



# THE ASSOCIATION OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATORS

## Formal response to the Electoral Commission Strategic Review

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has some 1,888 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services.

1.2. This paper sets out the AEA's views in relation to the questions raised in the Electoral Commission's consultation document dated 15 March 2016.

1.3. The AEA's primary concern is about the effect of any proposed changes to the law which would impact on electoral registration and the administration of elections and which might arise as a result of the issues identified in the consultation paper. Any such changes would need to be carefully considered in terms of the practical implications and the way in which the changes would be introduced and administered.

### 2. ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

#### **Question 1 - Thinking about your engagement with elections, what are your biggest risks, challenges and opportunities?**

##### **1.1 Risks**

The AEA considers the following three issues as presenting the biggest risks:

- Pressures on staff resources resulting in vacant Electoral Service Manager and Deputy posts as people decide to leave the profession.
- Pressures on financial resources that may mean Electoral Registration and Returning Officers struggling to deliver on their statutory responsibilities.
- The amount and complexity of legislation which could mean things are easily missed.

## 1.2 Challenges

The AEA has identified the following as the biggest challenges:

- Resources – funding and staffing, along with the reduction of local authority staff resource to call on for additional support at peak periods.
- The rate of churn of electoral services staff and the consequential loss of knowledge and experience within the profession as a whole.
- Late, conflicting and complex changes in legislation.
- Combined polls – for example 2020: UK Parliamentary (based on new boundaries), PCC, English Local Government (not London), GLA, Mayoral (where appropriate) and Scottish Parliament (may change to 2021).
- The ever increasing role of the media, and social media in particular.

## 1.3 Opportunities

The AEA has identified the following as the biggest opportunities:

- The Minister's vision for electoral registration.
- Stream lining and removal of prescribed processes.
- Joined up Government.
- Better use of data and technology.
- Law Commission recommendations – taking them forward so that the UK Government consolidates legislation in the near future.

## Question 2 – Thinking about voter's involvement in elections, what do you think voter's priorities will be by 2020?

The AEA has identified the following as the voter's priorities by 2020:

- **Registration** – they will expect to be able to vote at any poll they are entitled to vote in – therefore the ERO needs a complete and accurate register prior to an election or referendum. To achieve this there needs to be:
  - A registration process with less bureaucracy and registering as a single transaction until there is a change in personal circumstances.
  - Change of address for a registered elector to be automatically dealt with through transactions between the relevant EROs.
  - Joined up Government and better use of data as people move address, for example, registering for council services, council tax, DVLA, UCAS, and NHS records could enable registration in a single transaction.

- The annual canvass should be replaced with, for example (and not limited to) one every five years ahead of each UK Parliamentary General Election along with EROs being authorised to run more if they wish to or local circumstances dictate.
- **Clear messaging** – they will expect clear messaging in campaigns prior to any polls to avoid confusion and duplication of effort from the potential voter and ERO. Examples are the volume of duplicate registrations received prior to the UK Parliamentary General Election last year and the volume being received in advance of the EU referendum. To achieve this there needs to be:
  - Consideration given to the wording of any national registration campaign prior to an election to clarify that there is no need for an elector to take any further action if they have already received their polling card.
  - A review of the online service with a view to restricting the same person from registering more than once. In addition, consideration should be given to the possibility of a look-up facility to allow electors to check if they are registered before trying to register online.
- **E-voting** - The use of IT for voting would replicate the way that some citizens generally conduct their business and interact with both private and public sector organisations. In some countries, electronic and internet voting is being used for the conduct of elections. Whatever system of voting is used, it would have to be secure and gain public confidence.

**Question 3 – Identify three areas where you think the Electoral Commission should be leading the development ideas and/or policy in the next five years.**

The AEA has identified the following three areas in which the Electoral Commission should lead:

- Continued modernisation of electoral policy.
- Lobby for legislative changes to allow for the removal of the annual canvass with local authorities being provided with software functionality to easily data mine local authority and government databases.
- Stream lining of electoral processes and the removal of bureaucracy.

Alongside the above, the AEA expect the Electoral Commission to continue with the delivery of guidance which is timely, accurate and includes legislative

references. The Electoral Commission also need to move towards monitoring via outcomes and away from the current approach of monitoring via steps and processes that have been taken.

The AEA would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any discussions relating to the above. Our post-election report [Elections and Individual Registration – The challenge of 2015](#) provides further details and recommendations relating to some of the areas outlined in our response above.

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**Chief Executive**

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