

REPORT

To: BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE		Subject: ELECTION MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR SCOTLAND CONSULTATION – TIMING OF GENERAL ELECTION COUNT
From: HEAD OF CENTRAL SERVICES		
Date: 11 January 2010	Ref: JAF/IL	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report advises of a consultation paper, issued by the Interim Election Management Board for Scotland, canvassing the possibility of moving the counting of the votes in the forthcoming General Election from overnight, commencing immediately following the close of poll, until the following day. The report further advises that views are being sought from Returning Officers throughout Scotland including, locally, Mr. Whitefield. In order that Mr. Whitefield's response may be informed by local views, the report seeks the views of the Local Area Partnership and the Local Area Committee.

2. Background

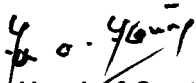
- 2.1 The Interim Election Management Board for Scotland has been established to facilitate arrangements for elections – and, in particular, for the forthcoming General Election. The Board have identified that the results of overnight counts for the forthcoming General Election are likely to be available later than has been the case in previous elections due, principally, to the increase in number of electors using postal votes and the new statutory requirement to check signatures of postal voters. Against that background the Board have issued a consultation paper canvassing the possibility of commencing the count not, as with previous General Elections, immediately following the close of poll but, rather, on the morning of the day following the close of poll.
- 2.2 The consultation process seeks the views of political parties, the media and other stakeholders including local Returning Officers – and, locally, Mr. Whitefield is required to respond by 25 January 2010.

3. Considerations

- 3.1 The background to the consultation paper is as set out in the previous section of this report. In particular – as shown in the attached press release issued by the Convener of the Board. There is some anticipation that the counting process will be extended by a period of 2/3 hours.
- 3.2 In North Lanarkshire it is proposed that the counting of votes take place in three separate locations – votes cast in the Airdrie and Shotts and Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill Constituencies in the Airdrie Leisure Centre, Airdrie, those cast in the Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East Constituency in the Tryst Centre, Cumbernauld and those cast in the Motherwell and Wishaw Constituency in the Wishaw Sports Centre. Against the background of those arrangements it is not considered that, if the counting of the votes commences immediately following the close of poll, the declaration of results will be unduly delayed. It is, however, accepted that there could be some savings in terms of costs were the counting of the votes to be delayed until the morning of the day following polling day.

4. **Recommendation**

- 4.1 The Local Area Partnership and the Local Area Committee are asked to note, and indicate their views, on the consultation by the Election Management Board for Scotland on the possibility of moving the counting of votes in the forthcoming General Election to the following day instead of overnight.


~~John Fleming~~

Head of Central Services

Members seeking further information on the contents of this report are asked to contact John Fleming, Head of Central Services on Extension 2228.

DEBATE UNDERWAY ON CHANGE IN ELECTION COUNT

A Consultation Paper has been issued on the arrangements for counting votes at the forthcoming UK General Election, focussing on the possibility of moving the count to the following day instead of it being carried out overnight.

The Consultation Paper, produced by the Interim Election Management Board for Scotland, points out that the results of overnight counts for the 2010 election are likely to be available several hours later than has been the case in previous elections. The consultation process is seeking the views of political parties, the media and other stakeholders. Views will also be sought at local level throughout Scotland by Returning Officers.

The extra length of time required to complete the count is largely because of the increase in the number of people using postal votes. New regulations mean the identity of postal voters needs to be checked and technology-based processes are required to support that. New tasks have to be completed when the polls close before the counting of votes can begin. The paper explains that this has potentially significant implications for the staffing of overnight counts.

Tom Aitchison, Convener of the Board, said: "We're facing the prospect of most Scottish results coming in around two or three hours later, which means the earliest would be around 2.00 am, with most around 4.00 am and some later, and that assumes that everything goes according to plan. Any recounts or unforeseen circumstances would push that even further into the early hours or beyond.

"We've got to consider and ask questions about how the new regulations will affect the counting process and those who will be working on the night. Voters will recall the problems that were experienced in 2007. We all recognise the desire for an early announcement of results and that there is a real drama about traditional overnight counts. However, our priority has got to be delivering accurate results that the candidates, the media and, most importantly, the public can trust."

A similar debate is going on south of the border, with a number of Returning Officers having already indicated that they intend to count on the day after the election, allowing postal votes to be processed overnight in preparation for the count.

Notes to Editors

1. The Interim Election Management Board for Scotland was established in May 2008, with members drawn from the 32 Returning Officers and 15 Electoral Registration Officers across Scotland. Its main aim is to provide a forum for ensuring best practice and consistency in elections management in Scotland.
2. The UK and Scottish Governments have recently reviewed the work of the Board, especially in its preparation for the recent European Parliamentary Elections, and intend to introduce legislation to establish the Board in statute.
3. Tom Aitchison is the Returning Officer for Edinburgh and the Chief Executive of the City of Edinburgh Council. He has also been the Regional Returning Officer for Scotland for European Parliamentary Elections.