

**Executive Committee**  
**General Election 2015: lessons learned**

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**Purpose**

1. This paper presents the lessons learned by the General Election Planning Group (GEPG) in delivering services in respect of the 2015 General Election, and makes recommendations for the planning for the next General Election.

**Action for the Committee**

2. The Committee is asked to:
  - (1) Note GEPG's assessment of the delivery of election services and the interim survey results in Annex A.
  - (2) Agree the future recommendations set out in paragraphs 7–22.

**Consultation**

3. This paper has been developed in consultation with workstream leads as part of the lessons learned review and project closure.

**Equality analysis**

4. Activities of the General Election were subjected to an equality assessment.

**Overall assessment**

5. Whilst further research will be conducted to assess the positive impact of the House contribution to new Members' arrival and induction, initial research based on data from one in three new Members suggests a positive experience for most, with the initial welcome phone call and buddies rated as a very positive experience by over 90% of respondents. Other activities, including the New Members' Reception Area (NMRA), and induction events, were rated positively in the majority of cases. These results show a marked increase in satisfaction against figures held for previous Elections.
6. The successful delivery of the 2015 General Election activities highlighted the benefits of cross-departmental working and the positive impact of staff on Members—across a variety of media there were 82 public instances recorded of praise for House staff from new Members.
7. Some 57 lessons learned have been recorded by the project, with the key themes included below.

**Recommendations for the future****Progress from 2010**

8. The Administration Committee had made 26 recommendations after carrying out their enquiry of Members' experiences in 2010. The General Election Planning Group (GEPG) successfully incorporated every recommendation into the planning, in addition to all additional recommendations made by the Member representatives to GEPG. These recommendations will form a core part of future planning and be revised as appropriate.

**General Election planning**

9. We recommend that GEPG should continue to exist in semi-hibernating form, overseen by the Head of the Governance Office during this period and with membership kept up-to-date (changing as staff move jobs so that those responsible for relevant departmental functions are on GEPG). The Group should reawaken two years before the expected date of the Election to give strategic direction to departmental planning and to reopen discussions with the Parties and Member Committees, with an SRO appointed to oversee the project.
10. GEPG will require dedicated staff support throughout the period of election planning and delivery. This is likely to incorporate a part-time resource of an Election Project Manager up to a year before the expected Election, with a transition to full time after this period. An additional project resource focusing on communications aspects in the final year is also likely to be required.
11. We consider that a soft touch project methodology was sufficient and should be repeated in the future. The addition of a dedicated budget supported delivery and provided flexibility in responding to changes and we suggest this should be provided for the next election. We recommend that the costs for departments should maintain part of their departmental budgets.

**Involvement of the Party Whips and other Members**

12. An important factor in the success of the welcome and induction arrangements was the close engagement with the Whips, some key Members and Party officials responsible for post-Election planning, though this was not entirely easy to achieve. Members of the Administration Committee from each of the three main parties were nominated by that Committee to sit on the GEPG in the last year before the Election. Those same Members also talked to key Election delivery staff on other occasions giving a far greater customer and user focus than for previous Elections. Many aspects of the revised offering—notably in terms of hotel and travel arrangements, early contact over the weekend and the buddy system were forged in light of feedback from these Members, party officials and the Whips. Forming similar relationships for the next Election will be highly beneficial and indeed the House service will be looking to generate regular contact and feedback on its services given the new customer focus in the strategy. The Committee may like to consider where the key contacts for the Election Group should be, given the variety of relationships that already exist with Members.

**Supporting arrival**

13. Based on feedback received the support for Members from the moment of their Election through to the NMRA, was an important factor in their positive experience at the 2015 General Election. We recognise that this has an impact on financial and staffing requirements and conclude that the value delivered makes it a worthwhile exercise to repeat and continue strengthening.
14. The buddy system received a large amount of public praise from new Members, which was further supplemented by the feedback received. It allowed the opportunity for a number of staff across departments to work together in a Member-facing role and gain an increased understanding of departments' work. Moreover, the specific training the buddies received both in knowledge of the House services and in customer service was widely praised by participating staff, many of whom compared it favourably with our normal staff induction. We recommend that an equivalent system be offered in the future. The Committee may wish to consider how the system could be used in the intervening years as an opportunity for the development for staff.

**Induction and training**

15. Induction arrangements for Members were redesigned in light of the recommendations from 2010 and extensive discussions with key Members. An average of 90% attendance was recorded at the induction events in comparison to 25% in 2010. Induction events were pared down to 3 key events on a single day (from over 30 events in 2010), and then a small number of later events at appropriate intervals. Members still recorded concerns at the amount of information to take in although recognising the importance of the information received. As in 2015 we recommend the continued development of tools to support learning, such as apps and guides, with sufficient time allocated to develop these.

**Support for MPs Staff**

16. 2015 saw the introduction of a range of initiatives to support MPs' staff. These were in direct response to the findings of the interview project carried out by the House-wide interview team. In addition to the constituency roadshows, specific versions of the Dissolution Guidance and Handbook were created better to meet their needs. Work is underway to develop this work further coordination by GO, DIS and DHRC. We recommend that a specific MPs Staff workstream is incorporated in future planning as happened in 2015 but not previous elections.

**Communications**

17. The process of coordinating communications worked very well. It reduced the amount of information being distributed and managed the demand on print services. The work was recognised for its positive impact on ensuring that only relevant information was sent out. We recommend that the coordinating function be retained in the future.

**Supporting services**

18. Support from departments received a positive rating from Members, IT support in particular had a marked increase in satisfaction from 2010. Providing an introduction to the work of departments helped ensure greater visibility of key contacts which in turn helped Members requiring support in specific areas.

19. There was a growing demand for HR and administrative support from new Members. The relationship between IPSA and the House was essential in providing clear support, work should continue to provide clarity on the division of responsibilities. In line with previous decisions by the Administration Committee the provision of administrative support was felt to be outside the remit of the House. This finding will be presented to the Administration Committee.

### **Dissolution**

20. Dissolution guidance was provided through a number of mechanisms including printed guides, briefing sessions and online material. Recognising the needs of a number of diverse groups we recommend the continuation of systems put in place for 2015.
21. To reflect the areas of responsibilities of the House, a more focused guidance document is recommended for the future. Guidance provided for Members standing for Re-election would include advice from the House on areas such as HR, accommodation and access arrangements which are within its direct responsibility. On issues relating to incumbency advantage, such as the use of social media, we will provide appropriate signposting to relevant organisations such as the Electoral Commission.

### **Departing Members**

22. The support for departing Members was felt to be at an appropriate level. Continued work is suggested to consider what practical support is required such as IT and HR and ensure that sufficient time is allocated to develop the services.

### **Rehearsal**

23. The full scale rehearsal of arrangements was critical to the successful delivery of arrival and induction aspects. This session also provided the opportunity of inviting over 200 staff from government departments, to provide an independent perspective on arrangements from individuals, who weren't familiar with Parliament. In addition, it allowed us the opportunity to inform these staff of the work of the House, increasing their understanding. We suggest that a full scale rehearsal be held again with an invitation to external staff.

### **Financial and procurement implications**

24. Funding of specific posts will require funding from 2018, with the addition of around a £50,000.00 election budget in 2019–20 and 2020–21.

### **Risk implications**

25. There are no specific implications for this paper although a full risk register should be maintained ahead of the next Election.

### **Next Steps**

26. It is proposed that a summary lessons learned report be presented to the Administration Committee and its views invited to inform planning for future elections.

27. The Executive Committee may wish to ask GEPG for an update, perhaps early in 2017, on the plans being developed for the next Election in the light of the feedback received.

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