
* MB has been in discussion with Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and Scottish Government with respect to appropriate date for this element of the Act to commence, with current intention of 1 April 2026.
* Corporate Plan for EMB to be developed and submitted to SPCB by September 2025. **ACTION** CH, MB
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| **Scottish Parliament Election 2026 Legislation, Funding, Guidance – update on progress** | * **Conduct Order** - The Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) Amendment Order 2025 is being prepared. A small number of changes associated with the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025 are also being prepared. The Scottish Government is committed to the Gould principle, which states that any changes to electoral law should be in place at least six months prior to a major electoral event and we are on track to achieve this
* Count Timing - requirement in rule 54 of schedule 2 to the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) Order 2015 that “The CRO shall make arrangements for counting the votes in the presence of the counting agents as soon as practicable after the close of the poll”. The Government is engaging with the Convener on this issue.
* **Fees and Charges –** MB and CH have had an initial discussion of the Fees and Charges Order to informed SG development of the order. **ACTION** SG are preparing a proposal and aim to share this for comment with EMB members after Easter.
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| **OAVA / Absent Voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Bill – update** | * Tracy Gilbert MP presented the Absent Voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Bill on 16 October 2024 which includes provisions which trigger the requirement for the Scottish Government to lodge a Legislative Consent Memorandum with the Scottish Parliament 2nd Reading was on 17 January 2025 and the Bill is currently at the Committee Stage.
* Officials from SG and the UKG are working together to take this forward, with a view to OAVA becoming available for voters in Scottish Parliament and local elections in December.
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| **SP Election 2026 Potential Directions from the Convener of the EMB** | * Note of direction issued for SP elections in 2016 and 2022 had been shared with EMB at previous meetings. Intention would be for Convenor to made similar directions for 2026 election, as usual with focus on consistency with respect to voter facing elements (poll card and postal vote dispatch dates, ballot paper colour etc) and appropriate contingency.
* **Timing of Count** – EMB has been in contact with ROs to assess their preference to the timing of the Count. Summary of findings circulated to EMB – there is a strong preference for the count to commence on the Friday following the poll for reasons of staff welfare, resilience and access to resources. (26 of the 32) MB met with Minister this morning to discuss ACTION Minister to engage further with colleagues. MB to discuss further with ROs in SOLACE etc.
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| **SP Election 2026 Support for ROs and EROs** | * EMB and EC are discussing how best to provide support for RO and ERO teams in the preparation for the SP election in 2026.
* **Joint Conference Autumn 2025** – as in previous years a joint conference is planned for Autumn 2025 for ROs, EROs and their senior staff to support preparation for the election. Venue and date to be confirmed. **ACTION** CH AD to continue development of plans for conference.
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| **Scottish Government Update**  | * Update circulated and noted
* **eCount Procurement** - The invitation to tender (ITT) to the commercial market for the contract for the eCounting 2027 project was issued on 28th March and bids are to be submitted by 30 May. The detailed specification was compiled and refined over several months, with substantial input from EMB members, and it incorporating the lessons from the 2022 elections gathered from all Councils. The eCounting project board signed-off the approach to, and key content of, the ITT and it was subject to external independent assurance – receiving a positive report and recommendation to proceed – prior to publication. It can be viewed online here: [DC-Electronic Counting for Scottish Local Government Elections 2027 - Find a Tender](https://www.find-tender.service.gov.uk/Notice/011663-2025).
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| **Electoral Commission Update**  | * SM gave an update on current work of Electoral Commission in Scotland. Personnel changes noted – EMB welcomed SM to her new role and congratulated her an her appointment.
* Corporate Plan - a separate plan for Scotland has been developed, which will be laid in the Scottish Parliament. Key priorities are
	+ Supporting voters and increasing participation
	+ Modernising the electoral system
	+ Safeguarding and protecting the system
	+ Leading an informed debate about the future of elections
	+ Strengthening the Electoral Commission
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| **Boundaries Scotland / Boundary Commission for Scotland** | * Boundaries Scotland will submit its report with final recommendations for changes to the Constituencies and Regions of the Scottish Parliament by 1 May 2025. The review is required under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998 and will recommend constituencies, and regions, of similar electorate size while also taking account of local authority areas, special geographical circumstances, maintenance of local ties and any inconveniences caused by the alteration of the existing boundaries. As soon as practicable after receiving the report, Ministers will lay an Order giving effect to the report’s proposals. The aim will be to lay the Order in sufficient time for Parliament to consider the recommendations, and reach its decision, before early November. This will help to ensure there is clarity about the electoral boundaries more than six months before the next Scottish Parliament general election.
* **Independent Review of the Process for Determining Boundary Changes** Andrew Kerr, OBE has been appointed as the Chair of the Review. Andrew was the Chief Executive of the City of Edinburgh Council and a member of the EMB. It is expected that the public consultation will go live at the beginning of May. Andrew is keen to hear views from members of the EMB and has offered to attend a future meeting to discuss the review. Secretariat support for the review is being provided by members of the Elections Team. Terms of Reference have been circulated. **ACTION** CH Andrew Kerr to be invited to the next EMB to explain the review
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| **Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill** | * On 4 April, the EMB submitted a response to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament’s Call for Views on the Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill. This was circulated
* The Convener has been invited to give evidence to the Committee on 8 May.
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| **Consultation on Dual Mandates in the Scottish Parliament** | * EMB had submitted a response to the Scottish Government consultation on dual mandates in the Scottish Parliament – circulated - and was invited to a roundtable discussion with the Minster, primarily on the impact were the provisions banning dual mandates for councillors to be commenced.
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| **OFCOM Consultation response** | * Response circulated that had been submitted to OFCOM. EMB is concerned about the impact of potential changes on the postal system and scheduled deliveries. Current electoral timetable is predicated on reliable and scheduled deliveries.
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| **UK Government** | * Oral update provided noting the development of the Strategy for Elections, to be published later this year, setting out the government’s approach to elections and electoral reform for this Parliament.
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| **Martyn’s Law** | * [Martyn’s Law](https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2025/04/03/martyns-law-factsheet/) – noted in terms of potential impact on count operations. Will be monitored in coming months
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| **EMB annual Report**  | * Annual Report 2023/2024 had been circulated and was submitted to Parliament on 24 March
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| **AOB** | * NO other business raised
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| **Future meetings scheduled for**  | * 26 June
* 27 November
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