**Summary of key contributions to the Elections Schema consultation**

**SECOND ROUND – AUGUST TO OCTOBER 2016**

*Tim Adams – LGA – 18-Oct-2016 (revised 3-Nov-2016) – red highlight records central team response and shows those comments that are carried through into a revised final version of the spec for initial adoption. Blue provides additional comment and advice from Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators.*

1. (from Halarose Ltd) The (one of 12) party description appears on the ballot paper and is proposed as required in data output. Would help if it persisted (perhaps with start and end dates) rather than being overwritten when changed (i.e. proper versioning). That would mean that there could be a max of 12 descriptions for each party with no end date. And do you agree that a URI for each party description would also aid? *Take advice from AEA and Electoral Commission. Proper versioning of party descriptions is desirable, but would take some effort by Electoral Commission. Electoral Commission responds: it would be happy to implement this if it was straightforward but because it would require some significant work it isn’t likely in the near future. In any case, is it really necessary? As long as it is clear what was used at the election in question. So if in 2019 you look up info on the 2017 elections and the link for the ‘Conservative and Unionist Party’ takes you to an up to date page for ‘The Conservative Party’ (because they’ve change their name back in the meantime) we are not sure you’ve lost much.*
2. (from Halarose Ltd) Like descriptions, each party has multiple emblems. We ideally need a proper one-to-many relationship between the party and the emblems, so perhaps the party emblem URL you refer to returns JSON containing all emblems including a URI for each and a URL to each jpeg/png? Also, perhaps versioning should be put in place for each. Raise possibility with the proposed Electoral Commission changes? *Take advice from AEA and Electoral Commission. Proper versioning of emblems is desirable, but would take some effort by Electoral Commission. See Electoral Commission’s response to 1 above.*
3. (from Wycombe DC) A csv expression of the data is not very user friendly for local residents. *This initiative seeks to develop a secondary stream of data in digital form, capable of driving presentational apps and wider analysis. However, it is intended that electoral registration officers also continue to publish data to local citizens in the form they already use.*
4. (from Wycombe, Breckland, S Holland DCs, AEA) This initiative is fully supported but will only succeed if the suppliers of Electoral Management Systems (EMS) are prepared to extend their systems to have a facility to export data into the appropriate form for hosting online and discovery by data and app consumers. *We are in discussion with four EMS suppliers and have consulted them throughout. Noted the need for a data export service within EMSs. Also some EROs must change work practices to load up election results into the EMS in a timely manner. In discussion with Electoral Commission on how soon that needs to be.*
5. (from Wycombe, Breckland, S Holland DCs) The published schema specification and publishing guidance material is rather long and detailed – making the burden look rather more complex than it really is. Would benefit from a short management summary and step by step guide. *Noted. At this stage the spec needs to be as comprehensive as possible to explain the vision. The documents follow the style set out by the LGA for other open data publishing specs. We will try to make the final outputs as clear and simple as possible.*
6. (from Wycombe DC) Concerns that not many councils know how to publish data into a central hub. *There is no need or intention to publish data to a central hub. Current best practice for local government open publishing is for local data stores (at a place of your choosing) but for consistent formats and registering availability in central inventories and data.gov.uk. see* [*http://opendata.esd.org.uk/*](http://opendata.esd.org.uk/) *and* [*http://about.esd.org.uk/news/data-publishing-and-data-standards-elearning-modules-local-government*](http://about.esd.org.uk/news/data-publishing-and-data-standards-elearning-modules-local-government)
7. (from Parliament Social & General Statistics Section, AEA) Focus is currently on defined first past the post elections. Remember the need to consider other elections after initial trials – viz Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly, Community Council Elections in Wales, London Assembly and Mayoral, Police and Crime Commissioner. *Noted. Currently outside the scope of this project but importance noted. We opted for the easiest elections first. If this is successful and gains support by publishers and consumers we will invest resources into an extension of capability.*
8. (from Parliament Social & General Statistics Section) It will also be useful to include “Parliamentary by-election” as a different entity from “Parliamentary general election”. *Noted and accepted.*
9. (from Parliament Social & General Statistics Section) Would it be possible to more explicitly clarify that Returning Officers should not include the rejected ballots in the calculation of VotesCast? The schema already defines VotesCast as “the total number of verified votes cast within the candidate’s electoral unit”, but it would be good if it explicitly said in the additional information that rejected ballots do not count towards this total. In our experience practice varies widely at the moment so it would be good to remove any ambiguity. *AEA and Electoral Commission advise: the VotesCast figure will be the numerator in any turnout calculation. Our approach is to include votes rejected at the count when calculating turnout and so this field should include the rejects (useful to also then have the separate field that tells you how many rejections there were). But it probably depends entirely on how you want to present turnout.*
10. (from Parliament Social & General Statistics Section) Would be good to have a variable for CandidateGender and CandidateAge. *Rejected. Electoral Administration Departments do not collect these data currently and we set out not to increase burden at this initial stage.*
11. (from Breckland and South Holland DCs) Not sure what the ServiceURI is all about. *Current best practice for local open data publishing is to encourage data linking with other data sets. Primary keys are needed (using URIs) to encourage this linking. This is merely inclusion of the unique service reference number in the local government services list for release of election results – service 721 – see* [*http://standards.esd.org.uk/?uri=service%2F721&tab=details*](http://standards.esd.org.uk/?uri=service%2F721&tab=details) *Once set up as an output parameter it needs no further effort and will be published repeatedly against future releases of elections data.*
12. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Page 13 details four reasons for the rejection of votes. At multi-vacancy elections, which occur in many local authority areas, there is also the reason “rejected in part”. This reason is included in Annex 1 on page 22. *Noted and accepted.*
13. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Electoral Area URI - Page 17 – “parish ward” needs to be included under “What is required”. It will also be essential that any changes to boundaries are reflected in the Electoral Area URIs in time for the data export. Seek further advice. *Electoral Commission advises that a parish may or may not have wards (depending on how big it is) and if it does the parish’s wards are going to be much smaller than the council’s ‘standard’ wards. They may also not be contained in one larger ward and might break across those boundaries. As there are no known URI sources for Parish wards, then the ElectoralAreaURI field will require to be optional for now.*
14. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Electoral Area Label - Page 18 – the AEA agrees with the Electoral Commission response that, as long as you have the local authority name and the ward name, it should be fine. However, in the case of a parish area, you may wish to include the local authority name, parish name and parish ward name where the parish is warded.  *See 13 above as this is a knock on impact. Based on 13 above.*
15. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Candidate Surname - Page 18 – reference is made to the fact that there is no obligation for this to be capitalised. For consistency, the data should reflect how it would be shown on the election results notice published by the returning officer. *Noted and accepted.*
16. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Alternate Political Label - Page 20 – this would probably be better described as “Candidate’s description”. Reference in the additional information column refers to “registration documents” where it, in fact, relates to the description provided on the candidate’s nomination paper. The description also refers to “The field is optional and can be left blank is appropriate at the discretion of the returning officer”. This field should reflect the content of the description on the candidate’s nomination paper as it would appear on the notice of results. *Noted and accepted.*
17. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Votes Won - Page 20 – how are uncontested elections dealt with and published? Reference is made on page 21 to “Votes Cast”. The actual process is that the RO will publish a notice which states the candidate was elected unopposed. *We will add a third option for the ELECTED field so that it can now contain any of the following: ELECTED, ELECTED UNOPPOSED or NOT ELECTED.*
18. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Ballots Rejected Official Mark - Page 22 – reference is made to “polling station stamp”. However, stamping instruments are very rarely used in polling stations with ballot papers being validated as live ballot papers in other ways, e.g. via a water mark. We therefore recommend that you remove the wording “polling station stamp” *Noted and accepted.*
19. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Percentage Turnout - Page 23 – the description states “A percentage figure calculated to one decimal place as Votes Cast divided by Eligible Electorate times 100.” The percentage turnout is calculated using the total verified ballot papers and the eligible electorate figures. Votes cast are the number of votes cast on a ballot paper, for example, a multi-member ward could have 3 votes if there are 3 vacancies but to calculate the turnout it would be 1 ballot paper and not 3 votes. This also applies to the footnote on page 13. The description also refers to “Note this figure may be subject to revision and republication at a later date if the Eligible Electorate is revised.” The eligible electorate does not change after the results have been declared. The data extract will be exported from the Electoral Management System (EMS) after the election results have been inputted and any changes to the eligible electorate will have been made on the EMS software already. The eligible electorate figure will therefore be correct at the time of the data export. *Electoral Commission advises: even in a multi-member ward election, one ballot paper should count as one vote for the purposes of a turnout calculation. So while the field for VotesWon will need to count individual votes for separate candidates on a single ballot paper, the VotesCast field will have to count ballot papers..*
20. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Returning Officer Name - An official notice of result would include the RO name. Whilst a contact email and telephone number is requested for electoral services, should consideration be given to including the name of the RO? *Noted and accepted.*
21. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General point - funding may be required to develop the EMS software. *Noted. Funding availability is very depressed and represents the biggest risk to moving forward. We are investigating possible remedies.*
22. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Organisation code and organisation label - details of national codes for the local authority, individual wards and parliamentary constituencies. Are there national codes available for the following areas which will be needed when introduced for Parish/Town Councils and in the future should it be extended to other elections:

* Parish/Town Councils – some areas of parish/town councils are warded;
* Greater London Authority Assembly constituencies;
* Police and Crime Commissioner police areas?

If the proposal were to be extended UK-wide, are there national codes available for the National Assembly for Wales as these constituencies are different to UK Parliamentary constituencies? *URI references will be made to official sources wherever they exist. In instances where there are no official references, the LGA natural neighbourhood service will provide unique references until such time as they are acknowledged by an official source. The LGA has online tools to help find them – see* [*http://uris.opendata.esd.org.uk/*](http://uris.opendata.esd.org.uk/) *In the first instance we will ensure that publishers are aware of URI sources for supported elections.*

1. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General observation. It would be extremely useful to electoral administrators if, once the project is live, the process could be included in the Electoral Commission guidance produced for each election, e.g. Part E - Verifying and counting the votes, and Part F - After the declaration of result. *Electoral Commission has indicated that it will do this. There will be a likely need for procedure change by some Electoral Administration Departments to input results into the EMS in a timely manner (Electoral Commission to advise on the definition of this). We are investigating if Form K can be a by-product of this work but it will require to be released in quicker time than currently.*
2. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General observation. Once the project is live, it is imperative that the data is captured in the same way for all future elections and not just specific elections. This will enable a consistent approach and ensure take up.

In addition, it will be necessary to:

* Continue to work closely with all EMS suppliers to ensure that the data can be extracted in the data specification format required and maintained;
* Ensure there is no duplication of effort required by ROs; and
* Work closely with the AEA to inform members and the Electoral Commission in relation to their guidance as outlined in question F

*Noted and good advice but we are moving in a difficult area with complex procedures and different practices for different elections. In the early stages we are keen to work up activity in small, steady steps of progress. In the early years there will be patchy take-up and not all elections and views will be supported. We can build upon this.*

1. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General observation. It is worth bearing in mind that not all ROs will input the election results onto their EMS system. A significant number of counts will be conducted away from the town hall or civic centre in venues such as sports centres, with no access to their EMS. In many cases, counts are conducted outside of the EMS by using tailor made spreadsheets. At the end of the count, the RO completes a paper copy of the notice of results and a copy of the results will be placed on the LA website immediately. It may be some time later before the results are entered on the EMS, if at all in some cases. *Good advice and noted. It is inevitable that there will require to be procedural changes by many ROs if this initiative is to work. In consultation with the Electoral Commission we will try to develop a timetable against which ROs can aim to transfer data from the count into the EMS for open publishing to the schema. It is unreasonable to expect this to be immediately as the declaration is made but transfer within a reasonably short but reasonable time period is a potential goal.*

*Electoral Commission advises: ROs will be encouraged to enter results data into their EMS systems shortly after election data for onward release in the proposed new data form. We will advise that this is done in a timescale similar to the Form K creation timetable but will encourage that best practice works to do so more quickly than this.*

1. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General observation. “The key to re-use and take-up is the publication of timely data …” Taking into account the comments above relating to the earlier point, the data may not be available as timely as envisaged especially if the result is declared in the early hours the following morning or even later in the event of combined polls in a local sports centre. *Agreed but see response to 25 above.*
2. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) General observation. Page 9 point 13 should also include reference to ROs in the first sentence. *Noted and accepted.*
3. (from Assoc of Electoral Administrators [AEA]) Data licensing. “It is recommended that local authorities should self-certify their dataset(s) with the Open Data Institute under the open data certificate….” As the data is the RO’s and not the local authorities, should it not be the RO that self-certifies the data? We are also unclear what benefits this approach will bring. *Noted and accepted. Will take further advice.*
4. (from Porism Ltd) For clarification, it will be helpful if each data field in the schema specification also records the data type and cardinality of properties to be expected. *Noted and accepted.*

Tim Adams

LGA 18-Oct-2016 – revised 3-Nov-2016 with comments from Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators.