

# Evaluation of May 2006 pilot schemes Key findings

AEA National Conference 7 September 2006

Tom Hawthorn

May 2006  
pilot schemes

- Early voting
- Electronic counting
- Postal vote signature checking
- Postal vote tracking facilities for voters
- Signing for ballot papers in polling stations
- Changes to the administration and security of elections – EA Bill/Act
- Voter Assist terminal

## Early voting: key findings

Broxbourne,  
Lewisham,  
Newham,  
Rushmoor,  
Shrewsbury &  
Atcham, Tyne &  
Wear (4),  
Westminster

- Levels of use did not exceed 6% of turnout
- Evidence suggests many users would have voted in any case
- Increased convenience welcomed by electorate
- Opinion research points to unfulfilled demand among voters and non-voters
- Comprehensive and properly resourced communication plans essential
- Choice of times and locations are key in determining convenience and turnout

## Early voting: key findings

- Added value of allowing electors to vote at any early voting station by networking electronic registers remains unproven in practice, given high cost per user ratio
- Early voting for service personnel and care home residents improved convenience, but high cost per user
- Repeated pilot schemes in the same areas would support effective long-term learning

## Electronic counting: key findings

Lewisham and  
Westminster

- Further evidence that e-counting technology can be used successfully (including by LA staff) and save time
- Potential for use of standard commercial scanning technology to increase capacity for any widespread rollout
- Accreditation and certification process required for independent assurance of e-counting solutions
- Need to ensure best practice applies to future pilot schemes and/or implementation
- e-counting is already happening outside pilot framework (London; Scotland) how can future pilots add to learning?

## Postal voter signature checking: key findings

### Newham and Stevenage

- Automated processes (Newham) make 100% checking of large quantities of signatures feasible. Costs currently high but may reduce over time
- Manual processes (Stevenage) only efficient for relatively small samples of postal voters, although manual processes may be refined
- What actions should be taken in relation to non-matching statements?
- Standard format for signature collection, suitable for checking against returned postal voting statements

## Postal vote tracking: key findings

Lewisham and  
Shrewsbury &  
Atcham

- Successful provision of a secure internet postal vote tracking facility; potential to successfully address voter concerns about postal service reliability
- Cost per user will be reduced if usage increases from average 9.9% of returned postal ballots
- More frequent updates required, ideally daily, to increase value of service
- How can accessibility be maximised e.g. website design and promotion of an equivalent telephone service

## Signing in polling stations: key findings

Brentwood,  
Lewisham,  
Peterborough and  
Tyne & Wear (4)

- Concerns about possible negative reaction by significant numbers of voters not borne out – only very small number of electors refused
- Opinion research suggests requirement may provide a deterrent effect and improve public confidence
- Important to manage risk of queuing, particularly when high turnout is expected
- Effective guidance needed for electors who cannot sign, refuse to sign or provide inappropriate signatures
- Value in exploring the feasibility of some element of checking the signatures provided by voters?

## Changes to administration and security of elections

Brent, Brentwood, Harrow, Merseyside (4), Newham, Stevenage, Stratford-on-Avon, Shrewsbury & Atcham, Swindon and Tyne & Wear (4)

- Postal voting statement signed only by the voter, with no requirement for a separate witness signature
- Barcode on postal vote materials to help scanning of returned packs and create marked register of postal votes
- Recording of elector number on corresponding number list not counterfoil in polling station
- Inclusion of printed official marks on ballot papers, including watermarks and underprints, as alternative to perforated mark
- All contained in Electoral Administration Act 2006

## Changes to administration and security of elections: key findings

- Positive impact, but several learning points:
  - Design of postal voting statement must be accessible and clearly indicate signature requirement
  - Barcodes should be printed on same elements of ballot packs, and scanned at same point during the opening process to ensure consistency
  - Corresponding number lists need to be kept together after the close of poll for easy access at the count
  - Robust quality assurance required for agreements with suppliers; further guidance on design of printed marks may be necessary.

## Overall lessons for evaluation

- Effective pilot schemes with good learning potential
- Importance of good relationships and effective partnership
- Important to be clear about objectives from the outset
- Difference between piloting to test principle and piloting to refine processes
- Value in having clear and simple pilot designs – don't throw in the kitchen sink!