

Board notes: 18 April 2018 session on modernising electoral registration | Electoral Commission Search Board notes: 18 April 2018 session on modernising electoral registration You are in the Electoral Commission Board section Home How we make decisions Electoral Commission Board On this page Presentation from the Australian Electoral Commission Presentation from Peter Wildman – Scottish Assessors Organisation Informal Board discussion First published: 23 July 2019 Last updated: 23 July 2019 Summary Date: 18 April 2018 Time: 9:30am Location: Boothroyd Room, 3 Bunhill Row, London Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting Sir John Holmes (JEH) Chair Sue Bruce (SB) Elan Closs Stephens (ECS) John Horam (JRH) David Howarth (DH) Alasdair Morgan (AM) Rob Vincent (RV), Bridget Prentice (BP) Sarah Chambers (SC) attending as an observer Claire Bassett (CB) Ailsa Irvine (AI) Robert Posner (RP) Craig Westwood (CW) Kieran Rix (KR) Charlene Hannon (CH) Melanie Davidson (MD) Mark Williams (MW) Renette Snyman (RS) Rupert Grist (RG) Nancy Bruseker (NB) Polly Wicks (PWi) Phil Thompson (PT) Tom Hawthorn (TH) External speakers: Tom Rogers, (TR) Australian Electoral Commissioner, Australian Electoral Commission Andrew Gately, (AG) National Election Manager, Australian Electoral Commission Peter Wildman, Scottish Assessors Association (PeW) Presentation from the Australian Electoral Commission AG and TR provided the context in which the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) operates; and gave a brief history of the legislative framework in which it operates. The Australian system operates a continuous roll-update with a compulsory voting/registration process. With regard to modernisation and the electoral roll there have been two key changes to the process that have been implemented: Direct enrolment – this has been changed to an opt-out system Registration – online enrolment has been adopted The AEC have a completeness record of 96.3%. The Federal Direct Enrolment & Update (FDEU) process uses trusted data sources to gather information to identify those who should be enrolled and where circumstances may have changed. In response to a question on data security, the AEC advised that they are able to choose which data sources to use, and can therefore pick the most accurate and trusted sources. The AEC work with the Privacy Commissioner to ensure that best practice is followed in relation to privacy and security. The electoral roll is publicly available in local offices. Australia has a “silent voter” system whereby information is suppressed for vulnerable or sensitive members of the electorate, and the AEC do not share data with other agencies. The discussion touched on: The increase in security concerns and whether, in response to this, the AEC would move away from signature on glass to fingerprint recognition. The AEC advised they were looking for opportunities to improve biometric data and mitigate risks around security. Registration addresses, as the AEC confirmed that in the Australian system only one address can be registered. For those with multiple homes, they have to choose their primary address. Queueing at polling stations is a key issues raised by the Australian electorate and the AEC are delivering a project, including development of an app, to help manage queueing. It was confirmed that the AEC has always been responsible for federal elections. Presentation from Peter Wildman – Scottish Assessors Organisation PeW is the ERO and assessor for Central Scotland. The Scottish Assessors Organisation (SAO) is an independent body answerable to Councils and the Scottish Parliament. There are 15 EROs for Scotland. All 15 EROs are members of the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA) and members of the Electoral Administration Committee (SAA ERC). Discussion focused on: The use of paper-based system and move towards online registration and the importance of education records due to the lower voter age (16) in Scotland. Risks around a single register, such as data reliability, consistency and cyber-crime. Resource pressures on local

authorities, across the UK, as experienced EROs and ROs retired. In Scotland, training and support opportunities are identified for EROs and ROs to share knowledge and experience. Informal Board discussion AI reflected on the current landscape, and identified key features of how electoral registration works within the UK and highlighted key points from the presentations: online registration has opened up access; levels of registration correlate with electoral events – higher registration rates occur around national elections. Levels of accuracy have increased since transition towards online registration, and commented that further modernisation is required to support many wider reforms to the electoral system. Currently the policy and legislative responsibility for electoral registration rests with the UK Government, with registration for local elections being the responsibility of the Welsh and Scottish governments. Opportunities for change in the UK context are limited due to lack of parliamentary time and lack of appetite for long-term reform so it is likely that success will be achieved through secondary legislation. The canvass pilots test changes to existing canvass requirements focusing on household notification letters, e-mail, phone and data. Initial findings from the pilots suggest that while most changes trialed are less expensive, they are also less effective than the current canvass. Questions focused on what improvements could be made to the accuracy of data, and TH commented that recommendations that the electoral registers be joined up with other services and EROs would improve the position. We are reviewing the existing public data infrastructure that could be used and to understand how the flow of data works, whilst maintaining the balance of privacy with transparency. Commissioners noted it was important to be futureproof in our approach and identify emerging issues. CB commented on the need to be realistic about what we can achieve alone with online registration. She noted that other Electoral Commissions who have successfully moved to online registration rely on the support from government agencies. It is important that we bear in mind the risks posed by moving online, and keep our thinking proportionate to those. To start with, we should focus on short-term gains like improving accessibility for overseas voters. It was agreed that the Welsh roll out of a national register in 2019 will be a useful case study that will provide lessons for the rest of the UK, even though the scale will be different between Wales and the UK.