

Board notes: 24 April 2019 | Electoral Commission Search

Board notes: 24 April 2019 You are in the Electoral Commission Board section
Home How we make decisions Electoral Commission Board On this page Update on May
polls Board effectiveness review (EC 25/19) First published: 26 July 2019 Last
updated: 30 July 2019 Meeting overview Date: 24 April 2019 Time: 9:30am Location:
Boothroyd Room, 3 Bunhill Row, London Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting
John Holmes, Chair Anna Carragher Sarah Chambers Elan Closs Stephens Alasdair Morgan
Rob Vincent Stephen Gilbert Alastair Ross Joan Walley Sue Bruce (Video conference)
Bob Posner, Chief Executive Ailsa Irvine, Director, Electoral Administration and
Guidance Craig Westwood, Director, Communications and Research Kieran Rix, Director,
Finance and Corporate Services Dan Adamson, Head of Monitoring and Enforcement
Katharine Sparrow, Senior Executive Assistant Update on May polls Bob Posner reminded
the Board of the different electoral events that were to take place in May, including
the recall petition in Peterborough, the local elections on 2 May, and the European
Parliamentary election. He said the organisation had moved to delivery mode and where
possible other work had been paused or reprofiled to allow staff to focus on the
polls. Directors then provided an update on their team's work in supporting the
delivery of these polls. Ailsa Irvine said the recall petition in Peterborough seemed
to be going well, and there had been regular contact with the Petition Officer.
Initial anecdotal feedback was similar to North Antrim in that the six week period
for signing the petition felt too long. We had sought to collect more data to
evidence any recommendations we might want to make on the length of petition periods
and other aspects of the process. She also noted there was little in the legislation
about the timing of the count, but the result had to be announced within one day of
close of the petition, which meant the result was likely to be announced just as
people started going to the polls for the local elections. The Board heard that
preparations for the local elections were going well and we had engaged with all
authorities with elections taking place. Some issues were arising, but they were
relatively minor so far. However, compared to previous years, we were receiving
significantly more queries from administrators. This was partly due to the higher
number of areas with elections than last year, but also to the late change to the
legislation around candidate's home addresses on the ballot papers, which had led to
a significant number of queries around the nomination process. Ailsa Irvine said the
contingency planning we had undertaken through the Events Delivery Steering Group had
put us in a good place when preparing for the European Parliament election. We had
issued our guidance to administrators at the end of March, and we had also provided
additional guidance to authorities with local elections to help them manage the issue
of overlapping timetables. The Board was reminded that the administrative structure
for the European Parliament elections was different to other elections, with Regional
Returning Officers (RROs) coordinating across 11 electoral areas in Great Britain,
and Northern Ireland. There were risks to the delivery of the poll as local
authorities were stretched with this poll so close to the local elections, but we
were working with the RROs, through our Elections Coordination and Advisory Board
(ECAB), to mitigate the risks and there was nothing currently to suggest the polls
wouldn't be delivered successfully. Craig Westwood updated the Board on our public
awareness campaigns. The campaign for the local elections had finished on 12 April
and early data on applications showed we had exceeded our targets in both England and
Northern Ireland, with final numbers to be confirmed. The team had worked swiftly to
put together the campaign for the European Parliamentary election and this was now
being rolled out, initially on digital channels, to be followed shortly by

television. Craig Westwood said the teams had also put work in place for our post poll reporting. He noted we had been able to up-weight our public opinion survey for the local elections which has enabled us to gain more evidence on the Peterborough recall petition. This would help with our reporting and any recommendations we might want to make. Craig Westwood noted that the voter ID pilots had gone ahead and plans were in place to ensure we gathered as much feedback as we could to inform our reporting. The various polls were also generating a lot of media and public affairs enquiries. There was substantial reactive work underway to deal with these enquiries, but we were also taking a proactive approach to help minimise the number of questions. The Board received an update on preparations in the Regulation Directorate. A decision had been taken early in the year to make regulation guidance available and remind campaigners of the regulatory period should the European Parliamentary election be confirmed. Where it seemed appropriate we were now also arranging meetings with political parties and non-party campaigners to ensure they understood the rules. Dan Adamson said campaign monitoring was well underway, including for the first time use of the new social media tools. Our enforcement team would look to intervene quickly where necessary. We were conscious that there were some high profile new parties and some inexperienced candidates. We were therefore thinking about potential issues and what this might mean for the advice that should be given. Turning to budgets, Kieran Rix noted that in normal circumstances the budget for European Parliament elections would have been around £1.4M over two years, but in the current circumstances, we planned to stay within the £686K agreed in our 2018/19 budget. The Board heard that the Executive Team had looked at workloads, and empowered staff to make suggestions about what work could be stopped or rescheduled to give them the capacity to concentrate on the election related work. They were also thinking about staff resilience and what could be done to help support staff through these polls. The Board discussed the various electoral events in more detail. They requested that once both the recall petition in Peterborough and the petition due to commence shortly in Brecon and Radnorshire had closed, our statutory report not only consider recommendations around the length of time and cost and whether petitions could be used to trial other forms of voting, but also address the potential for a more fundamental review of the current framework. The Board requested a discussion on the findings from the voter ID pilots and any recommendations we might make. The Board noted some of the issues coming up around the European Parliament election, including the registration of EU27 citizens (i.e. citizens from the EU except for the UK), security concerns, and any cancellation of the poll. Actions: That a Board discussion be scheduled on the findings of the voter ID pilots, including any recommendations we might make in our statutory report. That our statutory report on the recall petitions in Peterborough and in Brecon and Radnorshire consider recommendations around the length of time and cost, and whether petitions could be used to trial other forms of voting, and address the potential for a more fundamental review of the current framework. Board effectiveness review (EC 25/19) The Chair introduced the item and said it was important the Board scrutinise themselves and the impact they have had over the last twelve months. He noted that the next review of effectiveness would need to involve an external independent facilitator. Bob Posner said that the paper laid out the responsibilities of the Board, its membership, core values, and code of conduct. The paper analysed two aspects of the Board's role as a non-executive body – supervisory and stewardship – and the types of decisions made by the Board. He noted that in 2018, two-thirds of the Board agenda items were supervisory in nature. Further, two-thirds of Board agenda items gave Commissioners

the opportunity to contribute to Commission business. The Chair invited Commissioners to think about the impact of the Board on what was happening in the organisation, the balance between support and challenge of staff, whether Commissioners were confident they were receiving the right information, and whether they were spending enough time on substance as well as due diligence issues. Overall the Board were satisfied there were no fundamental problems. However there were a number of areas Commissioners wanted to come back to at future meetings, including: Assurance on robustness of investigations and other key regulatory processes, including an opportunity for the Chair of the Audit Committee to review a completed investigation How diversity in the makeup of the Board might be more of a focus through future recruitment How to deal with England, including the possibility of a Commissioner with some responsibilities for England, and a consideration of the returning officer leadership structures in England assuming the European Parliamentary election regions would be lost Whether there was a need for the Commission to play a greater leadership role to enhance confidence in the electoral system Commissioners should hear more directly from stakeholders on some issues How to make better use of the knowledge and experience of all Commissioners How to assess the performance of Board Committees The annual effectiveness process for the Board and how a review with external facilitation might be carried out, plus an informal mid-year update Actions: That an item be brought to Board to confirm the actions arising from this discussion on Board effectiveness.