

CHAPTER 8

POLLING AND COUNTING ARRANGEMENTS

Section 1 – Recruitment of Polling/Counting Staff

8.1 In view of the relatively small number of electors and the fact that there would be only one polling and one counting station in the CE Election, the REO deployed about 300 staff members to serve as polling and counting staff on the polling day, and did not launch any service-wide recruitment exercise as in other elections.

Section 2 – Training for Polling/Counting Staff

8.2 To equip the recruited staff with the necessary knowledge and skills for discharging their duties, four training sessions were organised in February and March 2007 at the REO's Cornwall House Office, Queen Elizabeth Stadium and the polling station. On-site rehearsals were also conducted on 23 March 2007 at the venue prior to the polling day, so that staff of different functional units would be familiar with the venue and operation of the electoral process. Operational manuals were also compiled for the officers, with one set designated for the PRO, DPRO and APROs, and another set for Polling Officers and Polling Assistants.

Section 3 – Identifying Venue as Station

8.3 Hall 2 of the AsiaWorld-Expo ("AWE") in Lantau Island was used as the polling and counting stations for the CE Election as no other suitable venue

was available during the specified period² and it was large enough to accommodate various facilities. The AWE was able to provide an adequately spacious venue on the dates required and was accessible to disabled electors. With an area of about 7,000 m², the hall could be partitioned into a polling station and a counting station, and the two parts could be located right next to each other. This facilitated efficient transportation of the ballot boxes from the polling station to the counting station after the close of poll. The arrangement was also convenient for electors who wished to go to the counting station to observe the count after casting their votes.

Section 4 – Polling Arrangements

Polling hours

8.4 The poll for the first round of poll in a contested election (and the poll in an uncontested election) were originally scheduled to be held from 9:00 am to 10:00 am. The EAC later decided to extend the time for the first round of voting in the case of a contested election, or the polling hours in the case of an uncontested election, from one to two hours, ie from 9:00 – 10:00 am to 9:00 – 11:00 am. This took into account the consideration that the AWE was used as the polling and counting stations for an election for the first time, and electors might be less familiar with the location. The time for the second and third rounds of voting, which would be conducted only as and when necessary in the case of a contested election, remained unchanged. The revised polling

² When looking for a suitable venue, the REO needed to ensure that the venue was available not only on the polling day, but also a few days before and after the polling day. In other words, the booking needed to last for six to seven days. The REO needed to take over the venue two to three days before the polling day for all the necessary setting-up, testing and preparatory work. The REO also needed the venue for two days after the polling day to ensure that the same place could still be used in case of any slight postponement or adjournment of polling and/or counting or in case the fourth or further rounds of polling were required in a contested election.

hours for the first three rounds of voting were as follows:

<u>Round of voting</u>	<u>Polling hours</u>
First round	9:00 am – 11:00 am
Second round	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Third round	7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

8.5 In the event that there was a need for the fourth round or further rounds, it would be held on the following day (ie 26 March 2007). For each round of voting, the count would be conducted right after the poll.

8.6 The EAC Guidelines were revised to reflect the new arrangement set out in paragraph 8.4 above. A press release was issued on 31 January 2007 to publicise the revised hours. The information was included in the polling notice mailed to electors before the polling date, and published in the Gazette on 9 March 2007.

The polling station

8.7 To avoid long queues near the close of polling hours and any consequential delay in the polling hours of the next round of poll (if necessary), 22 ballot paper issuing desks and 61 voting compartments (including five for the disabled) were set up in the polling station. Similar to all other elections, an area immediately outside the polling station was designated as the NCZ and the NSZ. Right outside the polling station, there was a waiting area for electors who arrived before the polling hours, and a resting area was provided for electors who had cast their votes and wished to wait for the counting of votes to commence. As in other elections, the candidates' introductory leaflet was displayed inside the polling station.

8.8 Both the polling station and counting station were situated within the NCZ. To enable candidates to canvass for votes in case a second and subsequent rounds of poll were required, conference rooms were reserved at the AWE outside the NCZ for renting by candidates, if so required. It turned out that only one of the candidates had rented the room. Each candidate was also allocated a small candidate room inside the counting station. Since the candidate room was situated within the NCZ, no canvassing was allowed.

8.9 In anticipation that a number of bodies might organise demonstration activities in the vicinity of the venue, Designated Public Activity Areas were delineated by the Police outside the polling station on the polling day. As security and accessibility by eligible electors were crucial to the smooth running of the election, the REO worked closely with the Police and the venue management on security and traffic management matters.

Polling notice

8.10 In accordance with the legal requirement, the REO sent to each elector a polling notice 10 days before the polling date. The polling notice was issued to electors together with an appeal letter from the CEO to encourage them to cast their votes at the election, and to provide them with essential information on the election.

8.11 As it was the first time that AWE was used as a polling and a counting station, the package sent to each EC member included the polling notice as required by the law (which contained such information as the polling date, address of the polling station and polling hours), location map of the polling station, detailed voting instructions as well as polling and counting procedures. In addition, there was also a transportation guide on the various means of

transportation to arrive at the polling station, approximate travelling time required, approximate distance from different drop-off points to the venue, arrangement for shuttle bus service between the drop-off points and the entrance to AWE, as well as suggested land routes for private cars.

8.12 For security reasons and for easy identification of the EC members, the package sent to the EC members also included a name badge for the elector and an entry permit for display on his vehicle. As in other elections, a map showing the extent of the NCZ and an introductory leaflet on the candidates were also included in the package sent to each elector together with the polling notice.

Design of ballot papers

8.13 The design of ballot papers followed the form set out in the EP (CEE) Reg. As more than one round of voting might be required, ballot papers to be used in different rounds were differentiated by different colours.

Voting procedures

8.14 An elector had to mark the ballot paper inside the voting compartment by using the “✓” chop provided. After marking the ballot paper, the elector would be required to fold the ballot paper so that the marked side was inside, and then put the folded ballot paper into one of the ballot boxes placed at the exit of the polling station. The introductory leaflet on the candidates was displayed inside the polling station. As mentioned in paragraph 8.11 above, the detailed voting instructions were sent to each elector together with the package and were also posted inside the polling station and each voting compartment.

8.15 After casting their votes, electors could proceed to the counting station to observe the count or leave the venue. Electors were encouraged to observe the count and stay until the counting result was known, so that they could proceed to the polling station for another round of voting, if required.

Section 5 – Counting Arrangements

The counting station

8.16 The counting station comprised a counting zone, a seating area for electors, a working area for the media and a seating area for members of the public who wished to observe the counting of votes.

The counting procedures

8.17 The ballot papers were counted manually. If one of the two candidates obtained more than half of the total number of valid votes cast in any round of voting, he would be returned at the CE Election. If another round of voting was required, the RO would make a public announcement through the electronic media. Electors who had left the venue were advised to keep a close watch of such announcement and return to the polling station in time to cast their votes. Alternatively, they might enquire through the REO Hotline about the need to return for another round of voting.

8.18 When the count started, the PRO assumed the role of counting supervisor, ie the officer overseeing the counting process. The RO was responsible for determining the validity of questionable ballot papers.

Section 6 – Preservation of the Secrecy of the Votes

8.19 Before the poll, there was concern as reported in the media whether electors who cast “blank votes” (ie unmarked ballot papers) in ballot boxes (投票票) could be identified. To uphold the confidence in the secrecy of the votes and hence the fairness of the CE Election, the EAC held a press conference on 13 March 2007 to address such public concern. The EAC Chairman stressed that both the legislation and the electoral arrangements had already safeguarded the secrecy of the votes cast by electors.

8.20 The EAC Chairman emphasised at the press conference that according to the law, the votes should be cast by secret ballot. He also stated that the EP (CEE) Reg required that no serial number was printed on a ballot paper, and no record would be made of any particular ballot paper issued to an elector. There was no ground to support the speculation that individual electors could be identified from the ballot papers they had cast.

8.21 As regards the electoral arrangements, the EAC Chairman stated that after an elector was issued with a ballot paper, the elector would mark the ballot paper inside the voting compartment alone. The elector should then fold the ballot paper inwards before dropping it into the ballot box. This could further prevent anyone from seeing the elector’s choice marked on his ballot paper. Apart from the above, an elector could choose to drop his ballot paper into any one of the two adjacent ballot boxes in the polling station. Since the ballot boxes were large in relation to the ballot papers (only about A5 size), ballot papers inside the ballot boxes would not be stacked in the order they were put into the boxes.

8.22 On the arrangements after the close of the poll, the EAC Chairman said that ballot boxes would be sealed before they were delivered to the counting station under the escort of police officers and candidates or their agents. The ballot papers would be mixed when they were poured out from the ballot boxes. The media and members of the public would be allowed to observe the opening of the ballot boxes and the counting of the votes in the counting station. Moreover, the law stipulated that if a ballot paper contained any writing or mark by which the elector could possibly be identified, it would be regarded as invalid and not be counted. All ballot papers would be sealed in packets after the election result had been declared, and would be destroyed in accordance with relevant legislation after a period of time.

8.23 The EAC Chairman personally demonstrated to the media at the press conference the polling procedures mentioned above, and how each step could help safeguard the secrecy of the votes. At the end of the press conference, the Chairman reiterated that the EAC would do all it could to make proper voting arrangements for the CE Election, and that he was confident that the CE Election would be conducted in a fair, open and honest manner.

8.24 The reassurance conveyed by the EAC at the press conference was widely reported in the printed and electronic media. Press releases were also issued to publicise the message.

Section 7 – Contingency Measures

8.25 To cater for any unforeseen circumstances such as inclement weather or other emergencies such as fire or power failure, preparations were made for the following contingencies:

- (a) the possibility of any postponement or adjournment of the poll, or the count in the counting station;
- (b) in relation to (a) above, the need for resumption of an adjourned poll or an adjourned count, as the case may be; and
- (c) the possibility of requiring alternative polling stations when access to the polling station was blocked by flooding, fire or other emergencies that rendered the polling station inoperable.

8.26 To ensure the smooth conduct of the poll, the REO had put in place other contingency measures to cater for any unforeseen circumstances:

- (a) stocking of extra ballot papers, ballot boxes etc at the AWE to cater for emergency situation;
- (b) booking of vehicles for delivery of equipment and emergency transport of electors and staff;
- (c) close monitoring of the flow of transport to the AWE on the polling day, in view of the location of the polling station, with the assistance of relevant government departments and authorities;
- (d) securing back-up electricity supply by the EMSD to ensure that the poll and the count could be continued in the AWE in case of power disruption; and
- (e) making full preparation for making public announcements of the implementation of any emergency arrangements (including inviting the

EC members to provide their contact telephone numbers, on a voluntary basis, to facilitate any emergency contact).