



SOLGM ELECTORAL WORKING PARTY NEWSLETTER

December 2016

Congratulations to all Electoral Officers and their support staff for your contribution to the successful running of the local elections in 2016. Thank you too to all members of the Electoral Working Party and SOLGM staff for the work they have contributed to over the last three years to provide an excellent set of reference guidelines to help Electoral Officers with their various tasks.

The Democracy and Governance Support Working Party with an Electoral Subcommittee has now replaced the Electoral Working Party. The new structure SOLGM has put in place gives the D & G Working party a wider brief and retains a specialist subcommittee dedicated to electoral matters. Geoff Williams, Chief Executive of the Rotorua District Council will lead the new Working Party and Dean Heiford, Manager Economic, Community & Support Services, Marlborough District Council will be his deputy and will lead the Electoral Subcommittee.

Department of Internal Affairs Update

DIA have advised that the Omnibus Bill will come to the Democracy and Governance Support Electoral Subcommittee for consultation before it is introduced into the House about the middle of 2017.

A timeline for the 2019 local elections was agreed and will be added to the Code of Good Practice.

Local Government New Zealand Update

A post election survey has been conducted in tandem with Auckland Council and analysis has just commenced.

LGNZ and SOLGM have agreed to re-establish the 'Election Coordinating Committee' and this will meet early in 2017. The objective is to have better coordination, an earlier commencement of national promotion, to resolve contributions to national funding issues for inclusion in Long Term Plans, and to better value local democracy.

Electoral Commission Update

Some 3.15M enrolment packs were sent out in June to commence the 2016 enrolment campaign. This resulted in 132,447 updated details in the data base, 57,183 new enrolments, and, unfortunately, about 54,000 names removed to the dormant roll because they could not be located. Many people took advantage of the opportunity to check their details online and there were a number of inquiries and sharing of information via the 0800 number and Facebook. Over 14,000 special votes required checking and 95% of these were for late enrolments.

There are some issues that will ideally be sorted before the 2019 local elections and that includes the high number of election inquiries directed to the Commission that should have been dealt with by local authorities. Of the 36,000 calls in this category 8,000 were seeking results on election day, 1500 were seeking advice on how to vote and included one local authority directing inquiries for non-delivered voting papers to the Commission. The Electoral Subcommittee will address a 'one stop shop' approach for local elections early during the next triennium. A service to provide 'a good voting experience' needs to be introduced and paid for by local government.

The Electoral Commission will develop and distribute to all local authorities and Electoral Officers a detailed document about what services are provided by them including timelines. They will also review the STV process and submit to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee that they should be permitted to provide supplementary rolls to local government just as they do for national elections.

A commitment was given to the Commission that local government will continue to work with them to build relationships and ensure improvements for 2019.

Local Government Commission Update

The Local Government Commission new Chief Executive is Dr Suzanne Doig and Geoff Dangerfield has been added as a temporary Commissioner to assist with the Auckland representation review.

A review of the representation review guidelines will be completed and released early in 2017. The next round of reviews will start soon and 54 local authorities are involved this time and that will create quite a big work load for the Commission. There are also 37 issues of non-compliance with the plus or minus 10% rule.

One issue that has been highlighted in the 2016 reviews is that appointments to Community Boards must be included as part of the representation review.

Reorganisation issues in Wairarapa, Northland, Auckland, and the West Coast continue to be dealt with by the Commission.

Post Election Challenges

The EWP in a discussion led by Dale Ofoske identified a number of post election challenges to be dealt with during the next three years including: the delay in the process for the Justice and Electoral Select Committee process until towards the end on 2017 will mean changes to legislation will be unlikely to be achieved for the 2019 local elections; the LEA needs to be reviewed as, although it is fundamentally sound, there are issues such as transfer of documents by electronic means that need to be clarified; there is a need to get an online voting option back on the agenda including engagement with the Minister of Local Government and the Department of Internal Affairs, and obtaining a commitment from Councils including those who do not necessarily want to participate in any trial approved; developing strategies for postal voting in light of changes, including future changes, at NZ Post; developing a national communications strategy/policy (including funding/resourcing, branding. 0800 'one stop shop' for local election inquiries); improving the relationship and cooperation with the Electoral Commission; standardising guidelines and social media policy; standardising staff protocols policy; replacing 'old fashioned' requirements such as public notices in newspapers; addressing the last minutes trends for enrolments, nominations and voting; a 'duty of care' to look after candidates and to walk them through processes; a longer term plan on all local election matters, addressing the trend of declining voter turnout and participation in democratic matters; reviewing the election deposit (purpose, amount); possible appointments, or other solutions, where there are insufficient candidates or where elected members resign for any reason in the immediate post election period; developing guidelines for applications for recounts and inquiries; supporting better and more accurate media reporting; further education on STV; and, use of titles including Matai titles.

Online Voting

A proposal for LGNZ to further consider online voting progress has been agreed to by LGNZ and SOLGM Executives. This will include engagement with communities and winning their support and establishing funding initiatives across local governments for consideration.

Election Insurance for By-elections

An approach will be made to Jardine Lloyd Thompson for a proposal to consider purchasing by-election insurance.

Elections Debrief

There was a good number of electoral officers and support staff who participated in a debrief on the 2016 elections. Presentations on what happened during the 2016 elections, the SOLGM survey of Electoral Officers and our partners perspectives preceded interactive session on stories from the coalface, discussion groups on online voting, representation reviews, voter turnout and election communications, a 'blue skies' session and a presentation from Auckland Council on Kid's Voting Online. There was a lot of 'good stuff' identified and the not so good experiences were noted. Not surprisingly there were some issues mentioned in each category e.g. some noted good candidate behaviour, others not so good; some good senior management support and some not so good; some good media coverage and some not so good – and so on.

Our 'independent facilitator' Elizabeth Hughes elicited some great stories that either made one laugh or cry. Some examples of candidate photographs submitted were shown and obviously were not approved for use. A bomb scare at one authority was well managed.

Electoral Officers had some very real and sensible ideas during a 'blue skies' session that probed what we would do if we could start with a clean slate and develop the rules for elections ourselves. This session also produced some 'far out' ideas that would spark some vigorous discussion with our elected members and other officials. Examples of some suggestions include: a 4 year term; compulsory voting; reduce the age of voting entitlement to 15; maximum number of terms for elected members; compulsory training (paid for perhaps) for candidates at university level; civic education added to the education curriculum for all schools; local elections being run nationally by a single authority; fixed date for local elections outside school holiday times; permission for early voting; template for candidate profile statements; national regulations for election signs; separate DHB and LT elections; electronic 'the works', encouraging diversity especially with use of languages; making special voting easier; and more.

Early next week, notes from the Forum will be circulated by email to all those who registered for, or helped us deliver what was an extremely successful day.

Kid's Voting Online

Katherine Wilson presented on the wonderful online voting experience for school children participating in Kid's Voting in Auckland. 56 schools participated and the 11,730 students was a 41% increase from 2013. These are our citizens of the future and given their good voting experience many will vote when they get the opportunity at 18 and once they have done so once, evidence indicates they will continue to do so every three years. The exercise resulted in more information being taken into the home and that may have prompted Mums and Dads to vote too. These young 'voters' indicated that they would rather use their mobile

phone because it was quicker than waiting for a computer to wake up and be ready for use. That is a saving of about 10 seconds!

The Next Three Years

Raymond Horan summed up and gathered the main issues to be dealt with over the next three years:

- LGNZ and SOLGM need to work more closely together;
- Consistent, constant national communications (including education) are a must;
- Democracy is more than a vote every three years – we need to make democracy relevant;
- Voting is a customer experience – how can we make it easy for people to vote;
- Online voting is moving towards a 'must' – but who will pay?
- The Local Electoral Act needs modernising e.g. technology and diversity;
- Campaigning via social media is an issue that 'popped' in 2016;
- There are multiple interpretations in some areas (including multiple legal opinions) and they need clarification;
- Moving DHB elections or having a single common system needs to be considered;
- Preparations for the 2019 local elections needs to start now;
- The Justice and Electoral Select Committee inquiry into the 2016 elections has wider terms of reference to 'review the law and procedures relating to local elections' and has a longer time frame (to December 2017).;

I hope you have found the newsletters following EWP meeting useful throughout the last term. This concludes my involvement and contribution to local elections with the EWP – I will continue to watch and admire the good work of local electoral officials and SOLGM staff and in particular I will follow the transition to online voting in the near future. I will also continue to vote. Very best wishes to you all, enjoy the festive season and use the break to re-charge.

Kind regards

Darryl Griffin
Chairperson
SOLGM Electoral Working Party