SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS - MAY 2017

DRAFT AIDE-MEMOIRE FOR ROs

- **General Welcome** to the venue and the count.

- Brief **Health and Safety** and Event Safety announcements and other housekeeping announcements such as refreshment arrangements, areas covers by PA system, etc.

- Indicate that – while there has been lots of information issued to candidates and their agents - just before the count starts, you would like to take the chance to give everyone a **brief description of what will be happening** throughout the count centre today.

- Stress that **staff are here to help**. They have particular tasks and please don't distract them from these unnecessarily. The names of senior staff and their pictures are on display in the count centre and are included in the Count Handbook. Please speak to any of the senior staff if you want more information or have any concerns about the way the count is being managed. In particular, some senior staff are acting as Candidate/ Observer Liaison Officers and will have more time to talk to you about the count process than other staff.

- **If you have any concerns or think that a mistake has been made please draw our attention to it immediately.** That will give us a chance to review what has happened and make corrections, if required. It will also help us to demonstrate to you that the count is being conducted with maximum accuracy and in a transparent manner. Staff have undertaken extensive training and will adopt the approach that "accuracy is more important than speed". I want them to work as efficiently as possible but not at the expense of being accurate and transparent in what they do. I do not expect that you will encounter many problems but please do raise any concerns at the time.

- There are **display screen(s)** within the count centre which will show progress within a range of wards that are being counted at any particular time. The screens will also display the number of first preference votes gained by each candidate, although you should bear in mind that this will not be updated after 80% of the ballot boxes for a ward have been processed.

- **We will be making announcements** throughout the count to let you know, for example, when we start to count a particular ward and where particular tasks are being performed.

- Explain **count management process** e.g. dealing with wards in a particular order or in groupings or other locally-determined managed way.

- **I'd now like to briefly explain each of the key stages of the process.**

- **Ballot Box Opening** is taking place at…this stage is a relatively simple process of removing ballot papers from the ballot boxes, unfolding them and orientating them in a consistent manner ready for scanning. The papers will be placed in Ballot Paper Trays, which have been previously labelled to show the contest etc. This process will be done with the ballot papers 'face-up'. Once all of the ballot papers from a box have been put in a Ballot Paper Tray, the Tray is transferred to the 'Awaiting Registration' area.

- **Registration** will take place at Desks…… this is the first stage of the e-count process. The Registration Officer will record that a Ballot Paper Tray has been included in the count and input the total number of ballot papers expected as indicated on the Ballot Paper Account. Once a Ballot Paper Tray has been registered, it is then taken to the 'Awaiting Scanning' area.

- **Scanning** will take place at Desks. At this stage, the Scanning Operator will scan the ballot papers. Other than capturing the scanned images, no processing of the data is done at this point. When all the papers in a Ballot Paper Tray have been scanned, the Tray is moved to the 'Scanning Complete' area.

- Once a Ballot Paper Tray has been scanned, the system will show that its contests are awaiting **Verification**. This will take place at Desks. The job of the Verification Officer is to check the number of papers processed at scanning matches the number expected as shown on the Ballot Paper Account entered at the Registration stage. Any variance will be shown on screen and the Officer will have the option to send the tray for a re-scan. Once verification of all boxes from a Ward is complete, a full report including information on how variances were considered will be produced and given to Election Agents.

- In addition, my staff have already undertaken a full count of the unused and spoilt papers in order that all ballot papers printed have been accounted for. A copy of this Verification Statement will be provided to each election agent. As each Ballot Paper Tray is verified, the Ballot Paper images are read by the e-counting software and, if they pass the set threshold tests, are processed automatically. Ballot papers which do not pass this test are transferred to the Adjudication stage.

- **Adjudication** will take place at Desks. At this stage the Adjudication Officer is only able to process good ballot papers into the e-count system. Staff will be using the Electoral Commission guidance, together with additional guidance from the Convener of the Electoral Management Board as the basis for their decisions. Copies of this guidance are available throughout the count centre for you to refer to. Any doubtful votes must be deferred to the Returning Officer Adjudication stage for consideration as ballot papers can only be rejected by the Returning Officer. A commonly asked question is:

- **"Why does the system send perfectly good ballots for adjudication?"**

  - The system uses "recognition" software which interprets the characters marked on a ballot paper. A specific threshold has to be met for <u>each</u> individual character in order for the ballot to be processed automatically. What might look like a "1" to a person might also look a bit like a "2" or a "7" to the

system. In such cases, if the threshold for it being a "1" is not met, the ballot will be sent for adjudication.

➤ It is worth bearing in mind that Adjudication staff will be looking at the voters preferences in the context of the whole ballot paper and can therefore make a judgement based on this information, whereas the system is just considering the likelihood of a number being a "1" or a "2" etc. If any character on a ballot fails to meet the likelihood test it will be sent for first level adjudication so that an Adjudication Officer can look at that ballot in context and decide if the system has correctly interpreted the voter's intentions.

➤ While the threshold test could, in principle, be less sensitive and allow more ballot papers to be automatically processed, this could result in papers being processed incorrectly. Extensive testing of the system has been undertaken and proved that the thresholds being used are ones that will ensure correct processing.

➤ It is likely that voting information from a small number of ballot papers will not be able to be captured automatically and will have to be input manually. This may be, for example, where the paper has been torn in two. This process will be undertaken at the Returning Officer station. An announcement about this will be made at the appropriate time. Candidates or their election agents will be able to observe the process to be assured that any data entered manually has been done accurately and in accordance with the voter's intentions.

➤ All papers deferred from first-level adjudication will be dealt with at Returning Officer Adjudication. Candidates and election agents will be informed when this work is to be done.

➤ Once all work on a Ward is complete, I will run some final checks to assure me that all ballot papers have been processed and that we are ready to complete the count. I will share the provisional result with candidates and election agents prior to making any formal announcements.

➤ I have received written confirmation from CGI, the e-count system provider, that there is no data within the system and **we are now ready to start the count.**

For ease of reference, the Annex over-page contains a brief check list of the key points detailed in the above Script.

Briefing Checklist	
General Welcome	☐
Health Safety and Housekeeping announcements	☐
Staff – here to help, photo ids, have been trained, Information Officers available	☐
Accuracy more important than speed - if you identify an issue please raise it immediately, easier to resolve earlier in the process.	☐
Explain display screens – including first preference by candidate	☐
Highlight announcements throughout count	☐
Count will proceed in Ward order e.g. 1-17	☐
Explain key stages: opening, registration, scanning, verification, adjudication	☐
Reconciliation of unused and spoilt papers already completed	☐
Verification may involve "good" ballots	☐
Final check, count and private sharing of provisional result, followed by declaration	☐
CGI have confirmed no data in the system	☐
Count will now start	☐