The Association of Electoral Administrators

Post-election review of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' Electoral Services – May 2023

Report compiled by:

Peter Stanyon   Chief Executive
Claire Wardle   Member Support and Training Officer

14 June 2023

1 Introduction

1.1 On 2 May 2023, the Chief Executive of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, Arthur Charvonia, approached the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) to commission a post-election review of the delivery of Electoral Services. He is the councils' Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Returning Officer (RO).

1.2 Mr Charvonia and the AEA's Chief Executive, Peter Stanyon, discussed the outline requirements on 3 May, following which the scope of the review was drafted. It was subsequently endorsed by Heather Bush, Regional Manager (Eastern Region) of the Electoral Commission (EC).

2 Scope of the review

2.1 The agreed scope was:

2.1.1 To investigate the circumstances surrounding the issues faced with the receipt and processing of nomination papers at the district, parish and town council elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

2.1.2 To evaluate the robustness of the delivery of Electoral Services in the two district councils, particularly in respect of the skills and knowledge of the core Electoral Services team and the support it receives corporately.

2.2 It was further agreed the following specific issues were to be considered:

2.2.1 The administration of the nominations processes at the district, parish and town council elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

2.2.2 The ERO and RO's and core Electoral Services team's awareness and understanding of existing legislation and guidance, and the challenges to be faced in the immediate future (Elections Act 2022, UK parliamentary general election, UK parliamentary constituency boundary changes, etc.).

2.2.3 The core competencies of the Electoral Services team, particularly in respect of their skills and knowledge.

2.2.4   The corporate structures and processes in place to support the delivery of excellent Electoral Services, particularly in specialist areas such as IT, communications, and HR.

3   Review methodology

3.1   The review was led by Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive of the AEA. He has over 35 years' experience of delivering elections. He was supported by the Association's Member Support and Training Officer, Claire Wardle. She has around 25 years' experience.

3.2   It was agreed the review would be completed by the end of May 2023.

3.3   We reviewed the following documentation:

3.3.1   Our pre-review questionnaire, which was completed by Edward McCreadie, the Corporate Manager – Electoral Servicers and Land Charges, on 12 May 2023.

3.3.2   The project plan and risk register for the 4 May 2023 district, parish, and town council elections.

3.3.3   The extended leadership team structure of the councils.

3.4   We interviewed 17 individuals recommended to us by the Chief Executive, including two election agents. Their names are listed at Appendix A.

3.5   We would like to place on record our thanks for the cooperative way all interviewees approached the review. All questions were answered openly and candidly, which greatly assisted our independent analysis.

4   Identified themes

4.1   We identified several common themes throughout the review and have therefore structured this report to address each. They are:

4.1.1   Nominations and notices
4.1.2   IT
4.1.3   Communication with candidates and agents
4.1.4   Corporate support
4.1.5   Project planning
4.1.6   Team development
4.1.7   Ongoing corporate learning
4.1.8   Other issues

4.2   We have avoided making specific recommendations in each area but have rather highlighted key issues and offered potential options for consideration.

5   Nominations and notices

5.1   Several issues were experienced in the administration of the nominations process.

5.2   Babergh has 24 district wards and 67 parishes, Mid Suffolk 26 district wards and 103 parishes. Of those, all district wards were contested as were nine of the parishes in Babergh and six in Mid Suffolk.

5.3   To assist with the administration of the process, the Notices of Election for the parishes were published on Thursday 16 March 2023, seven working days ahead of the latest statutory time for doing so. We consider this to have been a sensible decision.

5.4   The receipt of parish nominations commenced on Friday 17 March 2023. Candidates were able to submit their nominations to six locations across the districts at times specified by the RO. An online booking system was made available to candidates with RO staff attending and processing nominations onto the Electoral Management System (EMS). We consider these to be sensible arrangements, although we have reservations as to how they worked in practice.

5.5   The Notices of Election for the district elections were published on Thursday 23 March 2023, two working days ahead of the latest statutory time for doing so. The nominations process for the districts was administered entirely at Endeavour House, Ipswich.

5.6   Significant numbers of nominations were processed over the 13 working days for the parishes and eight working days for the districts (191 district nominations and over 1,340 parish).

5.7   We were made aware of several errors in the processing of nominations and the subsequent production and publication of the Statements of Persons Nominated, and in one case, the ballot papers. The errors included incorrect inputting of data, missing candidate details, incorrect candidate descriptions, errors in the inputting of relevant areas where candidates suppressed their home addresses, candidate details being transposed between district and parish notices, and incorrect voting instructions.

5.8   There was no single reason for the errors that occurred. Several factors were involved, including human error, lack of familiarity with legislation and software, and IT issues. We therefore suggest the following issues should be considered:

5.8.1   In-depth training of the staff appointed by the RO to input nominations into the EMS. It is essential they fully understand how the EMS input process works, how the data entry screens are arranged, and the precise data that needs to be entered. It is also essential those staff are aware of when the data must be saved.

5.8.2   To help ensure information is entered completely and accurately, checklists should be provided and used when inputting all nominations into the EMS system.

5.8.3   Every nomination should be physically date and time stamped on receipt so that evidence is available should it be required (as was the case in one incident at this election). Too much reliance was given to the EMS recording that information.

5.8.4   It was reported the EMS processing time was slow and contributed towards some of the inputting errors that transpired. This issue should be taken up with the EMS supplier to seek a solution, with the technical support of the Corporate IT team.

5.8.5   Data inputting should be checked for accuracy on an ongoing daily basis. This will help with identifying common errors or issues of concern, and with the timely production of the various notices required following the close of nominations.

5.8.6   In all instances, data should be checked by reference to the source documentation, for example the physical nomination paper. Ideally, it should be done by individuals not involved in the inputting process, by reference to checklists developed for the specific tasks, for example the checking of ballot papers should include specifically checking the number of candidates for whom electors may vote.

5.8.7   The system for the filing of the physical nomination papers must be organised, clear and simple. It is essential the papers can be found easily so that the checking and validation processes can proceed efficiently. Consideration could be given to sub-dividing the filing system into the two

sovereign district areas, sub-dividing again into parishes within those areas, and then delegating responsibility for the four areas to individual officers.

6   IT

6.1   The councils have contracted Democracy Counts to provide the EMS used for the delivery of Electoral Services. These were the first all-out district and parish elections held using the system. It was successfully used at the combined Suffolk County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in 2021.

6.2   It is clear there were issues with aspects of the software, which contributed to the challenges faced with the processing of nominations and production of subsequent notices. Ghosting of data was experienced, as was the ability to save invalid nominations (introducing confusion) and the incorrect formatting of exports.

6.3   Democracy Counts has identified a bug in the system, which may have been unique to Babergh and Mid Suffolk. We were advised steps are in hand for it to be corrected.

6.4   A lack of confidence in the system was expressed by several interviewees, but it is also clear the EMS cannot be held responsible for every issue that transpired.

6.5   We make the following suggestions:

6.5.1   With the support of the corporate IT team, discussions should be had with Democracy Counts in respect of the individual issues faced at these elections. It is essential the users of the system have confidence in its operation.

6.5.2   Every user of the system should receive the necessary training in its operation in respect of their areas of responsibility. We formed the view that some of the issues experienced may have been because of lack of understanding of the processes to be followed within the system.

6.5.3   At future elections, the system should be set up and tested much earlier than was the case on this occasion. We recognise there may have been issues preventing an earlier set up at these elections, but that contributed to the challenges faced. The corporate IT team should be fully involved in assisting where necessary.

6.5.4   The method for the reporting and escalation of issues, primarily to Democracy Counts, should be reviewed by the Electoral Services and corporate IT teams to improve effectiveness and resolution time.

6.5.5   There is an opportunity at the casual vacancy elections in June to set up the election and use the system in less pressurised and overwhelming circumstances. This could enable procedures to be learned and recorded more effectively. Any issues can be reported and resolved with the software company to the benefit of future elections.

7   Communication with candidates and agents

7.1   There was no communications plan in place for this set of elections. The EC emphasise it is part of the RO's role to ensure that everyone who wants to participate in elections (including electors and candidates) can access clear information to enable them to do so. Early engagement with candidates and agents is recommended.

7.2   There were two briefings for candidates and agents – one before and one after the close of nominations. We consider this sensible. However, we were informed by an agent that the meetings were quite brief and given at short notice, so not everyone who would have benefited was able to attend. It was felt there was insufficient information provided about the parish council election process.

7.3   Candidates and agents were not given direct contact details for the Electoral Services Manager (ESM) or core team. They were required to use a generic switchboard number. We were told it was difficult to get through to members of the core team. Those who were existing councillors had the ESM's contact details, and responses to phone calls were considered helpful. However, there was a slow response to emails sent to the team.

7.4   Because of the large number of nominations being processed, appointments taking longer than expected, and the emerging issues, the nomination process did not appear to be under control. One agent told us he had raised concerns about insufficient staff dealing with the nominations.

7.5   When issues were found with some Statements of Persons Nominated, not all the agents were informed. If information was given in a more proactive and transparent way, this could have helped reassure candidates and agents issues were being worked out and that subsequent election materials would be accurate.

7.6 Although no issues were reported in respect of the count process, there were gaps in the information provided at the verification and counting of the votes. For example, verification statements were not made available for inspection as they should be and have been in the past. Candidates and agents also found it difficult to ask questions, as it was not clear who to ask apart from the ESM or RO, who were actively engaged in the count.

7.7 Concerns have been raised about the Declarations of Result, which show very large numbers of ballot papers "rejected in part". We understand these are in fact unused votes, not rejected votes.

7.8 Some voters do not use all the votes they are entitled to use. Unused votes should not be categorised as rejected but should still be recorded at the count to provide a clear audit trail and help reconcile the verification and count figures.

7.9 The fact the unused votes have been incorrectly categorised has no bearing on the accuracy of the result. However, we understand some people may have been confused by the way the results have been presented, introducing doubt as to their accuracy.

7.10 We therefore recommend the following issues should be considered:

7.10.1 The development of a communications plan for future elections, detailing how candidates and agents will be given information before, during and after elections. This should be part of a wider public awareness plan to encourage participation.

7.10.2 Identifying methods of communication to reach and inform as many candidates as possible, bearing in mind the geographical area of the two districts.

7.10.3 A strategy for communicating clear information in the event of issues or errors, aiming to be proactive and transparent, and setting the narrative, should be developed.

7.10.4 Identifying staff during the election process, and at the count, as points of contact for candidates and agents. Clear lines and examples of answers for common questions should be provided.

7.10.5 The Declarations of Result for the contested parishes should be re-published so that unused votes are not incorrectly classified as "rejected in part", but as unused votes.

8   Corporate support

8.1   The Electoral Services team sits within the Law and Governance directorate, with the Director having line management responsibility for the ESM. The ESM is a Corporate Manager, and also manages Local Land Charges. Both the Director and the ESM are designated Deputy ROs with full powers at elections. The Deputy Chief Executive is also a Deputy RO with full powers.

8.2   There is a good history of corporate support for elections, with services across the councils being identified as having relevant skills and resources to assist. These include staff in Democratic Services, Land Charges, corporate IT, Communications and Customer Services. It is important that the experience within the councils is tapped into and built on at future elections.

8.3   There is a continued corporate willingness to support the delivery of elections. When the problems with the nomination process were identified, there was a clear, evident and swift mobilisation of resources to assist. The RO and DROs took a hands-on approach to resolving issues, and twice daily meetings took place in the last four weeks of the election timetable.

8.4   We received differing recollections as to the availability of additional support prior to then, and the readiness of colleagues to assist.

8.5   We believe the ESM could have been clearer as to what support the team needed whereas the project team could have been more challenging in its oversight of the delivery of the project. That in turn would likely have led to an escalation of the potential requirements to the senior leadership team, from where appropriate support could be channelled.

8.6   In short, greater understanding of the level and types of support that could have been requested and could then have been granted was not communicated as effectively as it might have been.

8.7   While acknowledging that all-out district and parish elections are the most technically difficult to administer, there will be other issues and challenges in future.

8.8   The assistance from a previous member of the Electoral Services team was extremely valuable. Her local knowledge, for example around the structure of the register and the arrangements for the count, was particularly useful. Such knowledge needs to be absorbed and built on by the existing team.

8.9   We therefore recommend the following issues should be considered:

    8.9.1   A thorough review of the challenges faced by the Electoral Services team in the delivery of these elections, identifying what resources and support will be required to mitigate risk in future.

    8.9.2   Recognition of the forthcoming challenges in implementing Phase 2 of the Elections Act 2022 measures, implementing parliamentary boundary changes, preparing for the UK parliamentary general election (at potentially 25 working days' notice), and preparing for the scheduled PCC polls in 2024 and Suffolk County Council polls in 2025.

    8.9.3   Questioning which aspects of the election process could be delivered by staff other than the core Electoral Services team. For example, recruitment of polling station staff, handling elector enquiries, proof-checking election materials, preparing ballot boxes and stationery, etc.

    8.9.4   Recognising that elections are much bigger than the business-as-usual processes of the Electoral Services team, and engendering a "one council" approach to their delivery and success within the extended leadership team.

    8.9.5   Recognising that examples of positive support and collaboration exist and building on existing experience and expertise at future elections.

9   Project planning

9.1   As with previous elections, there was a project team with representatives from Communications, Customer Services, ICT, as well as the RO and his Deputies.

9.2   There was a high-level project plan, based on the EC's template. This plan was monitored at project board meetings.

9.3   With hindsight, it is apparent that members of the project team felt there was insufficient check and challenge of the delivery of the plan. They were assured that things were going to plan and took that at face value.

9.4   The project plan contains broad deliverables, but without supporting detail of how long certain elements take or the interdependency of different tasks.

9.5   There was no detailed operational plan underneath the high-level plan. This meant there was a reliance on the ESM's experience and knowledge of how to do things, making it difficult for others to lead on tasks.

9.6   There is no electoral registration plan, which is one of the performance standards inputs expected by the EC. Such a plan should be in place for delivering the statutory annual canvass for the register of electors. Registration activity should also be undertaken throughout the year to maintain the register and to try to avoid peaks in applications before an election.

9.7   We therefore recommend the following issues should be considered:

9.7.1   Encouraging and valuing the input of the core Electoral Services team and supporting services in the development of election and registration plans.

9.7.2   To support the high-level project plan, and with the input of the core Electoral Services team and other supporting services, a more detailed delivery plan for future elections should be drafted that identifies key tasks at a more granular level.

9.7.3   Ensure project team meetings continue to take place well in advance of scheduled elections, recognising that planning starts with the review of the previous election, and that they provide an opportunity to check and monitor progress effectively.

9.7.4   Consider having the oversight of the project plan managed by someone other than the ESM.

9.7.5   The development of operational plans, process notes and checklists for all aspects of the delivery of an election, including (but not limited to):

- Setting up an election in the EMS
- Booking and equipping polling stations
- Recruiting and training staff
- Processing nominations
- Producing notices and election materials
- Operation of postal vote opening
- Ballot box preparation
- Management of the count

9.7.6   Development of an electoral registration plan covering the timescales, tasks and deliverables for the annual canvass as well as plans for identifying new potential electors and maintaining the register throughout the year.

9.7.7   Seeking out good practice from other authorities.

10   Team Development

10.1   The Electoral Services team comprises the ESM and two full time and two part time Administrative and Technical Support Officers. It is a flat structure, with no Deputy ESM or other senior/supervisory staff in the team. The lack of a Deputy ESM is considered a weakness.

10.2   It is a new team. We must note three members of the core team left in quick succession in 2021/2022, as did an experienced and highly knowledgeable Director. This led to an unsettled experience.

10.3   It is clear there are many strengths and an enthusiasm to deliver quality services, but it is also clear the technical knowledge necessary to administer quality electoral services requires development. That will take time.

10.4   There is however no development plan for the team. All have completed the AEA Foundation Course in Electoral Services, but there is no current programme for further development or training.

10.5   We are conscious the issues that arose at these elections have left the team feeling insecure and anxious. Strong leadership will be required to help rebuild confidence and ensure preparedness for the delivery of future elections.

10.6   We therefore recommend the following issues should be considered:

10.6.1   Engendering a collaborative and team spirit culture, undertaking work to build the core team, developing the individual and collective strengths that are apparent and addressing those areas where issues prevent optimum team working.

10.6.2   Seeking out development opportunities to build the core technical skills, including attending elections training courses, software training, shadowing other electoral services teams, etc.

10.6.3   Involving the team in the development of operational plans and process notes (see also the project planning section).

10.6.4 Having regular opportunities to share knowledge, new processes and guidance at team meetings, etc.

10.6.5 Encouraging individual team members to visit other local authorities to help understand how best to develop processes that will be of benefit to the electors of Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

10.6.6 Benchmarking with other local authorities to test if the structure remains appropriate, and to build on good practice already developed elsewhere.

11 Ongoing corporate learning

11.1 The delivery of electoral services has experienced significant and ongoing change over the last 20 years. That has introduced challenges for all local authorities. Electoral services teams are no longer able to deliver elections independently – a corporate approach is both recommended and required.

11.2 It was clear the introduction of voter ID was managed well in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, albeit we believe focus on its safe delivery may have contributed to the issues experienced in these elections. Some of the core elements of election delivery, including team development, appear to have suffered.

11.3 It was also clear there is very little awareness corporately of the challenges to come over the next few years.

11.4 We therefore recommend the following for consideration:

11.4.1 A corporate project team be established to consider:

- The impact the phase one Elections Act 2022 measures (voter ID and accessibility) will have on future elections and referendums.

- The impact the phase two measures (including online absent voting, the handling of postal ballot papers, EU citizens candidacy and voting rights and the changes to the overseas electors' franchise) are likely to have.

- Early planning for the PCC (due May 2024), the UK Parliamentary general election (due before the end of January 2025), and Suffolk County Council elections (due May 2025).

- The impact of the changes to the parliamentary constituency boundaries that will be reported to Parliament by 1 July 2023.

11.4.2 As a minimum, the ERO/RO, ESM and core Electoral Services team be encouraged to attend training and development on the Elections Act changes as they arise, and to share that knowledge with the extended leadership team and elected members of both councils.

12 Other issues

12.1 One other issue that became apparent was pressure on physical office and preparation space. The delivery of elections is a large exercise, with significant amounts of paper and equipment involved.

12.2 We appreciate the reasons why the footprint available is limited, but we also consider the lack of space a significant risk in the delivery of technically challenging elections such as those in 2023, but also those such as the forthcoming UK parliamentary general election that will generate higher levels of public interest.

12.2.1 We consider careful consideration should be given to attempting to resolve or mitigate the space challenge ahead of the PCC elections in May 2024.

13   Summary

13.1   It is clear significant challenges were faced by Babergh and Mid Suffolk in the delivery of the elections on 4 May 2023. Mistakes were made, but it is apparent they were resolved as efficiently and effectively as was possible in the circumstances. It is also fair to say there were many mitigating issues that are unlikely to arise again.

13.2   We are content that despite the challenges, safe and secure elections were delivered. This was largely due to the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication shown by all those involved.

13.3   We have recommended several matters for consideration by the ERO/RO and the wider team. Although set out in the commentary, for ease of reference, they are summarised at Appendix B.

13.4   We are satisfied there are no inherent failings in the delivery of elections in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. There are clearly areas that require improvement, but we have not identified any need for an entire re-design of the service.

Peter Stanyon   **Claire Wardle**
Chief Executive   Member Support and Training Officer

🌐 www.aea-elections.co.uk   ✉ member.support@aea-elections.co.uk

Interviewees

Edward McCreadie	Corporate Manager – Electoral Services and Land Charges
Joshua Edwards	Administrative and Technical Support Officer
Katie Edwards	Administrative and Technical Support Officer
Sally Jepson	Administrative and Technical Support Officer
Michelle Hart	Administrative and Technical Support Officer
Donna Bridges	Electoral Services Team Member (Retired)
Janice Robinson	Corporate Manager –Governance and Civic Office
Patrick Richardson-Todd	Governance Support Officer
Kathy Nixon	Deputy Chief Executive
Sara Wilcock	Director – Customers, Digital Transformation and Improvement
Brad Jones	Corporate Manager – Communications and Engagement
Matthew Harding	Corporate Manager – ICT and Programme Management
Samantha Lake	Corporate Manager – Customer Operations
Philip Faircloth-Mutton	Councillor and Election Agent (Conservative Party)
Ifty Ali	Director – Law and Governance (Interim)
Nicholas Hardingham	Councillor and Election Agent (Green Party)
Arthur Charvonia	Chief Executive and Electoral Registration and Returning Officer

Summary of suggested improvements

Nominations and notices

1   In-depth training of the staff appointed by the RO to input nominations into the EMS should be undertaken.

2   Checklists should be provided and used when inputting all nominations into the EMS system, to help ensure information is entered completely and accurately.

3   Every nomination should be physically date and time stamped on receipt so that evidence is available should it be required.

4   The issue of EMS processing time being reported as slow should be taken up with the EMS supplier to seek a solution, with the technical support of the Corporate IT team.

5   Data inputting should be checked for accuracy on an ongoing daily basis.

6   In all instances, data should be checked by reference to the source documentation. Ideally, it should be done by individuals not involved in the inputting process, by reference to checklists developed for the specific tasks.

7   The system for the filing of the physical nomination papers must be organised, clear and simple.

IT

8   With the support of the corporate IT team, discussions should be had with Democracy Counts in respect of the individual issues faced at these elections.

9   Every user of the system should receive the necessary training in its operation in respect of their areas of responsibility.

10   At future elections, the system should be set up and tested much earlier than was the case on this occasion. The corporate IT team should be fully involved in assisting where necessary.

11   The method for the reporting and escalation of issues, primarily to Democracy Counts, should be reviewed by the Electoral Services and corporate IT teams to improve effectiveness and resolution time.

12   There is an opportunity at the casual vacancy elections in June to set up the election and use the system in less pressurised and overwhelming circumstances.

Communication with candidates and agents

13   A communications plan should be developed for future elections, detailing how candidates and agents will be given information before, during and after elections. This should be part of a wider public awareness plan to encourage participation.

14   Methods of communication should be developed to reach and inform as many candidates as possible, bearing in mind the geographical area of the two districts.

15   A strategy for communicating clear information in the event of issues or errors should be developed.

16   Clear points of contact for candidates and agents should be identified, with clear lines and examples of answers for common questions provided to them.

17   The declarations of result for the contested parishes should be republished so that unused votes are not classified as "rejected in part", but as unused votes.

Corporate support

18   A thorough review of the challenges faced by the Electoral Services team in the delivery of these elections, identifying what resources and support will be required to mitigate risk in future, should be undertaken.

19   The extended leadership team needs to recognise the forthcoming challenges in implementing Phase 2 of the Elections Act 2022 measures, implementing parliamentary boundary changes, preparing for the UK Parliamentary general election and the scheduled PCC polls in 2024 and Suffolk County Council polls in 2025.

20   Questioning which aspects of the election process could be delivered by staff other than the core Electoral Services team.

21   Engendering a "one council" approach to the delivery of elections within the extended leadership team.

22   Recognising that examples of positive support and collaboration exist and building on existing experience and expertise at future elections.

Project planning

23 Encouraging and valuing the input of the core Electoral Services team and supporting services in the development of election and registration plans.

24 A more detailed delivery plan for future elections should be drafted that identifies key tasks at a more granular level.

25 Ensure project team meetings continue to take place well in advance of scheduled elections, and that they provide an opportunity to check and monitor progress effectively.

26 Consider having the oversight of the project plan managed by someone other than the ESM.

27 Develop operational plans, process notes and checklists for all aspects of the delivery of an election.

28 Develop of an electoral registration plan covering the timescales, tasks and deliverables for the annual canvass as well as plans for identifying new potential electors and maintaining the register throughout the year.

29 Seek out good practice from other authorities.

Team development

30 Engender a collaborative and team spirit culture, undertaking work to build the core team, developing the individual and collective strengths that are apparent and addressing those areas where issues prevent optimum team working.

31 Seek out development opportunities, including elections training courses, software training, shadowing other ES teams, to build the core technical skills.

32 Involve the team in the development of operational plans and process notes.

33 Have regular opportunities to share knowledge, new processes and guidance at team meetings etc.

34 Encourage individual team members to visit other local authorities to help understand how best to develop processes that will be of benefit to the electors of Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

35   Benchmark with other local authorities to test if the structure remains appropriate, and to build on good practice already developed elsewhere.

Ongoing corporate learning

36   A corporate project team be established to consider the ongoing impact the phase one Elections Act 2022 measures, the impact the phase two measures are likely to have, undertake early planning for the PCC and UK Parliamentary general elections, and the impact of the changes to the parliamentary constituency boundaries.

37   The ERO/RO, ESM and core Electoral Services team should be encouraged to attend training and development on the Elections Act changes as they arise, and to share that knowledge with the extended leadership team and elected members of both councils.

Other issues

38   Careful consideration should be given to attempting to resolve or mitigate the space challenge ahead of the PCC elections in May 2024.

The Association of Electoral Administrators

Founded in 1987, the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom, working independently of government. Key objectives include fostering the advancement of consistent and efficient administration of electoral processes, raising the profile of electoral administrators and contributing positively to electoral reform.

With 2,000 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services, the AEA is uniquely placed to comment on the challenges faced by electoral administrators in delivering safe and secure electoral processes to UK citizens.