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**Action Note**

27 February 2025 Action Note, 2PM

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| **Attendance/Apologies** | **Attendance**: Chris Highcock Karen Greaves Mark Adam Kenneth Lawrie Angus Reid Iain Hockenhull Jim Savege Kirsty Mavor Mark Conaghan Malcolm Burr Andy O’Neill, Alison Davidson, Saraj Mackie, Laura Lock, Brian Rout, Robert Nicol, Maria McCann peter Hessett  Apologies: Pippa Milne |
| **Action from previous meetings** | None outstanding |
| **UKPGE 2024** | **Electoral Commission Report on UK Parliamentary General Election** – noted.  **UK Government Response to the Electoral Commission Report** - noted. Noted that much of proposed action in response are falling to the UK Governments’ overall Strategy for Elections. EMB is involved in UK forums discussing the measures being planned.  **UKPGE Funding Claims** – noted the deadline of 4 April for submission of claims. Currently no concerns with respect to late submissions |
| **Workstreams** | **Local Government By-elections / Quarterly Review of by-election support from Fujitsu January 2025 2024** noted number of by-elections delivered by RO teams in recent months and supported by Fujitsu. Adjudication rates remain a concern. **ACTION** – EC and SG are developing work on voter education  **Postal Voting and Print Roundtable –** helpful discussion to be written up for further consideration. Some measures would be needed by governments, but there are actions that can be taken now by ROs and EROs  **Manual Verification and Count: Good Practice –** to be continued  **Accessibility Subgroup –** noted ongoing work around ballot paper overlay and audio support for visually impaired voters.  **Future Status and Resourcing of the EMB –**EMB to submit corporate plan to Scottish Parliament Corporate Body in July. Further work needed to develop appropriate governance arrangements for the new Board. |
| **Preparation for the Scottish Parliament Elections in 2026** | **Draft Timetable** for 7 May 2026 SP Election circulated. Electoral Commission will develop final timetable to be issued later in the years but this provided a preliminary outline of key dates. It is noted that EC are working on new guidance for SP election based on updated legislation but will need to await final conduct order.  **Legislation, Funding, Guidance** – Scottish Government continues work on Conduct Order for SP 2026. There are plans to engage with EMB further to discuss proposed approach to Fees and Charges Order. **ACTION** IH JN MMcC  **Discussion of Directions from the Convener of the EMB - D**irections issued for 2021 elections- were circulated and discussed. It is expected that there would be a similar set of directions issued for the 2026 polls. Before making any directions the Convener needs to consult with the Board and with the Electoral Commission. It is also likely that he would consult with the RO and ERO community ahead of any final directions.  There has been some consideration of count timing, with some ROs expressing a desire for a move away from an overnight count to see it conducted on the Friday. Convener to consider how to progress discussion. **ACTION** MB  **Accessibility** – note that the Accessibility Group has begun meeting again under chair of Vice convener Jim Savege. Detail provided in the SGF written update previously circulated.  **Results collation** – the results collation model from 2021 was circulated for reference. This can be updated once the new constituencies and Regions are finalised. **ACTION** CH  **Support for ROs and EROs** – a support structure for ROs and EROs in the delivery of the SP elections in 2026 is to be developed by the EMB. This will likely include a suite of materials and performance management templates with a focus on supporting the RROs and through them the CROs. **ACTION** CH  **Conference –** a joint conference with the Electoral Commission is planned for September / October 2025 for ROs and EROs to support final preparation for the elections. Date to be confirmed. **ACTION** CH and AD  **National Risk Register** – the 2021 register was circulated for reference. A similar document and risk management structure is to be developed for the May 2026 elections. **ACTION** CH |
| **Updates** | **UK Government**– PD noted the developing work programme for the UK Government with plans for legislation to take forward Manifesto commitments.  **Scottish Government Update** – written update circulated. Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Act 2025 – Commencement dates under consideration; secondary legislation for the Scottish Parliamentary elections, preparatory work for the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) Amendment Order 2025 is progressing with proposals shared with relevant stakeholders,  **eCount Procurement** - The project team has been working closely with EMB representatives and SG procurement and legal colleagues in recent months to produce the detailed invitation to tender (ITT) specification, incorporating the lessons from the 2022 elections. The key content of the ITT – covering staffing, system requirements, printing and training – was signed off by the Project Board last month and is currently being finalised and reviewed by the User Intelligence Group. The project will be independently reviewed at the digital pre-procurement assurance gate on 4-6 March (to which members of the EMB will contribute) and, subject to recommendations from the review, we remain on track to issue the ITT to the market by the end of March, inviting bids by end May. Ministerial approval for the project and its budget has been given, recognising the need to drive down costs where possible. The project’s Accountable Officer, DG Strategy & External Affairs, recently met with the project team and was given a presentation on it.  **Electoral Commission** – written update circulated.  **Boundaries Scotland / Boundary Commission for Scotland** – Second Review of Scottish Parliament boundaries, Commission meeting scheduled for 10 March 2025 with Final Recommendations to be submitted by 1 May 2025 to Scottish Ministers.  **Absent Voting (Elections in Scotland and Wales) Bill** – as noted in the SG 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, that 2nd Reading in the first house (HoC) occurred on 17 January 2025 and the Committee Stage is expected to occur during March. Officials from SG and the UKG are working together to take this forward.  **Scottish Parliament (Recall and Removal of Members) Bill** – note EMB to submit views to SP Committee **ACTION** CH  **Consultation on Dual Mandates in the Scottish Parliament** – EMB to respond to consultation **ACTION** CH |
| **EMB Admin** | EMB Annual Report to be finalised and submitted to Scottish Parliament **ACTION** CH |