
MANAGEMENT BOARD

General Election 2010: lessons learned

Paper by the General Election Planning Group

Purpose

1. This paper presents the lessons learned by the General Election Planning Group in delivering services around the General Election 2010, and makes recommendations for the planning for the next General Election.

Actions for the Board

2. The Board is asked to:
 - (a) Note GEPG's assessment of the delivery of election services (paragraphs 4 to 6);
 - (b) Agree the proposals for the future of GEPG set out in paragraphs 7 to 9;
 - (c) Consider opening a debate amongst Members on the method of allocating Member accommodation (paragraph 10);
 - (d) Consider establishing a small senior management group to take a strategic overview of services to Members (paragraph 12);
 - (e) Consider appointing a senior manager to have responsibility for the overall co-ordination of training services to Members and their staff (paragraph 14).

Consultation

3. This paper is the product of discussion in the General Election Planning Group.

Overall assessment

4. Overall, GEPG considers that the delivery of election services by the House Service and PICT was a success. Feedback from the Members' Survey is broadly positive. This finding is reinforced by feedback from the Hansard Society Year in the Life survey: 90% satisfaction with the welcome and orientation, and 76% with IT and communications provision, for example. (Headline results from the Members' Survey and Hansard Society Survey are attached at Annex A.)
5. While these results are positive, there are a number of things we could do better next time, and a more stringent financial environment may require us to be more stringent in prioritisation. (Cost effectiveness may by then be more important than impressive quality of service.) It will also be important to ensure that our plans take account of Member feedback and evolve to keep abreast of the changing needs of Members.

Recommendations for the future

6. Taking into account the lessons learned from 2010, GEPG makes a number of recommendations for the future.

General Election planning

7. We recommend that GEPG should continue to exist in semi-hibernating form, chaired by the head of OCE and with membership kept up-to-date (changing as staff move jobs so that those responsible for relevant departmental functions are on GEPG). It needs to develop an “emergency election plan” for use in case of a snap election, meet roughly six-monthly to ensure that these plans are up-to-date and then to 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.
8. GEPG will require dedicated staff support throughout the period of election planning and delivery. If possible, two staff members with complementary skills for planning and delivery should be made available. Workload will vary, but there is likely to be a full time requirement in the six months prior to, and one month after, the election date.
9. We consider that the application of elements of project management discipline to GEPG’s task was valuable, though we see no need for it to be constituted as a formal project. We recommend that earlier attention be given to the risks to successful delivery. It may be that GEPG should be given control over a small budget for corporately-delivered events, though we believe it is simplest if the majority of Election costs continue to be borne on departmental budgets. Given the increasing constraints on departmental budgets, it may be necessary to allocate additional departmental funding for election delivery.

Accommodation

10. While we set, and put considerable effort and expense into achieving, the challenging target of getting Members into their permanent accommodation within five days of allocation by the Whips, this remained an area of relative dissatisfaction to Members. While there is some scope for more process improvements, it is hard to see how we can address this without a fundamental change in the way accommodation is allocated. We recommend that the Board consider, in the context of its broader accommodation policy, whether there is scope for opening this issue with Member Committees and the Whips – perhaps as part of the anticipated discussion of radical options for working differently.

Involvement of the Party Whips

11. An important factor in the success of the welcome and induction arrangements was the close engagement with the Whips and Party officials responsible for post-Election planning, though this was not entirely easy to achieve. A fixed election date may make it easier to engage the Parties, particularly the governing Party, next time round. An issue to watch is that key people may find themselves reshuffled to different positions immediately after the Election.

Business as Usual planning

12. We believe that GEPG has demonstrated the usefulness of a cross-departmental forum for senior managers responsible for operational delivery of services to Members. There is a case for a more consistent focus, outside the particular circumstances of general election, for providing greater assurance that services – which are increasingly mutually dependent (for example because they require online delivery, or technical support) – are being delivered effectively and efficiently and are anticipating and meeting Members’ needs. We are hesitant to recommend the creation of another group, but on balance believe that a smallish group of senior managers (below the Board), who get to know each other well enough to engage in mutual challenge, would be worth creating. Its focus would be on ensuring that our services meet, and anticipate, the changing needs of Members (a need identified by the Board last year in respect of the then Corporate Risk 9 - Failure to meet the current and future needs of Members through inadequate understanding of Members’ needs, inadequate marketing of services, or inadequate forward planning). It could probably exist with minimal formality but would need some secretariat support. If the Board is sympathetic to this idea in principle, it might wish to ask the Head of OCE to develop a detailed proposal setting out exactly what its role would be.

Training for Members and their staff

13. A disappointing element in our election delivery was the take-up of briefings and talks provided for new Members, despite close engagement with the whips on their development and indications that they would encourage attendance. On the other hand, we perceive that there is a greater willingness among Members (old and new) to contemplate training, and the take-up of induction training for Members’ staff has been excellent. The evidence from 2010 suggests that the frenetic early days of a Parliament are not the best time for training for Members other than the ‘must-haves’ (which were covered by the Chamber and initial party briefings and one or two of the other talks). Evidence, both from the survey of services and anecdotal, suggests we should offer a more extensive training programme to Members and their staff as part of ‘Business As Usual’ activity over a much longer period. This should probably be a mix of ‘formal’ sessions (which would benefit from party support to encourage attendance) and informal learning, which already happens – as new MPs start to take up services – but which could be better coordinated and advertised to them.

14. At present, responsibility for training for Members is dispersed between most of the departments of the House, and its partial overlap with training for House and Members’ staff means that its marketing and delivery are not as joined up as they could be. Steps are being taken to create a single online portal to Members’ training, which initially will cover the more formal events but could be developed to incorporate the more informal ‘BAU’ approaches that are likely to be more effective in many cases. This slow development would be helped if a senior manager were given responsibility for the overall co-ordination of training services to Members and their staff, even if their delivery remains the responsibility of different departments.

Next steps

15. 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. The results from the Members' Survey and Hansard Society Survey will also require further analysis.
16. The Management Board may wish to ask GEPG for an update, perhaps early in 2012, on the plans being developed for the next Election in the light of the feedback received.

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