

GENERAL SYNOD

THE WORK OF THE ELECTIONS REVIEW GROUP

REPORT BY THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

1. In January 2016, following the elections to the General Synod in 2015, the Clerk to the Synod wrote to all diocesan presiding officers (as well as all diocesan secretaries and diocesan registrars who had not acted as presiding officers for the elections) inviting their views on the election process. 13 presiding officers/dioceses replied to that letter.
2. Comments were also received from individuals who had otherwise been involved in the elections, as well as from members of the General Synod. In total, 23 submissions were received.
3. These submissions were considered in detail, over three meetings, by the Elections Review Group, which had been set up by the Business Committee following the 2015 elections. The Group comprised three members of the Business Committee:

Mr Clive Scowen (London) (Chair)
The Revd Canon Joyce Jones (Leeds)
Mrs Anne Foreman (Exeter),

and two members appointed by the Appointments Committee:

Mr Philip French (Rochester)
The Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord (Sheffield).

The Worcester Diocesan Secretary, Mr Robert Higham, was in attendance as an assessor.

4. The Business Committee endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Elections Review Group, which will be the subject of a presentation to the Synod at the July 2017 group of sessions.

On behalf of the Committee

SUE BOOYS
Chairman

May 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction of online elections

- i) The Electoral Reform Society systems, which are likely to have both cost and operational advantages to dioceses, be adopted in principle.**
- ii) The current membership of the Elections Review Group be invited to consider the options and issues relating to the implementation of online elections.**
- iii) Additional training would be required for online elections, and providing that on a regional basis was advisable.**

House of Laity electorate

A seminar-style presentation be made at a future group of sessions of the General Synod, to present fully the pros and cons of each of the systems considered on the last review in order to help all members to understand the issues fully. Support for each option would then be gauged via an advisory STV ballot to be held during that group of sessions. In the event of the advisory ballot indicating a desire for change it would be for the Archbishops' Council to bring forward appropriate rule changes, at which point consideration would need to be given to whether it was practicable for the new system to be in place for the 2020 elections.

Preparation and planning

The Legal Office bear in mind the desirability of giving early notice to dioceses if key changes were made to the election processes (for example, the amendments to the former Universities Constituencies).

Legal Office guidance

The guidance be updated to include a reminder that it is necessary to distinguish between the electorates for the diocesan and General Synod elections, for reasons of clarity.

Election timetable

The proposal to alter the current sequence of diocesan synod and General Synod elections ought not to be pursued further.

Presiding Officers

The election rules be amended to allow a bishop's council of a diocese to appoint either the diocesan registrar or the diocesan secretary to act as presiding officer, but that if the council wishes to appoint someone other than either of those two officers, that would require the consent of the joint provincial registrar.

Establishing the electorate

The Legal Office guidance concerning registers of convocation electors should be revised and clarified, and that the Legal Office write to dioceses in the year before an election encouraging them to start contacting their deanery synods with a view to emphasising the importance of producing accurate data in a timely way.

Nominations

An amendment be made to the Single Transferable Vote Regulations to permit the removal of the names of candidates from the ballot paper after the close of nominations in cases where a candidate had died, expressed a wish to withdraw, or was discovered to be ineligible to stand between the close of nominations and the circulation of voting papers.

Election addresses

The Legal Office guidance be updated to make clear that: diocesan resources should not be used for the purpose of supporting a candidate; a diocese must not say or do anything to imply that any particular candidate was being supported; and a candidate must not imply the support or endorsement of their diocese.

Hustings

No change is required in relation to hustings: dioceses should continue to be able to hold traditional hustings or online hustings, or none at all, at their discretion; and no attempt should be made to regulate ‘offensive’ words or materials in online hustings.

Voting papers

The Legal Office guidance be developed so as to refer expressly to the possibility of alphabetical bias in the listing of candidates.

eSTV software and the count

Detailed notes on various eSTV issues would be of assistance to presiding officers.

Notice of result

- i) The election rules be amended to require the result sheet etc. to be sent to candidates and others within one working day (rather than four) of the declaration of the result and to give that the elections scrutineer four days (rather than ten) to order a rerun of the count**
- ii) The Legal Office guidance be amended to make it clearer that there is no requirement for the Scrutineer to ‘approve’ results; rather the result is required to be sent to all of the candidates, the Scrutineer and the Clerk to the Synod simultaneously and the Scrutineer then has the opportunity to call for a rerun within the prescribed period if he believe there has been a material error.**
- iii) The word “recount” in CRR 39(11) be amended to read “rerun”.**
- iv) There ought to be some delay (perhaps of 24 hours) between candidates being notified of the result and its publication on a diocesan or the General Synod website.**

Elections from the General Synod to the Archbishops’ Council, its committees and Synodical bodies

The Standing Orders Committee be requested to bring proposals to amend Standing Orders to provide for such elections also to take place online.

Electors’ email addresses

The Steering Committee for the draft Church Representation, Ecumenical Relations and Ministers Measure be requested to consider amending the draft Church Representation Rules in the draft Measure to give express power to electoral roll officers, diocesan electoral registration officers and presiding officers to collect and make use of electors' email addresses in the same way as postal addresses.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Elections Review Group ('the Group') presents this report to the Business Committee. It addresses a number of issues which have arisen in connection with elections to the General Synod, and other aspects of Synodical government, since the elections to the Synod in 2015.
2. The Group was set up by the Business Committee following the 2015 elections to review the rules governing elections (with a primary focus on the 2015 elections) but set in the context of the Business Committee's overall responsibility for keeping the detailed aspects of Synodical government under review.
3. Its membership consisted of three members of the Business Committee (Mr Clive Scowen (London) (Chair), Mrs Anne Foreman (Exeter) and the Revd Canon Joyce Jones (Leeds)); two other members of the General Synod appointed by the Appointments Committee (the Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord (Sheffield) and Mr Philip French (Rochester)); and an assessor – Mr Robert Higham (Worcester Diocesan Secretary), also appointed by the Appointments Committee.
4. After the 2015 elections, diocesan presiding officers (as well as all diocesan secretaries and diocesan registrars who had not acted as presiding officers for the elections) were asked for their views on the election process. As part of its work, the Group also considered submissions from Synod members and others on elections-related matters more generally, including points concerning the Church Representation Rules ('CRR').

I. ISSUES RELATING TO ELECTIONS TO THE CONVOCATIONS/HOUSE OF LAITY OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

Introduction of online elections

5. Members agreed that as the Synod had voted in favour of introducing online elections by 2020, it was incumbent upon the Group to consider the implementation of such a system. The submissions received had been broadly supportive of this course of action. The Group received a presentation from the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) on the online elections systems which they offer and those were demonstrated to the Group's general satisfaction. However a number of detailed issues remain to be resolved. **The Group agreed to recommend to the Business Committee that (i) the ERS systems are likely to have both cost and operational advantages to dioceses and should be adopted in principle; and (ii) the current membership of the Elections Review Group be invited to consider the options and issues relating to the implementation of online elections. Details of some of the issues which will need to be considered are included in the Annex.**

House of Laity electorate

6. The Group recalled that the question of the House of Laity electorate had been reviewed in advance of the 2015 elections. Members recognised that there were a variety of views on how satisfactory the current situation was, and whether it ought to be replaced. No additional research or analysis of the matter was undertaken, but it was felt that the issue was one deserving of further consideration, particularly in view of what a number of Synod members consider to be the unsatisfactory way in which the matter was handled in the last quinquennium. **The Group agreed to recommend to the Business Committee that a seminar-style presentation be made at a future group of sessions of the General Synod, to present fully the pros and cons of each of the systems considered on the last review in order to help all members to understand the issues fully. Support for each option would then be gauged via an advisory STV ballot to be held during that group of sessions. In the event of the advisory ballot indicating a desire for change it would be for the Archbishops' Council to bring forward appropriate rule changes, at which point consideration would need to be given to whether it was practicable for the new system to be in place for the 2020 elections.**

Preparation and planning

7. A submission from the London Synodical Secretary requested that early notification of key changes (of the kind that had been made, for example, in the Universities and Theological Education Institutions constituency) be given to dioceses and those involved in running elections. The Group agreed that it would be beneficial to alert dioceses as early as possible to any proposed changes to the election rules in advance of the issuing of any guidance. Members recognised that this would be a necessity if, as requested by the Synod, very substantial changes were made to the rules in order to allow the entire process to be conducted online. **The Group therefore invited the Legal Office to bear in mind the desirability of giving early notice of the kind proposed.**

Legal Office Guidance

8. The Dioceses of Chichester and Derby suggested that, whilst the Legal Office's 'Notes for the Guidance of Dioceses' was helpful, it was hard to digest, and that a step-by-step checklist would be more beneficial. Additionally, the Diocese of Coventry had called for more *pro forma* letters and documents contained within the guidance booklet to ensure consistency across dioceses. The Group recognised that the guidance was reviewed before every quinquennial election and, again, would require very substantial revision if the electoral process were to be conducted online. Members did not consider it necessary or practical to provide additional templates or *pro forma* letters, as the guidance already provided forms for the key documents, and dioceses ought to be trusted to write letters that complied with the requirements of the rules without assistance from Church House.
9. The London Synodical Secretary suggested that it would be helpful if dioceses were given the opportunity to submit comments on the guidance after the briefing day, so that it could be updated in light of their views. The Legal Office had accepted this proposal, and accordingly proposed to adopt the practice next time.
10. The Diocese of Bath & Wells suggested that the advice relating to data protection was unclear, and recommended that a form of words be included in the guidance for use in the dioceses. The Legal Office agreed to revisit the nature of the advice given in the guidance, and the Group acknowledged that the issue might disappear if elections were conducted online in the future.

11. The Diocese of Canterbury queried why the Legal Office was not able to give formal legal advice to presiding officers. The Group accepted that there were difficulties with that from the point of view of professional rules. But in any event, if formal advice were required in the course of the election process, it was preferable (as with any other legal issue in a diocese) for it to be obtained locally. The Legal Office did give a great deal of informal advice to presiding officers, diocesan secretaries and registrars in any event, so the point was somewhat academic.
12. The Diocese of Chichester submitted that the guidance ought to make clear that the electorates for the diocesan and General Synod election were not always the same. While recognising that this was only likely to present a possible problem every 15 years when the two elections coincided, and that this ought to be clear, **the Group recommended that the guidance be updated to include a reminder that it was necessary to distinguish between the two electorates, for reasons of clarity.**
13. The Legal Office undertook to publish its guidance for the 2020 elections sufficiently in advance of the end of 2019 to allow all concerned to consider it and make suggestions for clarification/improvement in advance of the briefing day.

Election timetable

14. The Dioceses of Bath & Wells, Chichester, Salisbury and Winchester all made submissions relating to the 'clash' which occurred every 15 years when diocesan synod and General Synod elections occurred at the same time. None of those dioceses, however, had argued strongly for any change to the position. In practice, dioceses appeared to have coped well with the situation, and it was not clear that any significant difficulties had actually arisen. The Group recognised that any proposal to alter the current sequence would require very careful consideration, including extensive consultation with diocesan secretaries and presiding officers. **Members therefore agreed to recommend that the matter ought not to be pursued further.**

Presiding Officers

15. The Dioceses of Canterbury and Norwich made a number of points in their submissions relating to presiding officers. Both dioceses queried why the diocesan registrar was automatically the presiding officer in synodical elections, when the diocesan secretary was entirely able to fulfil the role. The Group recalled that in both proctorial and House of Laity elections, the Rules required that the diocesan registrar must either act as the presiding officer or be responsible for the appointment of another person to carry out that function in respect of each election. If another person were appointed, the approval of the joint provincial registrar responsible for elections in both provinces (i.e. the Head of the Legal Office) had to be obtained.
16. The Group was advised that there had been some discussion of this matter in previous quinquennia; in particular, following the 2005 election, it was suggested that changes to the way the election process was conducted meant that legal expertise was no longer essential and that the default requirement might be changed so as to make the diocesan secretary the default presiding officer. However, consultation at that time with the diocesan registrars and secretaries (through the Ecclesiastical Law Association and the Diocesan Secretaries Liaison Group respectively) suggested that no problems had been experienced in practice and that the system was seen as working well as it stood.
17. At that point, a broadly equal number of diocesan registrars and diocesan secretaries fulfilled the role of presiding officer. By the 2015 election, however, the position had changed: in only

13 out of 42 dioceses was it the diocesan registrar. In the remaining 29 dioceses, the role was undertaken in 21 by the diocesan secretary, in 3 by an assistant/joint diocesan secretary, in 1 by the head of central services, in 1 by the director of finance, in 1 by a former diocesan official, in 1 by an assistant synod secretary, and in 1 by a head of operations.

18. The process by which a person other than the diocesan registrar could be appointed to act as presiding officer was straightforward, and had evidently – based on the above data – been employed by a majority of dioceses. The Group acknowledged that to alter the present default arrangement could only be achieved by legislative means, and would require consultation with registrars and diocesan secretaries to obtain their views.
19. The Diocese of Norwich also submitted that if the diocesan registrar did act as presiding officer, the cost of doing so ought to be covered by the registrar's retainer. The Group was advised that as matters stood any work that the registrar undertook as presiding officer fell outside the scope of the retainer. Members agreed that this was correct, given the considerable amount of work that could be involved, including in relation to matters other than the giving of legal advice. If, however, the role were undertaken by the diocesan secretary or some other member of the diocesan staff, any legal advice required by him or her from the diocesan registrar would fall within the scope of the retainer.
20. Additionally, the Diocese of Canterbury suggested that the bishop's council of a diocese ought to be permitted to authorise a person other than the diocesan registrar to serve as presiding officer, without the need for the agreement of the joint provincial registrar. The Group was sympathetic to this view, but agreed that there was merit in maintaining the requirement to obtain the joint provincial registrar's consent if someone other than the diocesan registrar or diocesan secretary were to be appointed, as he or she would have a better understanding of what was required for the role to be performed well than the bishop's council was likely to have. **The Group therefore recommends that the election rules be amended to allow a bishop's council of a diocese to appoint either the diocesan registrar or the diocesan secretary to act as presiding officer, but that if the council wished to appoint someone other than either of those two officers, this would require the consent of the joint provincial registrar.**

Electorate

21. Several submissions (Bath & Wells, Chester, Coventry, Lichfield and Worcester) made reference to the difficulty in ensuring the accuracy of the data held in the registers of electors, particularly that in the register of lay electors. The Group considered that it was unclear to what extent improvements in the quality of such data might be effected by Legal Office guidance, given that the quality of the data relating to lay electors was in the hands of lay volunteers. As the Diocese of Chester suggested in its submission, improvements in the quality of that data might only be possible if the electorate were changed.
22. However, **the Group agreed that the Legal Office guidance concerning registers of convocation electors should be revised and clarified, and also agreed to the recommendation that the Legal Office write to dioceses in the year before an election encouraging them to start contacting their deanery synods with a view to emphasising the importance of producing accurate data in a timely way.**
23. A submission from the Diocese of Coventry relating to the possibility of correcting the register of electors after the close of nominations is addressed in connection with election appeals below.

Nominations

24. The Diocese of Lichfield commented that obtaining permissions for electronic nominations had taken a lot of time and effort. The Group acknowledged that this issue was likely to disappear if elections were conducted online in the future.
25. The Diocese of Norwich made a submission canvassing the possibility of being able to remove names of candidates from the ballot paper after the close of nominations – for example, if the candidate died, expressed a wish to withdraw, or was discovered ineligible to stand between the close of nominations and the circulation of voting papers. The Group agreed that this ought to be possible, and therefore **recommends an amendment be made to the Single Transferable Vote Regulations.**

Election addresses

26. Mr Carl Hughes (Southwark) submitted that election addresses ought only to be made available online. The Group acknowledged that this issue was likely to disappear if elections were conducted online in the future.
27. The London Synodical Secretary called for the ‘policing’ of the use of diocesan logos or anything else that might be seen as signifying diocesan approval of a candidate. The Diocese of Coventry had made a similar point, suggesting that more guidance was required on the need for dioceses to be, and be seen to be, neutral and the need to avoid diocesan resources being used in support of a candidate. **The Group agreed that no legislative change was required, and that the Legal Office guidance should be updated to make clear that: diocesan resources should not be used for the purpose of supporting a candidate; that a diocese must not say or do anything to imply that any particular candidate was being supported; and that a candidate must not imply the support or endorsement of their diocese.**

Hustings

28. Mr Carl Hughes (Southwark) suggested that traditional hustings ought to be abandoned in favour of online hustings. The Group considered it was not necessary to make any change to the *status quo*, as dioceses were best placed to decide whether to hold a hustings in a traditional form, and it was therefore preferable to leave the option open.
29. The Dioceses of Coventry and Oxford, and the Ven. Pete Spiers (Liverpool) all made submissions relating to online hustings, and what impact they had had. The Group decided that it would be advantageous to carry out a simple survey (as suggested by the Diocese of Coventry) to ascertain what form of hustings dioceses had held and whether this had resulted in higher voter turnout. A letter was accordingly sent to the diocesan presiding officers seeking that information. Of the 31 dioceses that responded, it appeared that 11 had held online hustings (either instead of ‘traditional’ hustings, or in addition). The Group concluded, from the data provided, that there was no correlation between online hustings and higher turnouts. The Group noted that a group comprising the lay chairs of diocesan synods was currently considering how best to identify and disseminate best practice in regard to hustings and would make a report to the Business Committee in due course.
30. The Diocese of Guildford suggested that the guidance on election addresses ought to be strengthened and applied also to material which formed part of online hustings. Its concern centred around what might be considered ‘offensive’ material. The Group considered that this would be impossible administratively, as deciding whether or not something was ‘offensive’ was too broad a test, and requiring presiding officers to censor online hustings material would be unsatisfactory. There was, already, a clear distinction between what was clearly defamatory or unlawful under the criminal law and what might be considered

offensive by some. **Members agreed to recommend that no legislative change was required in this regard.**

Voting papers

31. The Revd Brian Wood submitted that listing candidates in alphabetical order on the voting paper might disadvantage those candidates with a surname beginning with a letter later in the alphabet: he suggested that listing the candidates in a random order would be a way of preventing that possibility arising. The Group was advised that the presiding officer was already empowered to list the candidates in a random order, as long as this was “indisputably open and fair”. **The Group therefore agreed that no extra provision was required, but that the Legal Office guidance might be developed so as to refer expressly to this possibility.**

eSTV software and the count

32. The Diocese of Chichester proposed that guidance on the operation of eSTV ought to be distributed to presiding officers and dioceses as a matter of course, rather than only when requested, to save time and effort. It was reported to the Group that this was already the case.
33. The Diocese of Norwich had requested that a clearer printout (in Excel format) showing the outcome of the votes would be helpful. It was again reported to the Group that this was already possible.
34. The Diocese of Oxford suggested that the ‘random’ choice for tie-break situations seemed not to be random when tested. The Group was advised that the eSTV programme did make a genuinely random selection, but that this would not continue to be random if a recount was requested – the same “random” selection would be made on each subsequent occasion the original ballots were used in order to ensure that the same circumstances were applied each time.
35. The Diocese of Oxford also suggested that the principle/process of ‘guarding’ in casual vacancies might require reconsideration, as they felt that it had produced some apparently unusual results. The Group was advised that although the process occasionally produced results that appeared odd at first sight and could be hard to explain, it worked as designed and produced an outcome compliant with the STV Regulations.
36. **The Group agreed that detailed notes on these and other issues would be of assistance to presiding officers.**

Notice of result

37. The General Synod Elections Scrutineer made several comments in his submission. The first was that the time limits for the circulation of results had been set in the days before email, and were now overlong and unhelpful: he argued that the result sheet etc. should be sent to candidates and others within one working day (rather than four working days) of the declaration of the result and that the elections scrutineer should have four days (rather than ten days) to order a rerun of the count. **The Group accepted this point, and proposes that the election rules be amended accordingly.**
38. The Scrutineer’s second point was that his role regarding the results needed clarifying. The Group was advised that there was no requirement for the Scrutineer to ‘approve’ results; nor did the Legal Office guidance suggest such. The result was required to be sent to all of the candidates, the Scrutineer and the Clerk to the Synod simultaneously. The Scrutineer then had the opportunity to call for a recount within the period of ten days of the count if he

believed there had been a material error. **The Group agreed that the guidance ought to be amended to make the position in this respect clearer.**

39. The Scrutineer's third point was that the word "recount" in CRR 39(11) ought to be amended to read "rerun". **The Group agreed.**
40. The Diocese of Guildford proposed that the candidates ought to be informed of the result of the vote before anyone else, and that the guidance to presiding officers regarding the timing of the circulation of results needed clarifying. This seemed to arise from the fact that the results from the 2015 elections in some dioceses had been published on the Church of England website before they had been communicated to the candidates. **The Group considered that there ought to be some delay (perhaps of 24 hours) between candidates being notified of the result and its publication on a diocesan or the General Synod website.** Again, it was agreed that clarification of the guidance would assist in this regard.

Appeals

41. The Diocese of Coventry had submitted that the rules relating to appeals needed to be clearer. The Legal Office accepted that the current provisions were far from satisfactory, and was accordingly preparing entirely new provisions, with a view to their being introduced in amending legislation in the course of the 2015-20 quinquennium, so as to be in place in time for the 2020 elections. (The Group noted that, in the case of appeals relating to elections to the House of Laity, they would in future be contained in rules to be made under the new Church Representation Rules contained in the Church Representation, Ecumenical Relations and Ministers Measure that had received First Consideration at the February 2017 group of sessions.) As the provisions were of a technical character, and did not raise significant policy issues, the Group did not feel it necessary to concern itself with their content.

Miscellaneous comments and suggestions

42. Many of the matters raised in the submissions grouped under this heading related to electronic communication and procedures. These would be addressed in due course with the advent of online elections.

Online elections in practice

43. The same was true of the submissions made relating to online elections.
44. The Diocese of Derby submitted that there would be a greater need for training, including small group exercises and active training on PCs, in preparation for online elections. **The Group agreed that additional training would be required, and that providing this on a regional basis was advisable.**

II. OTHER ISSUES

Elections from the General Synod to the Archbishops' Council, its committees and Synodical bodies

45. Mr Carl Hughes (Southwark) proposed that all elections to Synodical offices and bodies ought to be conducted by electronic means to save time and money. **The Group recognised that any change in this regard would involve amending the Synod's Standing Orders, but was persuaded that such a course would be advisable, not least from the point of view of the considerable potential for cost savings. It therefore recommends that the**

Business Committee request the Standing Orders Committee to bring proposals formulating the necessary amendments.

46. The Ven. Nikki Groarke, Archdeacon of Dudley (Worcester) proposed that the period for elections to Synodical offices and bodies came too soon after the elections to the Synod, when new members were still unfamiliar with the Synod's processes and their fellow members. The Group was advised that the various election processes took time to operate, and thus an early start was necessary to ensure the Synod's business carried on from one quinquennium to another. Again, the Group recognised that any change in this regard would involve amending the Synod's Standing Orders, but was not convinced of the need for such alteration in this case.
47. The Revd Canon Dr Judith Maltby (Universities and Theological Education Institutions) believed that the inclusion in the Communications Office's Daily Digest of the blogs of those standing for office could lead to their being unfairly advantaged. However, this concern had been overtaken by events: the Communications Office had subsequently amended its policy, and blogs are no longer included in its daily digest of news.

Possible amendments to Church Representation Rules

48. Mr Robert Higham, the Group's Assessor, submitted during the course of the Group's meetings that the Rule ought to be amended to (a) impose the obligation relating to notifying the secretary of the diocesan synod of the number of names on the electoral roll of each parish on the secretary of the PCC, rather than the electoral roll officer; and (b) to require the electoral roll numbers to be reported to the diocesan secretary only in the year before deanery synod elections (i.e. once every three years), rather than annually, and twice in the year of General Synod election. The Group was advised that the Rules did not specify a date at which the number of names on rolls was to be counted, and hence the need for a second confirmation of numbers every five years could be avoided by an administrative change, rather than by legislative means, by the Clerk to the Synod simply asking in future for the number on rolls already required to be notified under Rule 4 or, if they cannot be obtained, the number most recently supplied. **The Group agreed that no legislative amendment was required in this regard.**
49. Staff also suggested that it might be necessary, with the imminent advent of online elections, to amend those Rules which dealt with the power of electoral roll officers, diocesan electoral registration officers and presiding officers to collect and make use of electors' email addresses: the Rules did not currently address this issue explicitly. **The Group agreed to recommend that consideration be given to amending the draft Church Representation Rules in the draft Church Representation, Ecumenical Relations and Ministers Measure to that end.**

Clive Scowen (Chair)
On behalf of the Elections Review Group

May 2017

BUSINESS COMMITTEE
ELECTIONS REVIEW GROUP

Online elections

1. At its meeting on 10 January this year, the Elections Review Group received a presentation from Mr Joe Wadsworth of Electoral Reform Services (the provider of the eSTV software used in elections).
2. The presentation was well-received, but subsequent discussion highlighted a number of issues which would need more detailed discussion before they could be resolved satisfactorily. These included:
 - (i) The provision of and arrangements for a paper-based system to run alongside the web-based system;
 - (ii) The point at which election addresses must be submitted (at the same time as a nomination is submitted, or at a later point, as currently);
 - (iii) The form of an election address ('forced' by the online system, or in the form of an uploaded document, similar to the current provision);
 - (iv) What information should be available to Presiding Officers during the ballot period;
 - (v) The number of 'variables' on each web platform (diocesan coat of arms, information, guidance, instructions etc);
 - (vi) The validation of electors and the issuing of secure logins.
3. The Elections Review Group has, in principle, agreed that online elections should be introduced and that, subject to tailoring to suit the specific requirements of elections to the General Synod, the platform provided by Electoral Reform Services should be recommended to the Business Committee.