

Essentials of effective election management:

Planning for a UK Parliamentary
general election

Contents

1. Purpose
2. Checklist: actions to take now to ensure you are ready to deliver a well-run UK Parliamentary general election
3. Your responsibilities as (Acting) Returning Officer
4. Planning the election
5. What issues are specific to this election?
6. External partners
7. Managing contractors and suppliers
8. Insurance
9. Election finance
10. Equal access
11. General employment issues
12. Training
13. Communication
14. Postal voting
15. Polling station voting
16. Planning the count
17. Candidates and agents
18. Electoral integrity
19. Election observers
20. Key contact details

1 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this guidance is to assist (Acting) Returning Officers in Great Britain with planning for delivering a well-run UK Parliamentary general election. Every year there are media reports about things that go wrong with the delivery of elections, including with elections delivered by experienced (Acting) Returning Officers and their staff. This guidance is designed to support you in ensuring that you have robust planning processes in place to minimise the risk of this happening to you.

1.2 While we recognise that some (Acting) Returning Officers will also be Electoral Registration Officers, this guide has been drafted in such a way as to reflect that in law they are separate offices, and so treats the (Acting) Returning Officer as being a different person from the Electoral Registration Officer. This guide does not provide advice for Electoral Registration Officers: such guidance is contained in our manual *Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: guidance for Electoral Registration Officers*.

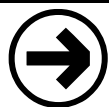
1.3 This guidance is issued in accordance with the Electoral Commission's power under Section 10 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) to provide advice to (Acting) Returning Officers.

1.4 It is not meant as a comprehensive guide to the relevant election law, and no expression of views on the part of the Commission can alter the application of any legislation to any particular case. (Acting) Returning Officers and their own legal advisers must reach conclusions based on the details of any particular case. This guidance should not be relied on as legally definitive and the Commission cannot accept any responsibility for any errors or omissions, or any act arising from them.

1.5 This guidance only covers electoral law and practice in England, Scotland and Wales. It does not cover UK Parliamentary general elections in Northern Ireland.

2 Checklist: actions to take now to ensure you are ready to deliver a well-run UK Parliamentary general election

1. **You are only as good as your team** – Make sure you identify appropriately qualified and experienced staff to assist you in delivering the election:
 - You may appoint one or more Deputy (Acting) Returning Officers, known as Deputes in Scotland, to discharge all or any of the functions of the office of (Acting) Returning Officer.¹ Put in place a formal written appointment and acceptance, including details of the powers granted.
 - It is an essential part of contingency planning to make provisions for circumstances when you may be unable to act personally.
 - Assign a senior officer to manage the planning process and the day-to-day running of the election with the support of an election management team comprising senior officers.
 - Use the National Occupational Standards for electoral services staff to identify the skills and knowledge relevant to the work you are asking the team to deliver. The complete suite of standards can be found at <http://ukstandards.org.uk>.
 - Identify the training required to ensure that all of the staff working for you have the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver the statutory responsibilities relevant to their role in a professional manner.
 - Ensure a high quality of training delivery by reviewing what you've done in the past, and ensure your plans include how you will evaluate what is delivered for this election.



Further information on employment issues, including recruitment and training, can be found in [Section 11, 'General employment issues'](#) and [Section 12, 'Training'](#) of this guide.

2. **What's the plan?** – Running an election is a complex logistical operation. You should be able to demonstrate that the planning process and systems used to deliver the election provide an effective and robust level of management control. This is essential for the delivery of any statutory service, and evidence that such systems are in place is required in order to meet the performance standards for (Acting) Returning Officers, which can be downloaded from our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

¹ Throughout this guidance, all references made to 'deputy (Acting) Returning Officer' should be read as 'depute' in respect of Scotland.

- Identify what needs doing to deliver all aspects of the election and make sure you know when things need to be delivered in order to comply with the rules and with the statutory (fixed) deadlines.
- Decide who's going to do what – be specific, put names next to actions.
- Record all this in a written plan which as (Acting) Returning Officer you should sign-off *personally*.
- Agree how you are going to monitor and report progress against the plan, and how you will deal with any issues in the run-up to and during the election. Have regular meetings with your election management team to enable you to monitor progress effectively.



Detailed guidance on planning for delivering a well-run UK Parliamentary election is contained in [Section 4, 'Planning the election'](#).

3. **What's new or different?** – Identify the issues that are specific to this election that you need to pay particular attention to in your planning – for example:
 - Are there particular messages you need to get out to voters about participating in the election? For example, have polling station locations changed?
 - Do you need to work across local government boundaries for particular parts of the process? For example, checking absent vote identifiers. Who do you need to work with? How are you going to manage access to data across the constituency? Do you have a software solution? Do you need service level agreements with the relevant Electoral Registration Officers within the constituency?
 - There may be a large number of new 'first-time' candidates and agents at this election. Consider and put in place arrangements to provide clear and timely information to enable them to engage effectively with the election process. Direct them to the Commission's advice and guidance on standing for election, campaigning and financial requirements.
 - Turnout at a UK Parliamentary election may be higher than for other types of election. Think about the impact this could have on all of the election processes, such as number of polling stations, numbers of enquiries from the public, supply of ballot papers to polling stations and the count.
 - Are there any specific access issues you need to address?

- Have there been any boundary changes and what are the implications for supply of the register and what you need to tell candidates and voters?
- Are there any specific integrity or security issues that may damage confidence in the election? How are you going to address these and who will you need to liaise with?
- Is there going to be particular media interest and what additional resources will you need to respond to this? How will you involve your communications team in this?



Further consideration is given to issues that are specific to this particular election in [Section 5, 'What issues are specific to this election?'](#)

4. **Keeping track of the money** – Work out the budget and set up a system for how you are going to track and account for the money you spend to comply with the framework established by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) (England and Wales) and the Scotland Office. Set up a bank account in advance.



Advice on election finance issues, including contact details for the Electoral Claims Unit and Scotland Office, is provided in [Section 9, 'Election finance'](#).

5. **What's the contingency?** – Draw up a risk register and plan how you will manage the risks. Decide what you can do to try to prevent these problems happening and do the things you identify.



Risk management is considered in more detail in [Section 4, 'Planning the election'](#).

The Commission has also developed template planning documents to support you in drawing up a risk register and in working towards meeting our performance standards. These can be downloaded from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections, and have been produced in Word format so that you can adapt them to fit your own local circumstances.

6. **Insurance is essential** – Check that you have adequate insurance cover for the election and that the range of cover is up-to-date. Check the amount of the excess. Obtain confirmation in writing. Always be prepared to demonstrate robust planning and decision-making processes in the event of a challenge to the election and a claim against the insurance policy.



Further guidance on what you need to consider to ensure you have adequate insurance cover in place to cover your functions as an (Acting) Returning Officer can be found in [Section 8, 'Insurance'](#).

7. **Remember, outsourcing production does not mean outsourcing the responsibility** – if anything goes wrong you will be responsible and you will have to answer any questions:
 - Before outsourcing all of the postal vote production, collation and issue, or other printing, consider whether any of these processes could be managed in-house by your staff and assess the benefits and risks of the various options.
 - If you do outsource any part of the process, make sure you get a contract in place as soon as possible for any work to be undertaken. The contract must be clearly worded to ensure compliance with the relevant election rules.
 - Check if there are any sub-contractors involved and agree clear lines of communication.
 - Make sure the contract includes provision to observe your poll cards/ ballot papers/ postal votes being produced and despatched and use this to quality check what is being produced.
 - Liaise with Royal Mail as soon as possible to get the relevant licences and envelopes in place.



Advice on managing contractors and suppliers is provided in [Section 7, 'Managing contractors and suppliers'](#).

8. **How will you manage the count?** – This is an extremely high profile event conducted in full view of candidates, agents, accredited observers, Commission representatives and the media. How you manage it will have a significant impact on the confidence of all attending in the result that is announced:
 - Do you have robust and transparent count processes?
 - How will you manage postal votes at the count?
 - Have you thought about the impact of the layout on transparency of the processes?
 - Have you considered the issue of security at the count?
 - Are you going to count on Thursday evening or Friday morning?

- Have you worked out how many staff you will need and how long it should take them to verify and then count the votes?
- Do you have a plan for how the process will be communicated to all those attending for whom this might be the first experience of a count?



[Section 16, 'Planning the count'](#) provides detailed guidance on what you need to consider when planning the count.

9. **What would you need to do if the poll at the general election is combined with the poll at another election?** – You will need to consider how a combined election would impact on your processes and determine what actions you need to take now to ensure that you would be prepared to run a combined election.



Issues you will need to consider in order to be prepared for the potential of combined polls are covered in more detail in Section 5, 'What issues are specific to this election?'. Also, where relevant, combination issues will be highlighted throughout this guidance and will be contained in a box with an exclamation mark ⚠ and a heading reading 'Combination'.

10. **Learn the lessons** – Shortly after the election, review how the election went, including any issues that arose and how they were dealt with, then update your plans so they are ready for the next election.



Further information on reviewing and evaluating the election and how this should inform your plans for future elections can be found in [Section 4, 'Planning the election'](#).

3 Your responsibilities as (Acting) Returning Officer

3.1 As (Acting) Returning Officer you are, by law, personally responsible for the effective running of the election in your constituency.² Although you may appoint one or more deputies to discharge all or any of the functions of the office,³ your personal responsibility for delivering the election cannot be delegated.

3.2 If a member of your staff or a contractor makes a mistake or carries out work in a way that is not compliant with the law, the responsibility is yours and you could face a legal challenge. The election could be questioned by election petition,⁴ or a court could find you to be in breach of your official duty and may, on summary conviction, fine you up to £5,000.⁵

3.3 Running an election is a complex logistical operation with statutory obligations, involving considerable financial and physical resources and delivered against tight and inflexible timescales. It is therefore essential that you have formal, written plans in place with clearly defined objectives and success measures to allow you to monitor progress, and which identify risks and corresponding mitigating actions.

3.4 Your duties as an (Acting) Returning Officer are separate from your duties as a local government officer.⁶ While working as (Acting) Returning Officer, you are not accountable to your local authority, but are independent and answerable only to the courts.

Performance

3.5 Sections 9A, 9B, and 9C of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) allow the Commission to set and monitor performance standards for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain.

3.6 We first published performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain in March 2009, and (Acting) Returning Officers will be asked to report on their performance against these standards after the next UK Parliamentary general election. Once all self-assessment returns have been received and a selected sample verified, we will publish details of each (Acting) Returning Officer's assessment of their performance against the standards on the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

² Section 27, Representation of the People Act 1983.

³ Section 28(5), Representation of the People Act 1983; Sections 25(1) and 41(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴ Section 120, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁵ Section 63, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁶ Section 27(1), Representation of the People Act 1983.



The performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain cover the following areas:

- Performance standard 1 – skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer
- Performance standard 2 – planning processes in place for an election
- Performance standard 3 – training
- Performance standard 4 – maintaining the integrity of an election
- Performance standard 5 – planning and delivering public awareness activity
- Performance standard 6 – accessibility of information to electors
- Performance standard 7 – communication of information to candidates and agents

Further consideration will be given to these standards throughout this guidance.

You can download the full set of standards for Returning Officers from our website at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

Your skills and knowledge

3.7 In order to meet performance standard 1 – skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer, you must be aware of the contents of the Commission's guidance materials on the administration of elections and must also have a working knowledge of electoral legislation. By 'working knowledge' we mean that you should have an understanding of the legislation that is relevant to a UK Parliamentary general election and an overview of what that legislation contains.

3.8 There are significant management responsibilities attached to the role of (Acting) Returning Officer and you should be able to:

- identify and oversee the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure
- command the required staff and resources to deliver a well-run election
- support the staff administering the election and provide appropriate oversight of their work
- oversee the planning, project management and risk analysis elements of the election and provide direction and receive regular feedback on activities and monitor progress
- understand the main processes and procedures at the election in order to review the planning, question any aspect of and quality assure the whole election process
- ensure that election accounts are completed in a timely manner
- maintain an effective working relationship with the Electoral Registration Officer.

3.9 In order to deliver the role effectively you should consider undertaking continuous personal development in election management, which is also one of the requirements that must be met in order for you to assess yourself as exceeding performance standard 1. The other requirement for being 'above

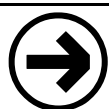
standard' is that you have a strong knowledge of electoral law and of both existing and developing electoral practice.

Your election management team

3.10 Although as (Acting) Returning Officer you are personally liable for the conduct of the election, you may appoint one or more deputies to discharge all or any of the functions of the office⁷. They may be given full powers or specific powers appropriate to the tasks they will be required to undertake. There are no statutory qualifications that need to be met in order to be a deputy (Acting) Returning Officer but you will need to ensure that any deputies appointed have the right skills and knowledge to carry out the delegated functions effectively.

3.11 There should be a formal written appointment and acceptance, including details of the powers granted, signed by both you as (Acting) Returning Officer and the deputy. It is an essential part of contingency planning to make provisions for circumstances when you may be unable to act personally.

3.12 You should assign a senior officer to manage the planning process with the support of an election management team comprising of other senior officers. They should be responsible for all preparations for, and for the day-to-day running of, the election. You will need to ensure that the officer you appoint has the right skills and experience to be able to do the job effectively.



You could use the National Occupational Standards for electoral services staff to identify the skills and knowledge you will need in your election management team. The complete suite of standards can be downloaded from: <http://ukstandards.org.uk>

3.13 In order to be effective, your election plan must identify the roles and responsibilities of all those tasked with delivering particular aspects of the election, and should clearly document reporting lines. These may be quite different to reporting lines in the normal council structure. It is crucial that you ensure that the council, as a whole, recognises the importance of election work.

3.14 As the ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the election remains with you, ensure that effective internal communication and escalation processes are in place so that you are able to oversee all aspects of the management of the election and can monitor progress.

Election staff

3.15 You must by law appoint a Presiding Officer for each polling station in the constituency and you may appoint as many of the following staff as are needed to assist in the conduct of the election:

⁷ Section 28(5), Representation of the People Act 1983; Sections 25(1) and 41(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

- Deputy (Acting) Returning Officers
- staff for the issue and receipt of postal votes
- Poll Clerks
- counting staff
- other staff to assist with other duties as part of the election process

3.16 Council staff employed to carry out these functions are under your direction while undertaking election duties, regardless of their normal employment arrangements.

3.17 In England and Wales, councils can permit their staff to work on the election, but they are not required to do so. You will need to agree all such arrangements with the council. In Scotland, however, the council is required to place at the disposal of the Returning Officer the services of staff employed by the council for the purposes of assisting the Returning Officer in the discharge of their functions.⁸

3.18 As a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time, you should ensure that you have procedures in place that will allow you to access sufficient, experienced staff whenever the election is called.

Impartiality

3.19 You and your staff must act impartially in your dealings with candidates and agents throughout the election.

3.20 It is a requirement that any member of your staff must not be employed by, or on behalf of, a candidate 'in or about the election'.⁹ You should secure a written confirmation of this from anyone you are intending to appoint.

3.21 On appointment, all staff should be provided with a formal notice, with a copy of the agreement or acceptance form, for them to sign and return to indicate their acceptance. This notice should include the relevant secrecy provisions,¹⁰ in addition to the confirmation referred to above.

3.22 It is important to note that you and your staff are not responsible for monitoring the conduct of candidates, agents, registered political parties or campaigners. If it is alleged that the conduct of anyone involved in the election process contravenes the law, the matter should be brought to the attention of the police (see Section 18, 'Electoral integrity', below).

⁸ Section 25(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁹ Rule 26(1), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

¹⁰ Section 66, Representation of the People Act 1983.

4 Planning the election

4.1 It is essential that you have formal written plans in place with clearly defined objectives and success measures. Not only are these plans a requirement for demonstrating that you meet the Commission's performance standard 2 – planning processes in place for an election, but they are also integral to a well-run election that delivers a consistent service to voters, candidates, agents and political parties. There are many different planning models that you could follow. The following four-stage approach is one such example which you may find helpful in planning for the delivery of an effective election:

- Stage 1 – Preparation
- Stage 2 – Develop the detail of the election plan and risk register
- Stage 3 – Deliver the tasks in the plan and monitor progress and risks
- Stage 4 – Review and update the plan

Stage 1 – Preparation

4.2 You should start by gathering all the information you need to include in your plans. Your plans should include:

- clearly defined objectives and success measures
- risks – identification and mitigation
- recruitment of temporary / permanent staff where needed
- business continuity arrangements
- consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises
- an outline of the roles and duties of all staff present at the count.

4.3 You should be able to demonstrate that the planning process and systems used to deliver the election provide an effective and robust level of management control. This is essential for the delivery of any statutory service, and evidence that such systems are in place is not only required in order to meet the performance standards for (Acting) Returning Officers, but will also assist you in the event of a challenge to the outcome of the election or with any insurance claim.

4.4 Using project management principles and tools will help you to take a structured and methodical approach to the planning and delivery of the election. The plans and management documents which you will need to run the election effectively include:

- election plan(s)
- risk register
- contingency plans
- business continuity arrangements
- budget and resources
- plan of the layout of the count premises

- contracts



We have developed template plans which, if adapted to fit your local circumstances, can be used to support you in working towards meeting the relevant performance standards. These templates are not designed as off-the-shelf materials, but rather provide a starting point for (Acting) Returning Officers to develop their own plans. They can be downloaded from: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

Stage 2 – Develop the detail of the election plan and risk register

4.5 A good way to begin is to look at the findings that came out of the review of the last UK Parliamentary general election, or other recent elections. Even if a review did not take place last time, it is still worth reflecting on previous elections to try to identify any issues that can be addressed in advance of the next election. It's also important to recognise what went well and why, so that you can continue to deliver those things successfully.

4.6 The information collected should be used to develop the detail of your project plan and risk register. These 'living documents' are management tools that can be used to monitor progress and ensure that all eventualities are covered.

4.7 The project plan should include objectives and success measures, which should be linked to the key deliverables. Your plan should also include:

- an overview of how the election is to be managed, including clarification of roles and responsibilities
- a risk assessment and mitigating actions
- lines of communication and mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring quality
- arrangements for reporting and escalating issues
- frequency of meetings
- tasks
- statutory and logistical deadlines
- identification and allocation of resources

Identifying and managing risks

4.8 Having reviewed what happened at the previous election, you will already have identified any difficulties and problems and the measures taken to resolve them. In addition to these, you should also list any other *possible* risks to the safe delivery of the election and identify what you are going to do to ensure that such risks do not occur, with options for dealing with any problems that do arise. This information will form the basis for your risk register.

4.9 Your risk register should also identify the seriousness of any risk, by indicating both the likelihood of the risk occurring and what the impact of the risk would be if it did occur. For example, if Presiding Officers do not know how to fill in their ballot paper accounts correctly, this could lead to delays at the verification stage of the count and potentially even undermine confidence in the result. Such a scenario would therefore represent a high level of risk.

4.10 The key objective of identifying risks is to manage those risks. There is considerable expertise within councils in identifying and managing risk that you could call upon to help you draw up your risk register and to advise you on how you could manage the risks you have identified.



The performance standards template plans we have developed include risk registers, which you can adapt to fit your local circumstances. You can download these from:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

Correction of procedural errors

4.11 In the event that something goes wrong during the election, it is important that you are familiar with the statutory powers you have as the (Acting) Returning Officer to correct procedural errors made in connection with your functions by either yourself or by an Electoral Registration Officer, a Presiding Officer, a person providing goods or services to you, or any deputy or authorised assistant of any of the above.¹¹ When developing your risk register, you should consider what possible procedural errors could occur and list any corrective actions you would take in such an eventuality.

4.12 The legislation states that you will not be guilty of an act or omission in breach of official duty if you 'remedy the act or omission in full' by taking steps under this power.¹² Therefore, you can use this power to remedy administrative errors that might otherwise have resulted in a breach of duty. It would still be for the courts to decide if the act or omission had been remedied 'in full', and so you should ensure that you document clearly any problems encountered in the conduct of the election and any decisions and actions taken to remedy those situations, as this provision does not remove the risk of challenge to the election or a finding by a court of breach of duty.

4.13 It is also important to note that this provision does not allow you to recount the votes given at an election after the result has been declared.¹³ Once a result has been declared, regardless of whether it is correct or not, it is final and only subject to challenge by an election petition, and the ability to correct procedural errors does not vary this principle. You should ensure that you properly manage the risk of incorrect declarations of results by following robust procedures during the count.

¹¹ Section 46(1), Electoral Administration Act 2006.

¹² Section 63(4), Representation of the People Act 1983.

¹³ Section 46(2), Electoral Administration Act 2006.

Stage 3 – Deliver the tasks in the plan and monitor progress and risks

4.14 In order to ensure effective management of the election, it is essential that your project plan and risk register are treated as 'living documents' and used to monitor progress and to keep any possible risks under review.

Reporting methods and techniques

4.15 The following list provides examples of reporting methods and techniques which, from experience, (Acting) Returning Officers and electoral administrators have found to be useful:

- check the timelines set out in your election plan to see whether expected progress is being made and that tasks are being delivered in accordance with stated deadlines
- put in place a system whereby your team leaders or key staff in charge of particular processes regularly produce exception reports that show where tasks are slipping behind schedule
- make sure you get update reports on the performance of contractors, covering time, quality and cost
- hold regular team meetings, with structured agendas, minutes and action points from previous meetings
- track the estimated spend against fees available

4.16 It is vital to agree, at an early stage, clear arrangements for the method and frequency of reporting between the person managing the day-to-day conduct of the election and you as (Acting) Returning Officer, and any deputies. This communication may be daily, weekly or exceptionally in the event of there being a major problem.

4.17 You need to have a sound knowledge of your team to ensure that an effective communication process is in place and is robust. You should discuss election planning with your team early in the preparation phase and on a regular basis throughout the conduct of the election.

Stage 4 – Review and update the plan

4.18 The planning process should include a review or evaluation phase to take place soon after the election in order to review the effectiveness of its conduct and to draw out any learning points for the future, while the experience is relatively fresh. This needs to be planned at the start of the process, and should not be left as something to think about after the election.

4.19 It is essential that the scope of the review should cover all aspects of the election, including:

- internal planning and management processes
- communications about the election to voters, candidates and parties

- access issues throughout the election process
- polling stations
- the quality of the register (feedback on which can be provided to the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s))
- production and distribution of poll cards, ballot papers, and postal votes, including the performance of any contractors and suppliers and contract management issues
- staffing
- equipment and supplies
- the budget, and managing and submitting the election accounts
- the management of the opening and verifying of postal votes
- the management of the count
- the post-election provision of data and information, and storage of election documents.

4.20 You should seek feedback from a sample of everyone involved in the electoral process. This will include: your core election team, Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, call centre or reception staff, voters, candidates, agents, political parties and media representatives.

4.21 There are a variety of methods that you could use to get this feedback. For example, you could invite comments from voters via feedback forms provided in polling stations. You could also hold post-election review meetings with staff and with candidates and agents. Any briefing sessions in advance of the election could be used to alert your staff, candidates, agents and media representatives to the fact that you will be conducting a review of the election and will be seeking their feedback.

4.22 During the review process, you should ensure that all relevant information is collated and that your plans for future elections reflect the improvements and changes identified. Tasks should be assigned to specific officers to take forward with clear delivery dates, and they should be required to report back to you on their progress with the implementation.

5 What issues are specific to this election?

5.1 Although many aspects of the forthcoming UK Parliamentary general election will be the same as previous elections, there will be some differences and some particular issues that you need to take account of when planning for this election. Some of the factors you will need to take into account include:

- Boundaries may have changed since the last UK Parliamentary general election.
- (Acting) Returning Officers responsible for constituencies that cross local authority boundaries will be responsible for verifying signatures and dates of birth on postal voting statements returned by electors from their own area and from one or more other local authority areas.
- There may be large numbers of 'first-time' candidates and agents who may not be aware of the process and what's required of them.
- This will be the first UK Parliamentary general election at which the legislative changes resulting from the Electoral Administration Act 2006 will apply
- The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 has also introduced a number of legislative changes, and includes provisions on elections during the canvass period and on candidates' home addresses at UK Parliamentary elections.
- There may be a new system for accounting for the fees and charges relating to this election (in line with that introduced in England and Wales for the European Parliamentary election in 2009)

5.2 The above list is not exhaustive, and you may also have specific local circumstances that you will need to address.

New boundaries

New UK Parliamentary boundaries in England and Wales

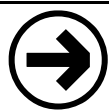
5.3 The Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007 and the Parliamentary Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions (Wales) Order 2006 have changed the boundaries of UK Parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales. These boundaries will come into effect for UK Parliamentary elections when Parliament is dissolved.¹⁴ This means that the next UK Parliamentary general election will be run on the new boundaries.

5.4 However, for registration purposes, both sets of constituency boundaries already exist.¹⁵ You should liaise closely with the Electoral Registration

¹⁴ Section 4(6), Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

¹⁵ Section 4(5), Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 .

Officer(s) in your constituency to ensure that the register for the new boundaries will be ready to be supplied to any candidate following the dissolution of Parliament.



We have issued guidance to Electoral Registration Officers on the impact of these Orders on the maintenance and supply of the electoral register in Circular EC34/2007.

Cross-boundary constituencies

General considerations

5.5 If your constituency covers more than one council area, you will need to think about how cross-boundaries are going to affect your processes and whether you will need to delegate some of your functions to a senior officer at the other council(s). You should liaise closely with the Electoral Registration Officer and election staff at the relevant council(s) in order to identify any possible issues and how these will be addressed. One possible issue might be register data compatibility. For example, you will need to establish whether your software system is able to correctly read the data provided by other councils when deciding whether or not to delegate the sending out of poll cards, the issue of postal votes, etc.

5.6 Another area that will require consideration is the management, staffing and equipping of polling stations. For example, you will need to ensure that you have access to the most up-to-date list of polling places that have been designated for use in the other council areas if you decide to manage all polling stations in your constituency yourself.

Absent vote identifier checking

5.7 One key aspect of the election process requiring advance planning and detailed consideration is the checking of absent vote identifiers. This is of particular importance if you are responsible for a cross-boundary constituency.

5.8 You should, as far as possible, work to ensure software compatibility between the relevant councils to allow you to carry out the verification of absent vote identifiers on returned postal voting statements. You will need to liaise with the other councils at the earliest opportunity and involve all the relevant software suppliers in these discussions.

5.9 You will also need to decide on the arrangements for transferring and receiving data, and consider how you are going to deal with the data relating to electors who are added to the register under the 11-day registration rule. You will need to agree dates for the exchange of data and carry out a test of the process ahead of the first scheduled transfer.

5.10 If, however, a software solution is not achievable, you may need to consider designating members of staff from the other council(s) as Deputy

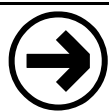
(Acting) Returning Officers to carry out the verification of the signatures and dates of birth on the returned postal voting statements of postal voters in their council area for you. If this approach is taken, robust Service Level Agreements (SLAs) should be agreed to ensure consistent delivery.

5.11 The SLA should set out the responsibilities of each council covered by the agreement, so that all parties know what to expect. Issues to consider when drafting your SLA include:

- who will be responsible for producing the stationery, sending out the postal votes, etc.?
- the mechanism for paying/re-charging costs – these include staff costs, costs for producing postal ballot packs, postage, etc.
- who will verify postal votes handed in at polling stations on polling day? – if they are verified by yourself, you will need to put in place arrangements that will allow you to access the necessary absent vote identifier records
- the process for collecting/delivering postal votes verified in different council areas to the count

5.12 There are a number of other issues you will need to consider if you are responsible for the election in a cross-boundary constituency:

- The checking of absent vote identifiers across multiple sites may make it difficult for candidates and agents to observe proceedings. You will need to consider how this issue will be addressed and how you will communicate this to candidates and agents.
- Different software systems could lead to inconsistent treatment of absent votes within the same constituency. You should liaise with the other council(s) and the relevant software suppliers as soon as possible to understand the impact on consistency of using different software packages.
- Increasing the number of people adjudicating identifiers could also potentially result in inconsistent treatment of absent votes. You should ensure that any Deputy (Acting) Returning Officer(s) you have appointed follow the same principles for adjudication.



Detailed guidance on adjudicating absent vote identifiers will feature in our guidance manual for (Acting) Returning Officers, *Managing a UK Parliamentary general election in Great Britain*. It will also include the guidance on signature checking that we issued in collaboration with the Forensic Science Service, and which is supported by the Scottish Police Services Authority Forensic Services.

First-time candidates and agents

5.13 There may be a significant number of new candidates and agents who have never been through the process of standing for election before. They will need your support in understanding this highly prescribed and regulated

process. By briefing candidates and agents as early as possible in the process and providing them with all relevant information, you can help to avoid potential problems arising from their lack of awareness of the requirements.

5.14 The Commission will be producing nomination forms and guidance for candidates and agents on both the financial and non-financial aspects of standing for election. You can help to ensure the effective participation of candidates and agents in the process by making this and any other relevant information available to prospective candidates as soon as they make themselves known to you.

Elections during the annual canvass

5.15 New provisions introduced by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 require the Electoral Registration Officer, in the event of an election during the canvass, to process and action all new applications and changes to existing elector details made on canvass forms that have been received by the registration deadline for that election (that is, 11 working days before the date of the poll).¹⁶

5.16 In order to be prepared should a UK Parliamentary general election be called during the canvass period, you should liaise with the Electoral Registration Officer(s) in your constituency as soon as possible to understand how they are arranging their canvass to ensure that if an election occurs during the canvass period all canvass forms received back will have been considered, applications determined, and names added to electoral register as appropriate in time for the election. Electoral Registration Officer(s) may well be under pressure to process the applications at short notice and this may impact on the time at which you can access the data you need to conduct the election. Agree how and when you will receive the relevant registration data you need to be able to run the election effectively.

5.17 Where your electoral services office will also be involved in administering the election at the same time as conducting the canvass, you will need to give particular consideration at an early stage to how the registration and election administration processes will be managed in parallel. Ensure that any additional resource needed to deliver the election has been identified and can be mobilised at short notice.

Potential combination

5.18 Where polls are combined, one Returning Officer takes on some of the functions of the Returning Officer for the other election. (Acting) Returning Officers at a UK Parliamentary general election will always take on the

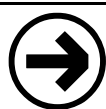
¹⁶ Section 13BB(2) and (3), Representation of the People Act 1983.

relevant functions of the Returning Officer for the other election when the polls are combined.¹⁷

5.19 Where the poll at a UK Parliamentary general election is combined with the poll at another election, the functions that will become the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer are¹⁸:

- the notice of the situation of polling stations
- the provision and equipment of polling stations
- the appointment of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks
- the notification of secrecy requirements at polling stations
- signing certificates of employment
- appointing someone to remove persons from the polling station on the Presiding Officer's request
- separating and verifying the ballot papers
- issue and receipt of the postal ballot papers (if a combined issue has been agreed with the other Returning Officer)

5.20 Should you have a combined election in your area, agreement should be reached early in the planning stage about who is best placed to undertake the various duties imposed by law, and to establish any appropriate delegations. There should be continuous liaison with the other Returning Officer and their staff throughout the election period. A failure to cooperate fully could reduce effectiveness and adversely impact on the service provided to voters.



If there is a possibility that the poll at the next UK Parliamentary general election could be combined with the poll for another election in your area, you should also consult the latest relevant manual for Returning Officers for the other election type. Our Returning Officer manuals are available in hard copy from our distributor, EC Group, on 0845 8500 501 and ecpublications@ecgroup.co.uk, or can be downloaded from www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators.

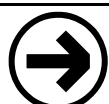
¹⁷ Regulation 4 (1), Representation of the People (Combination of Polls) (England and Wales) Regulations 2004. Regulation 95, Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 1986.

¹⁸ Regulation 5(2), Representation of the People (Combination of Polls)(England and Wales) Regulations 2004. Regulation 96(2), Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 1986.

6 External partners

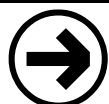
6.1 As set out in Section 4, 'Planning for the election', above, your election plan should identify the key people from other organisations or companies that you will need to work with, and include their contact details and an overview of how you're going to work with them. Your work with external partners will mostly fall into the following categories:

- Working with neighbouring authorities on cross-boundary constituency issues affecting the election.



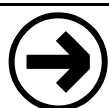
Further consideration is given to cross-boundary issues in Section 5, 'What issues are specific to this election'.

- Working with contractors and suppliers.



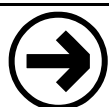
Further information on managing contractors and suppliers can be found in Section 7, 'Managing contractors and suppliers'.

- Universal service provider – make sure you keep in regular contact with your Royal Mail Account Manager.
- Community and disability groups – they can help you to fulfil your duty to encourage participation¹⁹ and provide you with advice on reaching the people they represent. Also, community and disability groups may be able to help you in working towards meeting performance standard 6 – accessibility of information to electors, which requires the (Acting) Returning Officer to ensure that research has been carried out to determine the appropriate languages and formats in which to produce information for electors. You should also ensure that signage in polling stations is produced in any relevant languages and formats.



Section 20, 'Key contacts' lists a number of national access organisations you may wish to contact for advice, while equal access issues are considered in more detail in Section 10, 'Equal access'.

- Press and media – know who to call if you want to get a message out quickly or if you need to respond to an emerging issue.



Further information on dealing with the media can be found in Section 13, 'Communication'.

¹⁹ Section 69, Electoral Administration Act 2006.

Working with other councils

6.2 In many areas, the boundaries of constituencies and councils are not coterminous (that is, do not have exactly the same boundaries). You may gain an area from a neighbouring council to form part of the constituency for which you are responsible. Equally, you may not be responsible for running the election in parts of your own council area because this falls into another constituency which is being run by an adjacent council.

6.3 Information you will need and which you should ensure is regularly updated includes the list of polling stations to be used in the constituency and other details which will assist you in securing and running those polling stations, such as booking arrangements, caretaker contacts and details of accessibility alterations which may be required.

6.4 In such non-coterminous areas, consistency of approach on electoral matters is of particular importance in order to reduce the risk of providing an inconsistent service and potentially confusing the electorate.



Cross-boundary issues are covered in greater detail in Section 5, 'What issues are specific to this election'.

Working with the Electoral Registration Officer

6.5 It is important to liaise with relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s) for your constituency as they will have to produce copies of the register, absent voting lists and labels, and polling station registers for you should you not have access to these records on your own computer system.

6.6 Additionally, given the provisions which allow Electoral Registration Officers to issue notices of alteration correcting minor errors on the register up until 9pm on polling day, and the emergency proxy facility which is available up to 5pm on polling day, liaison between you and your staff and the Electoral Registration Officer(s) and their staff is particularly important to ensure successful administration of these provisions and procedures.

6.7 You should discuss with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s) how they can best supply you with the postal vote personal identifiers record in order for you to verify the identifiers on returned postal voting statements. Early planning is essential, especially in non-coterminous areas.



Further information on the implications of constituencies that cross council boundaries on planning for and delivering the election can be found in Section 4, 'Planning the election', above.

Working with Royal Mail

6.8 Contact your Royal Mail Account Manager as soon as possible, and ensure you have an up-to-date copy of Royal Mail's best practice guidance on postal voting, *Managing postal voting*.



The Commission's website provides a link to Royal Mail's best practice guidance on postal voting at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

6.9 When using Royal Mail it is important to liaise with the Account Manager on a regular basis and obtain any licence numbers and Business Reply numbers as soon as possible in order to avoid any delay at the time when the postal ballot packs are to be distributed to electors. This is particularly important at a UK Parliamentary general election which could be called **at any time**, and so arrangements should be put in place now so that you are ready whenever the election occurs. It is also important to discuss arrangements for collection and delivery of postal votes at an early stage.

Managers of premises to be used for election activities

6.10 Locating sufficient and appropriate venues for election activities is not always straightforward. The review of previous elections should have identified any positive and negative points of venues used previously and highlighted any other issues that will need to be considered ahead of the next election.

6.11 You should make contact with managers of premises as soon as possible. Since a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time and the period between the announcement and polling day may be as short as 17 working days, when looking at potential venues you will need to alert managers of premises to the fact that you may need access to their venue at short notice. You could ask them to complete a pro forma confirming the notice required to confirm a booking and setting out caretaker/contact details and cost, and provide a pre-paid envelope for its return.

6.12 This activity, done at an early stage in the planning process, should highlight where premises are not available and should allow sufficient time to act on this information and for solutions to be identified.

7 Managing contractors and suppliers

Roles and responsibilities

7.1 As (Acting) Returning Officer you can outsource particular work required to deliver a UK Parliamentary general election, but not the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations. The duties and obligations for the effective conduct of the election remain your responsibility.

7.2 You should not automatically assume that outsourcing is your only and best option. The decision to outsource work should always be taken as part of an assessment of the costs, risks and benefits of outsourcing work, compared with in-house delivery by your staff.

7.3 You will need to come to your own independent view of the statutory requirements for any outsourced work and check that any such work meets all those requirements. It is vital for the statutory requirements and their implications to be fully explained wherever contractors are used, and for these requirements to be explicitly stated in the contract for the work.

Procurement

7.4 The review of the previous election, together with any recently arising circumstances, will help to inform the decision to outsource a particular function or task. The risks of outsourcing should be clearly identified and documented, with contingency built into the procurement and contract management process.



The earlier that any decision to outsource is taken, specifications prepared and appropriate companies invited to tender for the work, the better. As more electoral work is outsourced, the more quickly the suppliers of such services become booked up and reach their total capacity.

7.5 You should take these decisions and, if you decide to outsource work, commence the procurement process as soon as possible as a UK Parliamentary general election could be called at any time.

7.6 Your council will have adopted standing orders or regulations relating to contracts and procurement. A number of councils now use e-procurement to order and pay for their goods. You should take advice on the procedures to be followed, although you must bear in mind Electoral Claims Unit (ECU) or Scotland Office guidance and other legal requirements for procuring supplies and services.

7.7 It is generally agreed that it is good public procurement practice to obtain at least three written quotations. Some councils may, however, have a standing list of approved contractors who have already been through the tendering process and, in some instances, it may be more effective and economical to use such existing contractors and systems.

7.8 A detailed specification of requirements is essential for effective procurement. As a minimum it must:

- include a detailed description of what you want them to deliver
- provide clear instructions as to the necessary statutory requirements and obligations in relation to the particular work or services to be undertaken, such as:
 - directions as to printing and any requirements in terms of content and layout
 - statutory deadlines and the impact on production timescales
- contain relevant information about the data that will be provided, including processes for sending and receipt, and secure management of the data
- be provided to all those companies invited to tender for the work, and the successful company must be able to meet all the requirements of the specification.
- make it clear that the successful contractor should be producing work according to the specifications set by the (Acting) Returning Officer and that no changes should be made during fulfilment of the contract without prior authorisation by the (Acting) Returning Officer.



A checklist designed to highlight key considerations relevant to outsourcing work and managing contracts will be published on the Commission's website at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

7.9 In arriving at a decision as to the selection of a company to deliver the work, you should ensure that they understand the requirements and have the experience and suitability to undertake the work being outsourced.

7.10 The following is a list of the steps you should take to be satisfied that the company will have the capacity to complete any contracted work to the required standard and within the relevant timescales. This list is not exhaustive and you may decide to take further steps to be satisfied:

- take up formal references
- ensure that examples of previous electoral work are provided to you and reviewed
- make appropriate checks against the company's statements relating to such matters as insurance, contingency planning and capacity, quality control, security, health and safety, and procedures for the secure handling of data
- obtain a statement from the company being considered confirming whether they will be using sub-contractors to deliver any aspect of the work. This will create another level of risk and additional levels of complexity in communication lines, and so you will need to be reassured that the sub-contractors are capable of delivering the work and that appropriate quality assurance processes are in place.

7.11 Obtain a final quotation from the company selected, including every aspect of the work as detailed in the specification. Any variations agreed with the company should be in writing and accepted by both parties.

7.12 The final price of the contract should not be the only consideration in choosing a contractor. The focus should be on 'value for money'. Electoral work must be completed on time and to a high standard, and each bid should be carefully considered to assess exactly what it offers.



It is essential that you have a formal, written contract for all outsourced work.

7.13 Contracts should be developed with advice from other departments of the council, for example, legal services or procurement. Experienced managers in these fields can be used to ensure that appropriate and rigorous contract management procedures are followed, thereby minimising risk.



The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) provides model contracts on their website that might be of assistance:
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=5829996

You should, however, always seek legal or other expert advice when drafting contracts.

Contract management

7.14 The key to effective contract management is continuous and open lines of communication with the contractor, underpinned by clear and robust provisions in the contract as to the quality and timescales expected and required.



Specific consideration to outsourcing postal voting work is given in Section 14, 'Postal voting'. It contains a sample checklist that sets out what you should do as a minimum to quality assure the outsourced work.

7.15 The timescales for the company to undertake and deliver the work should be confirmed in advance and be detailed in the contract. In order to assist contractors and suppliers in delivering the work on time, it is essential to keep to agreed timescales for providing the information or data they need to do the job. If there is slippage, for example because of the time required to process bulk last minute postal vote applications, you will need to advise the contractors straight away.

7.16 Document all stages of the procurement and production processes. In particular, keep a formal record of the production process in order to be able to demonstrate that it was undertaken in accordance with the law.



Ensure that you remain in control of the process and that the company contracted to do the work does not make any decisions without your full understanding and authorisation. Any variations from the agreed specification could result in a breach of statutory rules and regulations, and therefore potentially in a breach of official duty. Any variations should therefore be formally documented and signed off by you or by someone authorised to act on your behalf.

Printing of ballot papers

7.17 You are required to supply each polling station with such number of ballot papers as you consider necessary.²⁰ Careful consideration needs to be given to the number that will be required.



If you decide that you need to outsource production of your ballot papers and are having difficulty finding a suitable printer, the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF) may be contacted for assistance:

British Printing Industries Federation
Farringdon Point
29–35 Farringdon Road
London EC1M 3JF
Tel: 020 7915 8319
www.britishprint.com

Election equipment

7.18 Elections require a substantial amount of election-specific and general stationery and equipment. Reviewing the previous election should enable you to determine the effectiveness of materials and equipment used, and to audit current supplies of key items, such as polling booths and ballot boxes. This information can then be used to inform estimates for ordering stationery and election equipment.



Make sure you have enough ballot boxes to cope with the potential of a high turnout at a UK Parliamentary general election. If you think you may need to order additional boxes, you should do so as soon as possible so that there is time for them to be delivered, particularly given the election could be called at any time.

When deciding on how many ballot boxes to provide to each polling station you should estimate the number of electors allocated to each polling station, excluding postal voters, and consider this against the number of ballot papers that will likely be able to fit into a ballot box. There is no legal solution to running out of space in the ballot box on polling day itself. If you haven't sealed a second box at the opening of the poll to have ready in case it is

²⁰ Rule 29(1) Representation of the People Act 1983

needed, there is no other course of action that you can take during the day that does not run the risk of challenge.

7.19 In England and Wales, grants towards the costs of purchasing polling compartments and ballot boxes can be obtained from the Electoral Claims Unit (ECU). In Scotland, these can be obtained from the Scotland Office. Claims for the cost of replacing polling screens should be submitted to the ECU or the Scotland Office on the approved application form. Approved claims will be reimbursed, the payments being regarded as advances towards the expenses of the UK Parliamentary elections. In Scotland, the Scotland Office can provide advances for the purchase of required equipment, and you can then seek reimbursement.



Contact details for the ECU/Scotland Office can be found in Section 9, 'Election finance'.

7.20 While polling screens or compartments bought with the help of a grant do not belong to the council, they are usually stored by the council and may also be used for local government and other elections.

Getting equipment to the polling stations and count venue

7.21 As the next UK Parliamentary general election could be called at any time, you should contact any agencies or contractors used to deliver election materials now and make provisional arrangements. Any agency or contractor used to deliver polling booths or other election materials should be informed of the date of the election as soon as it is known. Delivery schedules and comprehensive contract specifications need to be worked out with the agency or contractor so that arrangements can be made to ensure that key-holders are able to be present to provide access to the premises.

8 Insurance

8.1 The importance of having adequate and appropriate insurance cannot be over stated.

8.2 The actions of (Acting) Returning Officers and their staff will often be covered by the insurance policies entered into by their councils, but you should nevertheless check that you have adequate insurance cover.

8.3 The insurance company used may have changed since the last UK Parliamentary general election and so any agreements made may have to be reviewed. You should check that any agreement fully covers your functions as an (Acting) Returning Officer and obtain confirmation in writing if possible. Even if the company providing the cover remains the same, the exact range of cover should be checked and confirmed in writing where possible. You should also clarify the amount of any excess that could be charged in relation to a claim against the policy. If there is an excess it is essential to identify how that excess would be met in the event of a claim being made.



Remember that you are personally liable for the conduct of the election and should ensure that you have proper insurance cover.

8.4 Where your actions as (Acting) Returning Officer are covered by your council's insurance policy, the first claim against you in respect of personal injury, third party, fire and theft will be made to that insurer. In a case where the insurer refuses to meet the claim, or where the incident in question is not covered by the insurance, the Ministry of Justice or Scotland Office may be prepared to consider an indemnity.

8.5 *Employee injuries* – In the case of a claim for personal injury of staff, such an indemnity will only be considered when a claim for compensation falls outside the industrial injuries scheme, and providing that you are not personally to blame.

8.6 *Third party, fire and damage to premises* – In the case of a claim for personal injuries to third parties, or for claims for fire or damage to premises used for election purposes, such an indemnity will only be considered if reasonable care can be shown to have been taken to prevent accidents and damage.

8.7 Notice of any claims should be forwarded to the Ministry of Justice or Scotland Office, accompanied by details of why the claim cannot be met under other provisions, and full medical or other incident reports.

8.8 *Cost of a by-election following election petition* – The cost of re-running a UK Parliamentary election will normally be met by the UK Government. Should an election petition successfully allege that the election was invalid because of an error or omission on your part or on the part of your staff, the UK Government will pay for a re-run. However, where an election petition

complains of your conduct and you are deemed to be a respondent to that petition, you would need to pay any legal costs incurred.



Advice from one insurer during the local government elections in England in 2006 highlighted that in the event of difficulties arising and plans having to be changed, accurate records should be kept of decisions taken and the reasons why actions were undertaken.

It was stated that these records could be very useful if decisions or election results were to be challenged at a later date. Regardless of which insurer provides the cover, you should adopt this approach in your normal working practices.

9 Election finance

(Acting) Returning Officer's charges

9.1 You can recover the costs of running the election for 'services properly rendered, or expenses properly incurred, for or in connection with the election.'²¹ However, the services or expenses must be of a kind specified in an Order made by the Secretary of State, which will also, among other things, indicate the amounts available to (Acting) Returning Officers.

9.2 All costs must be reasonable and essential to the running of the election. Where there is a specified maximum, you may not recover more than that amount. There is provision for the Secretary of State to authorise this maximum to be exceeded only in the event of exceptional or unforeseen circumstances.²²

9.3 It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and the Scotland Office to provide guidance on the detailed completion of the claim forms and the claim forms themselves.

9.4 You will have 12 months from the date of the declaration of the result of the UK Parliamentary election in which to submit your accounts. The Secretary of State has the right to decline to pay where accounts are not submitted within that time. It is therefore crucial to get organised and keep good records in order to meet this deadline.

Authorised signatories

9.5 You should check that the information the Elections Claims Unit / Scotland Office has about the (Acting) Returning Officer and any deputies with full powers is up-to-date. If it is not, you should contact them as soon as possible and provide them with the new details.

Bank account

9.6 You will need to have a bank account set up into which the Elections Claims Unit or Scotland Office can pay the initial advance. If this is not already in place, you should get this organised as quickly as possible. Although there is no statutory requirement to do so, (Acting) Returning Officers should consider opening a separate bank account for election accounts to ensure that lines of accountability are clear and that the accounts are not confused with the council's accounts. You should provide clear instructions to your bank as to any special requirements and make it clear to them that you will not pay any bank charges. Most banks will be able to provide an account to suit these requirements.

²¹ Section 29, Representation of the People Act 1983.

²² Section 29(4A), Representation of the People Act 1983.

9.7 Ensure that the Election Claims Unit or Scotland Office has the details of the bank account into which the initial advance is to be paid. The advance will be paid by BACS or CHAPS, and so it is important that they have the correct bank account details.



Combination

Where the poll at a UK Parliamentary general election is combined with that at another election, the costs of the functions that are common to the elections will need to be split. You should seek further guidance from the Ministry of Justice or the Scotland Office, as appropriate, on the apportioning of costs.

If you may be faced with combined elections in your area, you should also consult the election finance section in the latest relevant manual for Returning Officers for the other election type. Our Returning Officer manuals are available in hard copy from our distributor, EC Group, on 0845 8500 501 and ecpublications@ecgroup.co.uk, or can be downloaded from www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators.

Election Claims Unit/ Scotland Office



For advice on the election funding process and related procedures in England and Wales, please contact the Election Claims Unit on 020 7944 0108, or at ecu@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

You can also write to:

Election Claims Unit
1st floor
Hempstead House
2 Selden Hill
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP2 4XN

Please do not contact the MoJ's Elections and Democracy Division on matters relating to the election funding process and related procedures.



The Scotland Office is responsible for monitoring the accounts submitted by (Acting) Returning Officers in Scotland. For advice on the election funding process and related procedures in Scotland, contact the Scotland Office at:

Finance and Elections Branch
The Scotland Office
1 Melville Crescent
Edinburgh EH3 7HW
Tel: 0131 244 9037

10 Equal access

10.1 Equal access is about proactively providing an electoral service that gives all eligible electors an equal opportunity to participate. This section provides an overview of legislative requirements relating to accessibility.

10.2 Consideration of access issues should form an integral part of your election planning and should cover all electoral procedures. As part of this, you should put in place arrangements to ensure that all staff involved in the election receive training on how they can help all voters to participate in the electoral process.

Planning for access

10.3 Reviewing the last election will provide learning points to feed into future planning for access. In such a review, you should take into account the following:

- All reports returned by Presiding Officers and polling station inspectors should be considered and, where any problems have been highlighted, remedial action should be identified and taken forward.
- Consider what practices were successful and where these can be used elsewhere.
- Feedback from electors, which can highlight any issues that may have occurred. Questionnaires with a predetermined checklist could be made available at polling stations for use by electors.
- Feedback from candidates, agents and political parties which may also help to highlight any issues, as well as things that worked well. Candidates, agents and their supporters have much and varied contact with electors throughout the election period and may receive feedback which they can subsequently give you and the election team.
- Feedback from local organisations of disabled people, older people, minority ethnic groups and the council's access officers.

10.4 The information obtained can then be used to inform your planning and ensure that any identified barriers to access are overcome in time for the next election.

Legislation

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)²³

10.5 Although electoral procedures are not specifically mentioned in the DDA, the Commission believes that the voting process is a public service. In its response to *Voting for change*, the UK Government stated, 'We take the

²³ As amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

view, as does the Electoral Commission, that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 applies to the provision of the facilities for polling.²⁴

10.6 Since December 1996, it has been unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person. Discrimination includes:

- refusing to provide any service to disabled people that it provides to non-disabled people
- providing a worse standard of service to disabled people than it provides to non-disabled people

10.7 As a provider of electoral services you have a number of responsibilities, which include:

- to change practices, policies and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.
- to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of buildings to overcome physical barriers to access. This covers many of the buildings used as polling stations, as they are in use for a wide variety of other functions.

10.8 There is a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality, which requires all public authorities when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where this involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons

10.9 All councils are required to publish a disability equality scheme and you should have regard to this scheme when carrying out your duties as (Acting) Returning Officer. The equalities officer at your council should be able to provide you with advice and assistance.

Race Relations Act 1976

10.10 The Race Relations Act 1976 gives councils various duties in respect of race equality. The general duty set out in the Act²⁵ and the statutory Code

²⁴ *The Government's response to the Electoral Commission's report: Voting for change – An electoral law modernisation programme*, www.dca.gov.uk/elections/govresp-vfc-cm6426.pdf.

²⁵ Section 71(1), Race Relations Act 1976.

of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality is to have due regard to the following three objectives:²⁶

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

10.11 Councils are required to publish a race equality scheme listing the functions and policies assessed as being relevant to promoting race equality. The scheme should also include an explanation of arrangements for monitoring policies and services, consulting on them and assessing their impact on race equality, and for monitoring the workforce and key employment practices. You will need to take account of the race equality schemes of the council(s) comprising your constituency when approaching these issues.

What does this mean in practice?

10.12 When considering access to electoral procedures, it is vital to think about the demography of your own area and the access needs of voters. Communities vary significantly throughout the UK, with different groups of minority ethnic electors and age profiles. It is also important to consider the geography of the area, including whether it is urban or rural. It is important that any changes with regard to access issues benefit all voters. Access issues should be seen in the context of the election as a whole.

10.13 It is important that there are accessible channels available for voters to contact election staff directly, so that they can put forward their views for consideration. It can also be useful to speak to disabled employees forums, where they exist in individual council areas.



Consideration is given to equal access issues in relation to the different aspects of the election process throughout this guidance.

Guidance and advice

10.14 You should be able to get expert help and advice from the relevant officers within your council responsible for the council's disability and race equality schemes. Where you are responsible for a cross-boundary constituency, you will also need to take account of the schemes of the other council(s) within your constituency.

10.15 In addition, local groups for disabled people, older people and those from minority ethnic communities may be able to offer advice and assistance. For example, they may be able to suggest alternative venues for polling stations or ways in which election literature can be improved.

²⁶ Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002.

10.16 Professional advice could be obtained from an access auditor. Your council may be able to provide you with relevant contact details.



A useful summary of relevant organisations who could provide guidance and advice on access issues is included at the end of this guidance in Section 20, 'Resources'.

11 General employment issues

11.1 In addition to establishing your core election team, you will also need to appoint staff to assist you with conducting the various election processes. This section provides some general advice on recruitment, as well as highlighting some of the key legislative requirements relating to employment.

Effective recruitment and induction of staff

11.2 An early assessment of the performance of Presiding Officers, count staff and other key staff at previous elections may lead to the decision to schedule further recruitment and specific training activities at an early stage in preparations for the election.

11.3 Additionally, it will be necessary at this stage to try to identify whether the staff you want to use will be available on short notice. As a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time, you will need to ensure that you are able to access sufficient, experienced staff whenever the election is called.

11.4 You should ensure that the methods used to identify, recruit and employ staff are robust and would withstand scrutiny by an auditor. You should consider obtaining recruitment advice from your council's human resources department.



Effective recruitment and training also features in a number of our performance standards for Returning Officers. In order for you to meet:

- Performance standard 1 – skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer, you will need to demonstrate that you have been able to command the required staff and resources required for a well-run election.
- Performance standard 2 – planning processes in place for an election, your election plans must cover recruitment of permanent or temporary staff where needed.
- Performance standard 3 – training, requires you to arrange for all staff to receive training to understand and carry out their roles.

The (Acting) Returning Officer's fees

11.5 As (Acting) Returning Officer, you are entitled to a fee for your services in conducting the election in respect of each constituency for which you act. Provision for this fee will be given in an Order made by the Secretary of State.

11.6 Superannuation contributions may be made for (Acting) Returning Officers. The council contribution to the fund should be reclaimed by being included in the election account submitted to the Election Claims Unit or Scotland Office.

11.7 Payment received by a deputy (Acting) Returning Officer is not pensionable.

Working Time Directives

11.8 The European Working Time and Young Workers Directives (The Working Time Regulations 1998) have the basic aim of ensuring that workers have a measure of protection against working excessive hours. The regulations restrict the number of hours a worker works each week and requires employers to allow minimum periods of rest.

11.9 While work for the (Acting) Returning Officer is not the same as work for the council, regard should be had to the total number of hours that staff are working so that every employer ensures that they are monitoring the health of staff over whom they have a duty of care.

11.10 The regulations allow for certain types of work to be excluded from the normal provisions on rest periods and total hours worked. In an election period, exemptions may be applicable. These may mean, for example, that compensatory rest can be provided at the end of a busy period rather than during it. It is also possible for a worker to opt out of the rules on total working time (but not the requirement for breaks), and this could be considered for council staff working over a longer period during the election.

Asylum and Immigration Act 1996



You must ensure that all staff employed at the election are entitled to work in the UK in accordance with the provisions of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006. It is no longer sufficient to rely solely on an individual's National Insurance number as evidence that they are entitled to work in the UK.

The UK Border Agency's website contains comprehensive guidance for employers on preventing illegal working:

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers/

National Insurance

11.11 The Social Security (Categorisation of Earners) Regulations 1978 (SI 1978/1689) provide that there is no liability for National Insurance contributions for employment as or by the (Acting) Returning Officer. Therefore, National Insurance should not be deducted.

Income tax

11.12 Income tax must be deducted at the basic rate of tax except where employees are able to complete a 'P527 Certificate of taxable income'. In such cases, fees can be paid gross. In addition, employees may wish to have income tax deducted from their fees at the higher rate, if applicable. In order to ensure that the procedures adopted are acceptable, you should consider consulting the Inspector of Taxes for the relevant council area.

12 Training

12.1 While recognising that there may be a short period between the announcement of a UK Parliamentary general election and the poll, as far as possible all staff involved in the election should be trained. This is essential to the successful delivery of an election and will help to ensure an accessible, consistent and professional service for electors, parties, candidates and their agents.



A schedule of training activities, training materials and an evaluation plan are also necessary to demonstrate meeting the Commission's performance standard 3 – training.

12.2 Training for permanent staff should be provided on an ongoing or timely basis (as appropriate), to ensure awareness and understanding of the legislative requirements relevant to the role and responsibilities you are appointing them to undertake.

12.3 While training activities for temporary staff may often not take place until an election is called, planning for those activities should start at the earliest opportunity. This will ensure that you are prepared to deliver your identified training activities once the date of the election is confirmed.

12.4 It is vital that each member of the election team, whether permanent or temporary, understands their particular role and any statutory obligations associated with the work they are undertaking. Training also plays a vital role in mitigating the risk of error.

12.5 Your training plan should identify relevant training needs of both permanent and temporary staff and contain a schedule of training activities to meet the needs identified. It should also include methods of evaluating the training sessions and materials, in order to inform future planning. Many councils have access to training personnel who may be able to assist you with this process.

12.6 Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and other frontline staff are frequently the only members of your staff that voters will meet in person. It is therefore important that such staff are trained to understand their role and to perform their duties professionally and effectively.

12.7 All staff should also receive training relevant to their role on how to ensure equal access to the voting process for all electors.



Further consideration is given to staff training in relation to particular parts of the election process in Section 14, 'Postal voting', Section 15, 'Polling station voting' and Section 16, 'Planning the count.'

13 Communication

Duty to encourage electoral participation

13.1 Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty on you as (Acting) Returning Officer to take such steps as you think appropriate to encourage participation of electors in the electoral process. The Secretary of State has a power to reimburse any such promotional activities, but such reimbursement is at their discretion and will be separate from any money available through the fees and charges provided for the conduct of the election.

Planning communication activities



The purpose of the duty to encourage participation is to ensure that you do all you can to improve voters' capacity to engage effectively with the electoral process. It is essential that you use this as your starting point for planning communication activities and include in your plans how you are going to deliver this duty.

In order to meet performance standard 5 – planning and delivering a public awareness strategy, you will need to have a written public awareness strategy. A template strategy that can be adapted to meet your local needs is available from our website at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

13.2 Any election attracts considerable interest and involves many different kinds of communication activities – from statutory notices and distribution of poll cards, to provision of information and briefings for candidates and agents, and public enquiries. In addition, there is a need to manage media relations.

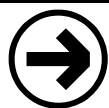
13.3 You should seek advice from colleagues within your authority who have expertise in communications work, including working with the media or specific groups such as young people or disabled people, who should be able to assist you with the development of your public awareness strategy.

13.4 As a minimum, your strategy should:

- identify target audiences
- have clearly defined objectives and success measures
- identify activities or tasks
- identify risks and corresponding mitigating actions
- list the required resources (financial and staffing)

13.5 Consideration should also be given to working with internal and external partners. Working with partners not only allows you to pool resources, but may also encourage effective working partnerships between yourself,

Electoral Registration Officers and other Returning Officers, as well as with communications teams and others within the council.



To support you in fulfilling your participation duty and working towards meeting performance standard 5 – planning and delivering a public awareness strategy, the Commission has also developed an online electoral participation toolkit, the ‘Do Politics Centre’. It contains practical materials, advice and guidance for electoral administrators aiming to increase voter awareness. All materials are free to access and include case studies, event plans, campaign techniques and templates for communication materials. This can be accessed at www.dopolitics.co.uk.

13.6 You will also need to consider the potential benefits of working with partners. For example, you should consider the value of working with other councils, particularly if you are responsible for a constituency that crosses local authority boundaries. This approach may lead to a more effective use of limited resources, and will also help to deliver a more consistent message to voters across the constituency.

13.7 You should consider any possible political sensitivity around any communications work you carry out or any information you provide to the public. In particular, you should avoid using the names of actual political parties or candidates in any examples of election stationery or information you produce.

Statutory and other notices

13.8 The legal requirements for posting public notices in relation to a UK Parliamentary election are that the (Acting) Returning Officer must post any notice required ‘by or under’ the Representation of the People Act 1983 in ‘some conspicuous place or places in the constituency’.²⁷ The (Acting) Returning Officer may also decide to give notice ‘in such other manner as he thinks desirable for publicising it’.²⁸

13.9 It is important to remember that the statutory notices provided for in the election rules are there to communicate information to voters, candidates and parties and should therefore be included in your communications plan.

13.10 In drawing up your communications plan, you should review all locations previously used for statutory and other election notices to ensure that the notices are placed in sufficiently accessible locations for the public. A key communication tool in delivering modern electoral services is the council website and you should ensure that all notices are posted on it as soon as they are issued, with clear signposting from the home page to where the election information can be found. In particular, information for voters about key deadlines in the process should be easy to find, along with the situation of polling stations, the statement of persons nominated and election results.

²⁷ Section 200(1), Representation of the People Act 1983.

²⁸ Section 200(1A), Representation of the People Act 1983.

13.11 Considering the requirement to make reasonable adjustments in service delivery for electors with disabilities, the internet is now a vital tool which, with the accessibility tools that most users have, can help to make information more accessible.

Language

13.12 Nomination papers and ballot papers are prescribed and must only be produced in English.²⁹



In Wales, nomination and ballot papers can be produced in English and Welsh.³⁰

13.13 All other documents that are required to be displayed or provided to voters for the purposes of the election may, if you consider it appropriate, be produced in:³¹

- Braille
- languages other than English and, in Wales, Welsh
- graphical format

13.14 Legislation also enables you to use other means of making the information contained in the documents accessible to persons who might not otherwise have reasonable access to the information (including audio)

13.15 It should be noted that the Welsh Language Act 1993 places a responsibility on (Acting) Returning Officers in Wales to provide bilingual election material to electors.

Information for electors

Poll cards

13.16 Poll cards are one of the most important means of communication with electors. In some cases, electors may be unaware that an election is actually taking place until they receive a poll card. This being the case, it is important that poll cards are made easy to read, while containing as much information as possible.

13.17 You must produce poll cards not only for those who are entitled to vote in person at a polling station, but also for those entitled to vote by post or by proxy. There is no requirement to produce poll cards for overseas electors.

²⁹ Section 199B(4), Representation of the People Act 1983.

³⁰ Parliamentary Elections (Welsh Forms) Order 2007.

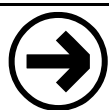
³¹ Section 199B(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

13.18 Although the content of poll cards is prescribed,³² the following are some points you may wish to consider when producing poll cards:

- Poll cards should be produced in clear, large print, using a minimum of 12 point font size.
- Include a helpline number and an email address that people can use if they have any enquiries.
- Maps showing the location of the polling station can be helpful on poll cards for electors or proxies entitled to vote at the polling station, particularly if the location has changed since the last election, but any map should not be so small that electors have difficulty reading it.
- Include access details on poll cards for electors or proxies entitled to vote in person at the polling station (such as highlighting the availability of the device for enabling voters who are blind or partially sighted to vote without assistance or informing people that specific physical access arrangements will be in place), taking into account the size of the poll card to be used.

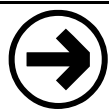
Postal and proxy voting

13.19 Postal voting is available on demand and anyone can choose to vote by post without the need to supply a reason for selecting to vote in this way.



Additionally, there are a number of circumstances in which a person can choose to apply to vote by proxy. These are set out in detail in Part G, 'Absent voting' of our guidance manual for Electoral Registration Officers, *Managing electoral registration in Great Britain*. You can download the manual from our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration/managing-electoral-registration-services.

13.20 There should be adequate publicity surrounding postal and proxy voting, which should include how to apply and the deadlines for doing so. You should liaise with Electoral Registration Officer(s) in your constituency to ensure that application forms, including forms in relevant languages and formats, are located in a variety of public places so that people have easy access to them.



The Electoral Commission produces postal voting application forms in a number of languages and formats, including audio, Braille and large print. These leaflets are available to order free of charge and are also available as downloadable PDFs on the Commission's website at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/languages.aspx and www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/accessibility/electoral_information_in_audi.aspx. Printed copies can be ordered from EC Group 0845 8500 501 or ecpublications@ecgroup.co.uk.

³² Rule 28 Representation of the People Act 1983 and Forms A, A1, B and B1, Representation of the People Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Setting up a dedicated enquiries team

13.21 A UK Parliamentary general election will likely generate a large number of enquiries from voters, both in person and by telephone, received within a relatively short timescale.

13.22 To be prepared to deal with this volume of enquiries, you should set up a dedicated team (or train front reception or call centre staff) to deal with a range of basic enquiries, such as questions about who can register to vote, the franchise at UK Parliamentary elections, postal and proxy voting, and the location of polling stations. More complex enquiries should always be escalated to the electoral services team.

13.23 A significant proportion of enquiries will relate to whether or not a person is registered to vote, and you should therefore liaise with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s) to ensure that the enquiries team receive adequate training to deal with such enquiries.

13.24 The staff will also need training to understand what they can answer and what they will need to escalate to you and your team. You should consider providing the enquiries team with a document listing answers to frequently asked questions, as well as a list of the locations of polling stations and key dates in the electoral timetable.

13.25 Setting up a dedicated enquiries team can bring real benefits to the public in getting a quick and accurate response to more straightforward questions. It will also save you and your team considerable amounts of time, which can be spent focussing on other parts of the election process.

Changes to polling places and stations

13.26 In addition to the statutory notice giving the situation of each polling station,³³ you should inform electors clearly of any changes to polling station locations. This can be done by including additional information with the poll card, such as a simple map and bold text to draw voters' attention to the new venue and location. The statutory wording for the poll cards must, however, still remain.

Access issues

13.27 It is important to remember that different localities and communities have distinct characteristics, which means that the same promotional activities or materials can work well in some areas and with some groups, but not so well in or with others.

13.28 Any facilities or provisions for disabled voters, those with low levels of literacy and those for whom English is a second language need to be publicised if people are to know that they are available. Any such publicity will

³³ Rule 23(2)(b), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

also need to be in a format and language that is accessible to its intended audience.

13.29 Direct contact should be made with community groups, including those for older people and disabled people. There may be an existing network of publicity and help within those communities that could be built upon.



Independent research has identified that to produce promotional materials that work, you should aim to achieve the following:³⁴

- be clear about the audience - who needs to act on the information?
- use language that is appropriate for the audience
- be produced in a format that is accessible to the audience
- convey a clear message
- be attractive or eye-catching
- encourage action on the part of the audience

13.30 The following are practical examples of things you could do to provide relevant and accessible information for voters:

General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up an elections helpline with a dedicated telephone number and an email address.• Distribute leaflets, posters and articles for newspapers to a variety of organisations working with specific groups of the community, so that they can effectively disseminate information through their networks – for example, Age Concern, Talking Newspapers and groups for people from minority ethnic communities.• In planning any publicity and advertising, take account of the range of local communities in your area. The most effective publicity uses spoken word with local radio and local television popular options, including digital and cable channels. There may be minority language radio or TV stations in areas with large minority ethnic communities.• Place articles in local newspapers, including free and community newspapers, and translated advertisements in the minority ethnic press.
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with the Electoral Registration Officer(s) in your constituency to provide accessible information about electoral registration.
Absent voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with the Electoral Registration Officer(s)

³⁴ The Electoral Commission, *Making an impact* (2002), www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

in your constituency to provide accessible information on the options that voters have to cast their vote, including, for example, explaining how to apply to vote by post or by proxy.

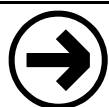
- Including information with the postal ballot pack about how to obtain directions and guidance in alternative formats.
- Include a plain English guide for voters on how to complete their postal vote - preferably containing diagrams or images to explain how to complete and return their vote. This is useful for all voters, including those with low levels of literacy. You should not, however, use an image of a ballot paper that shows actual registered parties and/or candidates on it, particularly if the illustration shows a vote marked against one of the candidates. It is better to use fictitious examples to ensure that your impartiality is not put into question.

Polling stations

- Clear and accessible information about the location of polling stations and any changes to them should be made available through relevant channels, such as your website or by including additional information with your poll card.
 - Publish information explaining the voting process in a polling station so that voters know what to expect. This could be in the form of a leaflet, information on the website or a poster, and should include pictorial information.
-

Information for candidates, agents and parties

13.31 You should be able to provide a briefing pack containing nomination papers and a generic election timetable to any potential candidates and agents as soon as possible. Briefing sessions should be organised for representatives from political parties, candidates and their agents, if known, once the election has been announced to provide them with information about the nominations process. Arrangements for the opening of postal votes and the count could be covered at a further briefing session after the close of nominations. Any such briefings should be held in accessible venues.



We will produce guidance for candidates and agents at the next UK Parliamentary general election, as well as nomination papers.

We have also produced a factsheet on the process of standing for election that you can provide to anyone enquiring about the process for becoming a candidate. The factsheet can be downloaded from our website at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

You can also direct candidates to our webpage containing guidance on party and election finance at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/candidates-agents/candidates-and-agents.

13.32 You should bear in mind that candidates and agents may have specific access needs for the election, and so may need any guidance produced in a large print or other format, such as Braille or audio, or in a language other than English.

Managing media relations

13.33 Prior to any election, you should liaise with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s), agree how your media relations are to be handled over the election period, and put the necessary arrangements in place. You should clarify in advance who within your staff is authorised to speak to the press and broadcasting media and ensure that all staff are aware of this information. Risk management issues can be addressed through rigorous procedures for the accurate and appropriate release of information relating to the election.

13.34 It is also important that the media know whom they should contact for information and are accurately directed to that contact by council staff. You should consider using the council press office as the election press office for the duration of the election. This means that the media are dealt with by media trained people and allows your election team to get on with administering the election, and also ensures consistency of message in response to all press enquiries received.

13.35 In addition to making practical arrangements for their attendance, any early contact with the media should also include an explanation of the counting processes to be followed and the expected finish and declaration times. You should also ensure that they are aware of the requirements as to secrecy.

13.36 The media can support the election in many ways, for example by promoting awareness of the election and seeking to engage the electorate. The media can be extremely helpful in getting a message out to voters in the event of any incident requiring new or revised arrangements to be communicated, or to inform specific community groups of arrangements which may benefit them, for example, accessibility information. Prior consideration of your media strategy is important in order to identify all of the key dates in the election administration process that could be used to highlight the election itself.

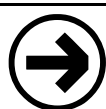
13.37 You will find it helpful to have current contact details of all the relevant media in your area. Your council press office should be able to assist you with obtaining this information.

Briefing packs

13.38 Providing the media with a briefing pack, which gives useful information and contacts, will save you and your team time in the long term. It also aids the media in doing their job. Any briefing pack should include the following:

- election timetable
- election press office contact details
- media access arrangements for the counting of votes
- previous relevant election results
- details of candidates and their agents (including photographs if available)
- plain English information on the count process

13.39 Press briefing packs should be prepared in advance as far as possible so that they can be made available at the beginning of the electoral process.



The Commission will be producing an online handbook for the media, which will answer questions frequently asked by the media about the conduct of elections, campaign spending rules and reporting requirements. The handbook will be available to download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

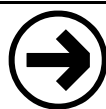
Polling stations

13.40 The media have no rights to enter a polling station except as voters. They must not be allowed to film or interview voters in the polling station. If you have given permission to a film crew to film outside the polling station but within the polling place, Presiding Officers must be instructed to make sure that the film crew do not hinder or harass voters on their way to vote, or obstruct the entrance to the polling station.

13.41 To avoid having to turn down requests for access to polling stations on polling day, it may prove helpful if you consider making a polling station available to the media prior to the opening of polls, for example on the day before polling day. This allows TV crews and photographers to get their footage prior to polling day, which could then be run on the eve of the poll.

Count

13.42 Where interest is expressed by radio and/or television in broadcasting from the count, you should arrange to meet with the media representatives at an early stage to discuss your intentions as to how the count will proceed and also to ascertain the media's likely requirements.



Advice on planning media facilities at a count can be found in Section 16, 'Planning the count'.

13.43 Any briefing pack prepared for the media should give details of what facilities will be made available for them at the count, and should also include information on the election, the area and the candidates (including photographs if available), and plain English information on the count process.

13.44 You may also wish to indicate in the briefing pack the likely timetable of events, with an estimate as to the possible declaration time(s). You should take time to confirm with producers and reporters present at the count how you will indicate when an announcement is about to be made. This will allow news desks to be informed, so that live feeds can be set up at short notice if desired.

Media representatives as observers

13.45 While media representatives can apply to attend the count as your guests, some may also wish to observe at polling stations, or may wish to observe the process for checking absent vote identifiers. Media representatives can be accredited as observers by the Commission and any person who attends in such capacity must be treated in the same way as any other accredited observer.

13.46 Like any observers, media representatives accredited as observers by the Commission are bound by the Commission's Code of practice for observation and by any decision of the (Acting) Returning Officer on the use of cameras and other recording equipment.



Further details on the Code of practice for observers and the rights of observers are set out in Section 19, 'Election observers'.

14 Postal voting



This section only covers advice on the planning requirements of the postal voting process. More detailed information on postal voting, including the issue and distribution of postal ballot packs, the opening of postal votes and the verification of postal vote identifiers will be provided in Part C, 'Absent voting' of our guidance manual for (Acting) Returning Officers, *Managing a UK Parliamentary general election in Great Britain*.

The production of postal ballot packs

14.1 All eligible postal voters must be sent a postal ballot pack. In order to produce these packs you will need to print postal ballot papers, postal voting statements, instructions for voters, and produce envelopes for their delivery and return. In addition, if you consider it appropriate, you must also include in the pack information about how to obtain:³⁵

- translations into languages other than English and, in Wales, Welsh, of any directions or guidance for voters sent with the ballot paper
- a translation of Braille of any such directions or guidance
- graphical representations of the directions or guidance
- the directions or guidance in any other form (including audible format).

Envelopes

14.2 **Outgoing envelope** – This envelope will be addressed to the elector at the address they have asked for their ballot paper to be sent to and which is shown in the postal voters list or the proxy postal voters list.³⁶

14.3 **Return envelopes** – To maintain the secrecy of the ballot, the legislation provides for the ballot paper and postal voting statement to be returned in two separate envelopes:

- Envelope 'A'³⁷ – this is the ballot paper envelope, which should be marked with the letter 'A', the words 'ballot paper envelope' and the number of the ballot paper.
- Envelope 'B'³⁸ – this is the envelope for the return of the ballot paper envelope and postal voting statement. It should be marked with the letter 'B' and the address of the (Acting) Returning Officer.

14.4 While not a statutory requirement, you could consider printing the name of your council and constituency on all A and B envelopes. This could help to reduce the instances of postal vote packs becoming undeliverable if, for example, a voter returns the 'A' envelope, which may have both the ballot

³⁵ Rule 24(2), Parliamentary Election Rules.

³⁶ Regulation 72(7), Representation of the People Regulations 2001.

³⁷ Regulation 74(3), Representation of the People Regulations 2001.

³⁸ Regulation 74(2), Representation of the People Regulations 2001.

paper and postal voting statement inside it, without putting it in the 'B' envelope.

The postal ballot paper

14.5 The design of the ballot paper must follow that set out in the election rules.³⁹

14.6 A postal ballot paper should be the same as a polling station ballot paper. All ballot papers should be produced on paper of a sufficient quality to prevent the voters' marks, including those made with pens etc., being seen – particularly during postal vote opening sessions, where the ballot papers must always be kept face down. You should discuss your requirements with your printer as soon as possible.

14.7 Ballot papers do not need to be printed with a counterfoil, although they could be produced in such a way, or they may be, for example, loose, stapled or glued together in books. They must be accompanied by a corresponding number list.

14.8 All postal ballot papers must contain an appropriate security marking, known as the 'official mark', and another unique identifying mark. The official mark used on postal ballot papers may be the same as that used at the polling stations, but it does not have to be.⁴⁰ The official mark does not have to be a perforation added at the time of issue of the ballot paper; it could be the printing of an emblem or mark or a special printing device such as a watermark. If, however, you choose not to use a printed mark such as a watermark or an underprint, the ballot papers may be stamped with a perforating official mark.

14.9 The regulations do not stipulate at what time the mark must be applied. In order for it to be effective, however, you should ensure that the secrecy of the official mark is maintained. Whatever form of official mark is used, the mark must be appropriate to ensure security and prevent copying. Once a mark is used, it cannot be reused for another seven years in the same constituency.⁴¹

14.10 In addition to being numbered, all ballot papers, including those to be issued at polling stations, **must** bear a further unique identifying mark, which must be unique to each individual ballot paper. This mark can be letters and numbers and could, for example, be the ballot paper number with the addition of a prefix or suffix. An example may be 'GCN00001', to indicate a (G)eneral election in the (C)ity (N)orth constituency, with the ballot paper number '00001' being printed as a suffix. It should be noted that the use of the number '00001' is in addition to the printing of the number '00001' in the ballot paper number section of the ballot paper. Also, a unique identifying mark can be, but does not have to be, a barcode.

³⁹ Rule 19, Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴⁰ Rule 20(3), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴¹ Rule 20(2), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

14.11 Decisions on what to use as the official mark and unique identifying mark should be made at an early stage in the preparation process.

The postal voting statement

14.12 The form of the postal voting statement is prescribed⁴². There are, however, different variations of the same form: there is one for ordinary postal voters, one for anonymous electors voting by post and one for those who have been granted a waiver by the Electoral Registration Officer. The Commission is not aware of any case law covering the extent to which prescribed forms can be altered and so you should consider carefully whether you need to deviate from the wording and format of the prescribed postal voting statement before doing so. If you do decide to alter the form, you should keep a record of why and how that decision was reached.

14.13 The postal voting statement must include the voter's name and number of the ballot paper being issued with the statement. It must also contain another unique identifying mark, which could be a barcode, but could be in another format. This mark does not have to be connected to the unique identifying mark on the ballot paper: it may be the same but equally it could be different or connected. The postal voting statement must also contain the prescribed instructions to the voter on how to vote by post.

Decision on outsourcing

14.14 One of the key decisions you will need to make regarding the production of postal ballot packs is whether you are going to outsource any or all parts of the process. This decision has significant consequences attached to it and you should assess the benefits and risks of the various options before reaching a decision.

14.15 If you do decide to outsource all or parts of the process, you will need to draft a clear specification for the work to be outsourced. In particular, your specification should include a mechanism for ensuring that all of the stationery complies fully with the requirements of the legislation.

14.16 You can use the following checklist, which sets out what you should do as a minimum to quality assure the process:

- There should be full disclosure of any sub-contractors and their role, and provision for full access to all sub-contractors during the production process.
- Clear lines of communication should be maintained between any contractor, any sub-contractors and you as the (Acting) Returning Officer and your staff.

⁴² Rule 24 Representation of the People Act 1983, Forms G, H and J, Representation of the People Regulations 2001.

- Proofs of all items to be included in the postal ballot pack should be provided both electronically and in hard copy to you as (Acting) Returning Officer or to your nominee to sign off before printing begins. Should the proofs not be acceptable at any point in the process, revised proofs should be prepared within a set timeframe, to be specified in the contract.
- You or your staff should have access at all times to all parts of the printing, collation and packaging process (including any processes taking place at the premises of sub-contractors) to carry out quality checks on print runs, collations and completed materials. In addition, contractual provision should be made to allow for Commission representatives to attend the company's (or sub-contractor's) premises to observe the process. If the issuing of postal votes has been contracted out, contractual provision should also be made for accredited observers to observe the process on site.⁴³
- Final printed versions should always be checked and you should have a system in place that allows you to be satisfied that the right documentation has been produced and, if the collation is also outsourced, included in the postal ballot packs.
- There should be a requirement that there is no direct communication between the contractors and Royal Mail without your (or your nominee's) knowledge and involvement; printers should only communicate with you or your nominee.
- Contractors should be required to seek permission from you as the (Acting) Returning Officer or from your nominee before releasing any ballot packs to Royal Mail, and should follow the handover procedures prescribed in the contract. You or your nominee should be present at the handover.
- Clear processes and service standards should be in place for issue/problem resolution processes. You need to know what you can expect in terms of a response from the contractor if things do not go according to the agreed specification, so that you can maintain control of the work
- The appropriate notice as to secrecy should form part of the contract, with a requirement that the company provides this notice to all staff. This must include any sub-contractors used to deliver the work.⁴⁴

14.17 Similarly, if you decide to print in-house, it will also be essential to have processes in place to quality assure what has been produced. You should put in place formal sign-off processes, and you should always check the stationery once it has been printed. Additionally, you should make arrangements to carry out spot checks while the printing is being carried out in order to ensure that your agreed specifications are being met.

⁴³ Sections 6A–6F, PPERA.

⁴⁴ Rule 31, Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

Data

14.18 If outsourcing postal vote production, you should ensure that your software is able to produce a data file that your printers can use to produce material to the specification required. It should be agreed at an early stage in your negotiations with your suppliers in what format they are to supply ballot papers or postal voting statements, and this agreement should be included in your specification and contract.

14.19 Sample data should be provided to printers at as early a stage as possible in the process, in advance of 'live' data being submitted, in order that the data format can be worked on. This will also enable pre-proofs to be developed so that it is clear which part of the data should go where on the ballot paper or envelope.



If the decision is made to outsource printing, electoral register data held by the contractors should be destroyed following the handover of ballot papers to Royal Mail or the (Acting) Returning Officer. A written undertaking should be signed by the contractors to accept that information from the full electoral register cannot be disclosed at any time, confirming that they will not disclose data to any unauthorised party and that, upon completion of the processing, they will return any discs and paper records provided to them and securely destroy any other electronic or paper copies of the data.

The issue, receipt and opening of postal ballot packs

The issuing process

14.20 You should decide at an early stage of your planning whether or not you will outsource the issue of postal ballot packs. Your decision should be based on a cost-benefit analysis of the various options. Whatever decision is taken, you should put in place quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that all eligible postal voters are sent a correct postal ballot pack in time for the election. These mechanisms should include regular checks throughout the printing and production process.



If you decide to outsource the collation of postal ballot packs and the issue of these to voters, any quality checking arrangements will need to be considered as part of the developing of the contract. Section 7 – Managing contractors and suppliers, contains further information on contract management.

14.21 Equally, if you are carrying out the issuing process in-house, you will need to consider how you are going to quality assure the process. You should ensure that all stationery is checked before being sent out and provide training and written instructions to all supervisors to ensure that they can supervise or direct the process efficiently and effectively.



Combination

If the poll at the UK Parliamentary election is to be combined with the poll at another election, you will need to decide whether you will do a combined issue of postal votes or organise separate issues for each election. Whatever decision is reached, you should notify suppliers at the earliest opportunity. The primary consideration for this decision should be the impact on voters - it should not be based exclusively on cost and the saving of administrative effort. If you decide to do a combined issue you will need to give consideration to how you are going to manage the two different electoral timetables. If the poll at the UK Parliamentary election is combined with the poll at a local government election, for example, the preparations for printing and issuing for postal ballot packs for that poll may already have started by the time the UK Parliamentary election has been called.

Overseas voters

14.22 There will be some postal voters who will require their postal vote to be sent outside the UK. This will include overseas electors, members of the armed forces registered as service voters and also some electors who are normally resident in Great Britain but request that their postal vote be sent to an overseas address, e.g. because they are on holiday at the time of the election.

14.23 Whether you have decided to issue in-house or to outsource the process, you should ensure that any postal votes to be sent overseas are prioritised and sent out as soon as possible after 5pm on the eleventh working day before the poll, ideally via Air Mail to allow sufficient time for the postal vote to reach the elector and for it to be returned before 10pm on polling day.

14.24 You should liaise with Royal Mail about the higher cost of postage for sending items overseas via Air Mail to ensure that postal ballot packs are posted with the correct outgoing postage. Return postage is not required to be included on the return envelope if the address provided by the elector is outside the UK.

The opening process

14.25 Your election plan should include a schedule of the frequency of postal vote opening sessions. In making the decision as to how many opening sessions are to be held, you should consider the numbers of postal voters in your constituency and make an estimate of turnout. You should liaise with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s) for your constituency, who should be able to give you an estimate of the expected number of postal voters at the next UK Parliamentary general election.

14.26 At postal vote openings you are required to check that the signatures and dates of birth returned on postal voting statements match those provided on the corresponding postal vote application form.



The Commission strongly believes that you should check the personal identifiers on 100% of the postal voting statements returned. This means that every postal vote ballot will be treated equally. However, you may choose to check less than 100%, as long as you check the personal identifiers of a minimum of 20% of the postal voting statements returned.

You should decide early on in the planning process the percentage of postal voting statements to be verified, as this will have an impact on workflows. If you decide to check less than 100%, you will need to have two separate processes operating side by side, instead of just one administrative process for all returned postal ballots. Also, any decision to check less than 100% should be communicated to candidates and agents, along with details of what percentage is to be checked and the reasons for making this decision.

14.27 You should liaise with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer(s) and software suppliers to agree the arrangements for transferring and receiving data, and decide how you are going to deal with the data relating to electors who are added to the register under the 11-day registration rule. You will need to agree dates for the exchange of data and carry out a test of the process ahead of the first scheduled transfer.



Specific advice for those (Acting) Returning Officers in constituencies that cross local authority boundaries can be found in Section 5, 'What issues are specific to this election?'

Venues for issue, receipt and opening of postal votes

14.28 If you are planning to conduct the issue and/or opening processes in-house you should evaluate the previous arrangements and venues for suitability. You will need to consider layout and how it fits your intended workflows, as well as IT and security requirements. As part of your considerations for choosing a venue, you should consider access to copies of the original absent vote application forms, in case the quality of the scanned image does not allow you or your deputy to make a decision, or in case of IT failure.

14.29 Any venue used for the opening of postal votes should be accessible to all those entitled to be present, including candidates, agents, observers and Electoral Commission representatives. It should be noted that accredited observers and representatives of the Electoral Commission may observe the entire postal voting process, including the issue of postal ballot papers, and you should factor this into your considerations for choosing a venue for the issuing process.

Staff for issue and receipt of postal ballot papers

14.30 In order to ensure the success of both the issuing and opening of postal ballots within the timescales, you must ensure you have sufficient staff.

14.31 If the issuing process is to be conducted in-house, you may need to appoint temporary staff to assist with the collation of the stationery and the issuing of the postal ballot packs.

14.32 In order to assess the likely staffing levels required for your opening sessions, you will need to make an estimate of the turnout and calculate the number of sessions likely to be needed and the number of staff required at each. Staff numbers will also be dependent on how much of your process is automated and how much of it needs to be done manually.



Combination

Should you have combined elections in your area, the decision on whether to do a combined or separate issue of postal votes may have staffing implications for the issuing (if done in-house) and the opening of postal votes, and you will need to plan accordingly.

14.33 You must provide all staff involved in the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, including any staff working for a contractor, with a copy of the secrecy provisions in Section 66(4) and (6) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

14.34 Staff dealing with the issue and receipt of postal votes should receive dedicated training that includes a briefing on the particular procedures to be followed. In addition, the Forensic Science Service provides signature checking training services and you may want to consider offering this training to those members of your staff involved in the verification of postal vote identifiers.



For further information on the services provided by the Forensic Science Service and their contact details, visit their website at www.forensic.gov.uk

15 Polling station voting

Polling places and polling stations

15.1 It is the responsibility of the relevant council to designate polling places within their area and to keep these under review.⁴⁵ A review of polling districts and polling places should have taken place in 2007 and should be carried out at least every four years after that.⁴⁶ Reviews can be carried out at any time and some councils may wish to carry out their next review before 2011. In undertaking a review, councils are required to seek the views of people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for people who have different forms of disability. In designating polling places, the council must therefore have regard to accessibility for disabled voters.

15.2 Although it is the responsibility of the relevant council to designate polling places and keep them under review,⁴⁷ it is your responsibility as (Acting) Returning Officer to provide a sufficient number of polling stations within the designated polling places.⁴⁸

15.3 The designation of venues for polling stations can be a difficult exercise because, on occasion, there may be no suitable premises within the polling district.

15.4 You should work closely with people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people. You should be able to demonstrate that a proper assessment has been conducted of all of the polling stations to be used at the election. Where access problems exist, documentary evidence of any action taken to try to remedy these problems should be retained.



We recommend that you prepare an action plan to identify potential improvements and ways of making them. Permanent improvements to buildings can benefit users throughout the year, and not just at election times. However, in order to achieve permanent improvements, funding needs to be identified. Some councils have provided access grants to bodies that own buildings which are used as polling stations, on the condition that they allow the premises to be used on polling day.

Accessibility at polling stations

15.5 Despite the increase in postal voting, the majority of electors still vote in person at polling stations. Therefore, one of the most important aspects of equal access is to ensure that polling stations are as accessible as possible.

15.6 Ideally, you will have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area, with owners willing to hire them

⁴⁵ Section 18A, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴⁶ Section 18C, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴⁷ Section 18A, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁴⁸ Rule 25(1), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

out for polling station use at low cost. Unfortunately, in practice, this is often not the case and, in many areas, there is very little choice available. Equally, it is not desirable to close down large numbers of polling stations and deprive electors of convenient local polling places because there are access issues.

15.7 However, in many areas, significant improvements have been made to premises used as polling places, to make them more accessible. Reimbursable advances are available from the Ministry of Justice or Scotland Office for temporary adaptations to premises used as polling places and, while not ideal, these may help more people to access a polling place.

Choosing buildings for polling station use

15.8 Traditionally, polling stations tend to be located in buildings such as schools, village halls and community centres. However, there is no reason why they should not be located in alternative buildings which have good access and have a suitable space that allows electors to vote in private. Premises as diverse as fish and chip shops, pubs, temples and supermarkets have been successfully used as polling stations. Whatever the case, it is essential that the premises identified provide sufficient space for voting to take place, including the space potentially required to accommodate polling agents and accredited election observers.

15.9 Certain publicly-funded schools may be used as polling places free of charge and the legislation allows you to require a room in such schools for use as a polling station.⁴⁹ If your council has designated schools as polling places, you should liaise with the relevant schools at the earliest opportunity to explain to them that you want to use certain rooms within the schools as polling stations, and that you may need access to those rooms at short notice due to the fact that a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time. You should also take this opportunity to set out any other requirements you may have.



In England and Wales, the rooms you are entitled to use free of charge are those in schools maintained or assisted by a local authority, as well as those schools in respect of which grants are made out of moneys provided by Parliament to the person or body of persons responsible for the management of the school. The education department at your council should be able to provide you with a list of relevant schools.



In Scotland, the rooms in schools you are entitled to use free of charge are those in schools that are not independent schools within the meaning of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

15.10 While the schools may be used free of charge, you will be responsible for any expenses incurred as a result of using a room within such a school as

⁴⁹ Rule 22, Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

a polling station.⁵⁰ This will most likely include running costs, such as heating and lighting. You should reach an agreement in advance with the school as to what you will be charged for and at what rate.

15.11 You should remain vigilant for any new buildings which may provide alternative locations for any polling stations that present access problems. It may be that a new community building or hall has been built in the area that would prove to be the ideal polling station. Close liaison with accessibility experts will help to ensure that the best possible buildings are identified.

15.12 When initially choosing buildings to be used as polling stations or when reviewing existing polling stations, you should take the following factors into consideration.

Location of the building

15.13 The location of the building is important when considering whether or not it should be used as a polling station. If possible, it needs to be close to where voters live and to be fully accessible. Questions to ask are:

- Is it located close to where most of the electors in the polling district live?
- Is it at the top or bottom of a steep hill?
- Does it have suitable access from a road?
- If there is a pavement, does it have a dropped kerb close by?
- Are there any convenient public transport links?
- Is it safe and well-lit?

Parking facilities

15.14 Many electors drive to the polling station, including disabled people, so provision of parking spaces at polling stations is important. Factors to consider are:

- Are there adequate parking facilities close to the entrance of the building?
- If not, is there anywhere close by that could be used for parking just on polling day?
- How far do electors have to walk from the car park to the polling station?
- Is there a designated disabled parking space, or could one be provided?
- Is there a dropped kerb from the parking area to the polling station?
- Will there have to be temporary parking restrictions introduced that allow poll staff to park nearby and voters, especially disabled voters, to park for a period to allow voting? If so, you will need to liaise with the relevant departments within your council to get the necessary arrangements put in place.

Pathways

15.15 The approach from the road and car parking space should have a hard, smooth, non-slip surface, without steps, potholes, broken slabs or similar; it

⁵⁰ Rule 22(2), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

should not have any severe gradients; and should be well lit. Gravelled surfaces can present difficulties to wheelchair users.

Entrance

15.16 When assessing access to the main entrance to the building, the following factors should be considered:

- Does the building have a level entrance?
- Are there any steps to the entrance of the building?
- Are the stairs highlighted in any way?
- Is there a handrail by the steps?
- Is a permanent ramp provided?
- If not, could a temporary ramp with a suitable gradient be provided safely, or is there another entrance that disabled people or other electors could use?
- Is the door wide enough for a wheelchair user to gain access?
- How heavy are the doors for a frail or elderly person to open? Would the doors need to be propped open?

Inside the building

15.17 When assessing access inside the building, the following questions should be considered:

- Are there any internal steps or barriers for electors to negotiate?
- Are doormats level with the floor? If not, can they be removed?
- Are there any other trip hazards?
- Is there a suitable non-slip floor covering? Would it become slippery when wet?
- Are there any corridors which may be difficult to negotiate for any electors using wheelchairs or those who find walking difficult?
- In terms of the layout of polling equipment in the polling station room, is there enough space in the room for staff, polling equipment and a number of electors, including a wheelchair user?
- Is there adequate lighting in the room? Switch on all the lights available to test this. Is there any need for additional lighting?
- If the premises have movable mats, heavy curtains trailing on the floor, a mix of carpet and wooden flooring with edging lips in between, and highly polished floors – all of which can be potential hazards – can anything be done to remove or improve them?

Portable polling stations

15.18 Sometimes, there is no other option but to use a portable polling station, such as a Portakabin. Accessibility is a matter that should be discussed with suppliers of such accommodation. You should contact several different suppliers in order to compare what they can offer.

15.19 Loud generators that are sometimes used at portable polling stations can cause difficulties for all electors, and in particular for people with hearing difficulties, as well as being unpleasant for polling staff and people in

neighbouring properties. Use of such generators should be avoided if at all possible.

15.20 There are several other considerations that will need to be planned for if portable polling stations are to be used, including making road closure orders, if necessary, to accommodate the stations, providing toilet facilities for staff, connecting an electricity supply if generators are not used, and accurately describing the position of the polling station on poll cards and on street signage.

Booking polling stations

15.21 Since a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time, you should make contact with managers of premises as soon as possible.



Section 6, 'External partners' provides further details on making arrangements for booking polling stations.

15.22 The cooperation of the owners of premises is important in ensuring that polling places are accessible. You should ask owners if they are aware of any particular access issues with the premises which may cause difficulties on polling day. When booking polling places, you should also remind the owners of premises of the following:

- Any temporary ramps or other access facilities should be put in place for polling day.
- If there is a separate entrance to the building for disabled people, this needs to be well signed and kept open throughout polling day.
- If the polling station has a polished floor, this should not be polished before polling day, in order to minimise the risk of voters slipping or, at least, slip mats should be in place.

Last minute changes to polling stations

15.23 There may be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling station may be required at short notice. As part of your planning for the election, you should have compiled a list of stand-by polling stations or Portakabins that could be used in such circumstances.

15.24 As councils are responsible for designating polling places and polling districts rather than you as (Acting) Returning Officer, if possible and practical, you should designate a new polling station within the same polling place. As the location of a polling station within a polling place is your responsibility, there would be no need to seek separate council approval for such a change.

15.25 If, however, there is a need to change the polling place, council agreement will be required. If delegation procedures are in place, you should follow these as set out in the council's constitution and contact the person or persons who are entitled to make changes to the scheme of polling places.

15.26 You will need to remember to amend the notice of poll to reflect any changes to your polling stations.

15.27 There are a number of mitigating measures you can take to ensure that electors who are affected by a late change to a polling station are able to vote with minimum disruption. You could:

- if time allows, send out a letter to all affected electors informing them of the change to their polling station
- put up signs at the old polling place informing electors about the change in polling station and include directions to the new one
- display clear and visible signage at the new polling station (although this should be the case at all polling stations)
- if possible and necessary, offer a shuttle transport service from the old polling station to the new one (you would need to liaise with the relevant council to find out about any available means of transportation and insurance arrangements)

Polling station equipment, notices and supplies

15.28 As well as considering the locations to be used as polling stations, it is also important to consider the equipment used inside the polling station well in advance of polling day.

15.29 Each polling station should be equipped with a low level polling booth for use by wheelchair users. Reimbursable advances are available from the Ministry of Justice or Scotland Office for polling booths for voters with disabilities.

15.30 You should consider providing magnifying glasses for electors to use when voting, as this can be useful to assist those electors with visual impairments. Polling booths should be checked to ensure that they have sufficient light to allow those with a visual disability to clearly read the ballot paper and instructions. If in doubt, supplementary light should be provided. It is also helpful to place white or luminous strips around the slots on the top of ballot boxes, to make it easier for people to see where to place their ballot papers.

15.31 Each polling station must be supplied with a tactile voting device.⁵¹ These should be ordered well in advance of polling day.

15.32 At least one copy of the large-print ballot paper must be displayed prominently at each polling station.⁵² It is helpful to supply more than one large-print ballot paper for display in well lit and conspicuous locations in the polling station.

15.33 It is a legal requirement for you to provide an enlarged hand-held copy of the ballot paper (which must clearly be marked as a sample) for the

⁵¹ Rule 29(3A) (b) Schedule 1 Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁵² Section 199B(5) Representation of the People Act 1983.

assistance of voters who are partially sighted.⁵³ Laminating such samples will help to prevent them getting torn or dirty and it might be helpful to supply more than one copy for each polling station for voters to use.

15.34 In addition, if you consider it appropriate, all election notices and documentation, except for the ballot papers and nomination papers, may be translated into Braille and into languages other than English and, in Wales, Welsh. You can also use graphical representations or any other means of making the information accessible, such as audio.⁵⁴ For example, the 'guidance for voters' notice could be displayed pictorially or translated into languages widely used in the community.



Combination

If the UK Parliamentary election is combined with another election, you will have to ensure that the relevant polling stations have been supplied with equipment and election stationery for all relevant elections, including the large-print ballot papers, enlarged hand-held copies of the ballot paper and the relevant notices.

Appointment of Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks

15.35 You must appoint a Presiding Officer to attend each polling station, plus as many Poll Clerks as are necessary for the election. Numbers will depend on how busy you think the polling station will be, based on previous experience. You should also take into account the number of applications for postal votes when allocating staff, as, in an area with a large number of postal voters, fewer electors will be attending the polling station to vote in person.

15.36 The recommended ratios for staffing arrangements at the last UK Parliamentary general election were as follows:

- In addition to a Presiding Officer, there should be one Poll Clerk for 1,000 voters or less.
- One additional Poll Clerk may be appointed for the next 750 electors. A third Poll Clerk may be appointed to a polling station with up to a maximum of 2,500 electors.
- Wherever possible, a polling station should not have more than 2,500 electors allocated to it.

15.37 You should consider making arrangements for the allocation of multilingual staff to polling stations in any areas where particular languages (other than English and, in Wales, Welsh) are widely used within the community. Similarly, there may be disabled people who may be just as capable or better at polling duties than able-bodied people. People from all communities and backgrounds, with and without disabilities, should be encouraged to apply so that polling station staff can better reflect the wider electorate.

⁵³ Section 199B(7) and (8) Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁵⁴ Section 199B(2) and (3) Representation of the People Act 1983.

15.38 Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks should be issued with the notice of requirement as to secrecy at the polling station, Section 66(1), (3) and (6) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

15.39 For any polling staff who will not be able to vote at their own polling station because of their employment, the rules allow for you to authorise them to vote at any polling station within the constituency in which they are registered, by means of a certificate of employment.⁵⁵

15.40 Alternatively, polling staff may choose to apply for a postal vote, and many (Acting) Returning Officers provide an application form with the preliminary letter to potential polling staff, with information as to the deadline for applications.

Training on access issues for polling station staff

15.41 As a minimum, all polling station staff should be:

- trained in the use of tactile templates, which enable blind or partially sighted electors to vote without assistance
- made aware of the large-print ballot paper to be displayed in the polling station, the hand-held enlarged copy of the ballot paper which will be available for issue to voters, and any translations of official notices into alternative formats that you as (Acting) Returning Officer have deemed appropriate and will be providing to polling stations
- made aware of the importance of the layout of the polling station, including how to place notices, taking into account lighting levels, and how to offer assistance to disabled people
- made aware of the provisions which allow disabled people to have a companion to assist them to vote or to require the Presiding Officer to assist them
- made aware of the importance of speaking clearly, particularly to people who have a learning disability or hearing difficulties
- given advice on how to assist voters with learning disabilities
- provided with guidance notes on access issues to refer to on polling day
- provided with a checklist for issues to consider when setting up a polling station
- if appropriate, shown how to install any temporary ramps safely

15.42 Disability awareness training for polling station staff could be provided by the council's access officer or by local groups of disabled people who have the necessary expertise.



At each election there will be a number of people who are unfamiliar with the voting process, and so polling station staff should be trained to make the voting experience as clear and accessible as possible to **all** voters.

⁵⁵ Rule 32(3), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

16 Planning the count

16.1 The count is one of the most intense and pressurised parts of the election process, and is the focus of attention for candidates, agents, observers and the media following the close of poll.

16.2 The count procedures will be subjected to close scrutiny and it is therefore imperative that planning and preparation are carried out well in advance, so that any potential issues can be anticipated and you can take steps to mitigate the risks identified. It is essential that those attending have confidence in the processes followed by you and your staff, and accept the results announced as accurate.



We will produce a count preparation checklist that can be used as a quick guide to all the key issues that you need to think of when planning for the count. The checklist will be available for download from our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections. The paragraphs below focus on these key issues in greater detail.

Timing

16.3 As (Acting) Returning Officer you are required to make arrangements for the counting of the votes at the election as soon as practicable after the close of poll.⁵⁶ However, it is for you to decide whether to count on Thursday evening or on Friday morning taking into account local circumstances.

16.4 The most important thing is that the count is accurate and that voters have confidence in the election result. We all enjoy the excitement of election night and we understand the natural wish of candidates to know the result as soon as possible. But your responsibility is to make sure the results are accurate and accepted. Nothing is more important than that. It is entirely appropriate for you to decide to count on Friday if you think this is necessary to ensure an accurate result.

16.5 We recognise that managing an election count is a complicated task, and in making this decision you will have a number of issues to consider including geography, availability of staff and venues, the security of ballot boxes, and the volume and management of postal votes returned across the constituency.

16.6 Although many aspects of the forthcoming UK Parliamentary general election will be the same as previous general elections, there will also be significant differences including:

- This will be the first UK Parliamentary general election at which the legislative requirement to check the signatures and dates of birth on postal voting statements accompanying postal ballot papers will apply.

⁵⁶ Rule 44(1), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

- (Acting) Returning Officers responsible for constituencies that contain more than one council area will not only be responsible for verifying signatures and dates of birth on postal voting statements returned by electors from their own council area, but will also be responsible for verifying those from the other constituent council areas. In such cases there may be logistical difficulties in getting postal votes, received on polling day, to the count venue.

16.7 You should be able to provide the reasons for any decision regarding the timing of the count and explain these locally.

Count venue

16.8 The effectiveness of the count will rely on a suitable venue for which layout plans will need to be developed, taking into account your intended count process and workflows. The evaluation of the previous election should highlight any learning points as to the suitability of the venue(s) used previously, and produce a clear set of requirements for the selection of a count venue.

16.9 Since a UK Parliamentary general election can be called at any time and the period between the announcement and polling day may be as short as 17 working days, when looking at potential venues you will need to alert managers of premises to the fact that you may need access to their venue at short notice. You should identify venues, including alternative count venues as part of your contingency planning, as soon as possible and make sure that venue managers are aware of your requirements. You will need to consider the minimum notice periods for confirming the booking of the venue, and should consider seeking an agreement which will enable you to take precedence over any other pre-arranged bookings.

16.10 You will also need to ensure the venue has sufficient space to accommodate everyone entitled to attend the count, as well as the space required for your processes, particularly if you are also opening and verifying postal votes at the count venue. You should also give consideration to any IT, power supply and security requirements. Whichever venue is chosen must be accessible.

16.11 The following summarises some of the key factors to consider when you are choosing a count venue:

- availability for the time required to set up and conduct the proceedings
- convenience for candidates, agents and count staff (including proximity to public transport)
- access arrangements for vehicles and sufficient parking
- separate entrances for candidates, agents, guests, observers and staff, and for the delivery of the ballot boxes
- disabled access, both to and within the venue

- size of the venue in respect of the space required to conduct the count processes, including sufficient space (equipped with the appropriate infrastructure) for the opening of postal ballot papers, the checking of personal identifiers and the observation of these activities if they are to be carried out at the count venue; sufficient storage space for parcels, ballot boxes and other equipment, in addition to the space required for the count processes; and adequate space for count staff and other persons entitled to attend the count
- lighting within the venue
- platform or stage for announcing the result, and for making regular announcements throughout the proceedings as appropriate
- acoustics within the venue
- internal and external IT and communication systems
- toilet facilities
- facilities for candidates, agents, counting agents, Commission representatives and accredited observers – it can be useful to have a separate room equipped with a television set to help keep people occupied during the count
- media requirements
- catering or hospitality facilities
- furniture requirements: if there are insufficient tables and chairs in the venue, for example, these will need to be hired or acquired from another location
- security and storage requirements (particularly if counting on Friday).

Count layout plans

16.12 At an early stage, layout plans should be drawn up, bearing in mind the venue to be used and the procedures to be followed.



You will also need to supply a count layout plan to demonstrate that you meet performance standard 2 – Planning processes in place for an election.

16.13 In the development of such plans, consideration should be given to the workflows to be followed at the count. How you conduct the count will have a direct impact on your layout, and so you will need to make a decision as to how you want to organise your count at an early stage including, for example, deciding whether you will conduct a series of mini-counts on a ward basis or carry out one count covering the whole constituency.

16.14 Additionally, you need to ensure that candidates, agents, representatives of the Commission and accredited observers will have an unrestricted view of the proceedings, while also ensuring that they will not be able to interfere with the work of your staff.

16.15 During the course of the proceedings it is inevitable that agents and candidates will want to observe at close quarters, which may be distracting to staff. It may, therefore, be appropriate to use stands and ropes to keep

candidates and agents at a reasonable distance from the counting area but still sufficiently close to allow the whole process to be observed. No part of the process should take place out of the sight of candidates, agents and observers.

16.16 In considering how to organise the count, the following factors should also be taken into account:

- The number of tables to be used should accommodate the number of counting assistants to be employed.
- The layout of the tables should allow easy viewing by candidates, agents, accredited observers and representatives of the Commission.
- All procedures adopted by you and your staff should be transparent at all times and explained where necessary. Make sure that everything you do at the count is carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend the count.
Practices such as sorting ballot papers should be conducted in an area that can be viewed by all candidates, agents, observers and representatives of the Commission at any given time.
- In providing for the number of counting agents to be admitted to the proceedings, every effort should be made to ensure that the numbers for each candidate are not fewer than the number obtained by dividing the number of your counting assistants by the number of candidates standing. In any event, the number permitted to attend should not be such as to risk impeding the efficient conduct of the proceedings or be in breach of fire regulations.
- Circulation areas and the amount of space available in the vicinity of the count tables should be maximised at all times, and any obstructions such as stored furniture should be removed.
- Sufficient seating facilities should be provided for candidates, agents, observers and representatives of the Commission, ideally away from the count tables so that conversations may be had while not risking distracting the count staff.
- You are ultimately responsible for the health and safety of all persons present and this duty of care should be kept in mind when deciding on the layout of the venue: for example, any cabling from equipment or media cameras should not present a trip hazard to anyone at the proceedings; and free access to emergency exits should not be obstructed in any way. Maximum venue capacity should not be exceeded and there must be appropriate security to ensure that only those eligible to attend actually do so.

16.17 All equipment should be tested in advance of the count, which may include public announcement systems, telephone lines, mobile phones, photocopying and computing equipment, scanning equipment for verifying postal voting personal identifiers, and power points. Contingency plans should be in place in case of an equipment or power malfunction.

16.18 Sufficient time should be allocated for setting up. Depending on the location, it may be difficult, or indeed impossible, to retrieve anything from the

election office once the verification has started and so all equipment and materials should be checked in advance. On this basis, you should prepare a checklist of all materials, including stationery and equipment that will be needed at the count venue, which could include:

- signing-in sheets for staff
- list of all staff
- spare copies of instructions for staff
- sample entrance passes, including samples of the identification badges held by Commission representatives and accredited observers
- verification sheets – if a laptop is to be used, the spreadsheets should be prepared in advance; it is advisable to also have paper copies of the spreadsheets in case of equipment failure
- postal ballot boxes and related envelopes
- PC/laptop, printer and photocopier
- result sheets
- statement of ballot papers rejected
- ‘rejected’ stamp and ink pad
- ‘provisionally rejected’ stamp for any final postal vote opening
- sorting trays (which could be marked with the names of the candidates)
- cards to divide counted ballot papers, e.g. marked in 100s
- electoral law reference books, Commission guidance manuals and other guidance materials
- letter openers and scissors
- sacks and ties for counted ballot papers
- packets or envelopes for rejected ballot papers
- assorted stationery items, including marker pens, pencils, rulers, adhesive tape, notepaper, string, rubber thimbles, paper clips and rubber bands
- calculators
- large box or other receptacle for the mixing and storage of verified ballot papers if empty ballot boxes are not to be used for that purpose
- materials used in the equality of votes (e.g., an unused pack of cards, slips of paper, etc.)

Designated areas

16.19 Areas need to be designated for the different count functions, and be appropriately furnished and equipped. You will need to consider this when developing your count layout plans, and may wish to consider designating the following areas.

Outside the count venue

16.20 **Car parking and vehicle access** – The organisation of vehicle access around the verification and count venue should be considered carefully. It is advisable to designate different parking areas for candidates, agents and accredited observers, and for staff. It can also be helpful to have a designated

entrance and exit to the car park, which may help to avoid congestion when ballot boxes are arriving from the polling stations.

16.21 It may be useful to have staff supervising the car park at this time. Any staff working in the car parking area should be equipped with appropriate safety wear such as high-visibility jackets, and should be appropriately trained to deal with a large volume of traffic including, for example, candidates and agents arriving at the proceedings and polling station staff arriving with ballot boxes.

16.22 **Entrance** – Staff should be positioned at the entrance to the venue to check the identity of people wishing to enter the count. They should be provided with lists of those permitted to attend, including staff, candidates, agents and guests, and with information regarding the possible attendance of accredited observers and representatives of the Electoral Commission who do not need to be on the list of attendees. They should be instructed to check all tickets, entrance passes and accreditation identification as appropriate. It is important for health and safety and security reasons to record who actually attends the count.

16.23 Anyone not on the list of those permitted to attend or not in possession of the photographic identification issued to accredited observers and representatives of the Electoral Commission, examples of which are shown in Section 19, 'Election observers', should not be allowed in without the consent of the (Acting) Returning Officer. It should be made clear to the candidates and agents and any other interested individuals in advance that entry to the count will be restricted to those on the (Acting) Returning Officer's list of those entitled to attend and any accredited observers and representatives of the Commission.

16.24 Those entitled to attend the count should be permitted to attend all or part of the proceedings as they so choose. There is no requirement for those eligible to attend to arrive by a certain time, and so those entitled to attend should be admitted whenever they arrive. For example, entry to the verification by those eligible to attend must not be restricted in the event that they arrive later than the advertised start of the process, particularly as candidates and agents have the right to attend the close of poll at polling stations and affix their seals to the ballot boxes and may therefore arrive some time after the count has begun, nor should any person who wishes to leave and return later be prevented from doing so.

Inside the count venue

16.25 **Receiving area** – This area is where ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts and other polling station stationery and equipment will arrive for checking in and sorting. Ideally, this area should have an entrance separate from that used by other staff, candidates, agents and observers, with direct access from the car park or loading area. Staff should be positioned here to receive the materials and should be equipped with a checklist to mark off the ballot boxes as they arrive. Where the Presiding Officer delivers the ballot boxes and other materials to the verification venue themselves, receiving staff

should ensure that all items are accounted for before the Presiding Officer leaves. A cursory check of the arithmetic of the ballot paper account could also be undertaken if possible at that time to allow explanations of any obvious discrepancies to be sought from the Presiding Officer. There should also be sufficient space for storage.

16.26 Reconciliation, verification and results table(s) – This is where verification staff will verify the contents of the ballot boxes. If laptops are to be used, cabling arrangements should be taken into account and contingency arrangements should be considered in the event of equipment failure. Staff receiving ballot boxes should take the ballot paper accounts to the verification table(s), where supervisors will check their verified totals.

16.27 (Acting) Returning Officer's table – This is where election law textbooks, Electoral Commission guidance, procedure notes, spare instructions, staff lists, stationery and other guidance materials should be available for quick reference.

16.28 Count tables – These should provide proper segregation for the staff and counting agents, possibly using physical barriers. You may wish to tape card around the edge of the tables to prevent agents leaning on them. Sufficient stationery should be provided at each table. Where space permits, chairs should be provided for counting agents.

16.29 Postal voting – Where postal votes are verified on site at the count venue, a separate area should be allocated for processing unopened postal votes received from polling stations. There may be a considerable number, and the personal identifiers of not less than 20% of these will need to be verified. Adequate space should be allocated to receive and verify these postal votes, and to allow observation of this process. Where the personal identifier verification is to be undertaken via an automated system, network and cabling arrangements must be considered, as should contingency arrangements in the event of system failure.

16.30 Tables for counted ballot papers – Once ballot papers have been separated and counted, they may be placed in bundles for candidates and put on a separate table, so that all the votes for each party or candidate are kept in the same pile, with card dividers to show an agreed number, such as 100.

16.31 Area for candidates, agents and candidates' guests – It may be beneficial to have a separate area set aside for candidates, agents and candidates' guests. If space permits, a television set could be provided in an adjacent room.

16.32 Area for refreshments – Consider providing an area where counting assistants and other staff can get drinks and snacks. It is important to have adequate refreshments available to help to maintain staff energy and concentration levels throughout the process. It is not advisable to let counting assistants eat or drink at the table while they are counting, in order to avoid the possibility of any spillages.

16.33 It is for you to decide whether to provide refreshments for candidates, agents and other attendees, and whether to charge for them.

16.34 **Media area** – The requirements for the media area will depend upon the types of media represented and their respective needs. Ensure that media representatives do not interfere with or compromise the secrecy of the process. If television cameras are present, any lighting should not cause undue heat or glare which might impair the efficiency of the count, and cameras must not be allowed to film close-ups of the ballot papers. In addition, it is important that there are no trailing cables for other count attendees to trip over, and that any equipment installed is safely positioned.

16.35 The following should be considered when planning media facilities at the count:

- Contact principal broadcast organisations in advance
- Outline the press facilities available. Remember it is you and not the media who has the final say as to what is allowable at the count centre
- Media outlets may well wish to check the count centre in advance, particularly if they intend to carry out filming on the night
- Provide an opportunity for media representatives to inspect the count centre to identify space for interview purposes and also for parking vehicles, and to identify cable routes, assess power supplies and highlight communication requirements (such as telephone or ISDN lines)
- Make arrangements for indicating completion of the count, and discuss declaration procedures
- Arrange for sound systems to be used for the announcement and any live feed
- Make accreditation arrangements for journalists, technicians and photographers attending
- Designate an area of the count venue for media use
- Provide media passes
- Make those attending aware of the secrecy provisions
- Ensure that there is a nominated media spokesperson in place for the count, and that everyone is aware who this is and that all questions should be directed to that person
- Make sure that the media are aware of any restricted areas and procedures – for example, ensure that camera operators are aware that they must not overview sensitive information (such as close-ups of ballot papers) or obstruct count staff

16.36 It is advisable to ensure that the council's public relations team are present to deal with media enquiries, although you should brief them ahead of the count and make sure that they know who to approach if they are asked any technical questions.

16.37 In addition to making practical arrangements for their attendance, any early contact with the media should also include an explanation of the counting processes to be followed and the expected finish and declaration

times. You should also ensure that they are aware of the requirements as to secrecy.



For further guidance on dealing with the media and planning for their attendance at the count, see Section 13, 'Communication'.

Accessibility

16.38 Although the count is not open to the public in the same way as polling stations are, access issues should still be taken into account when deciding on venues, as those entitled to attend may have disabilities or have other access needs. The following factors should be taken into consideration when choosing a count venue:

- the location of the building
- lighting (especially if verifying or counting overnight)
- parking facilities
- the entrance and how accessible it is
- any internal steps or barriers to those attending
- floor coverings

Health and safety

16.39 You are ultimately responsible for the health and safety of all persons who are present during the count proceedings. You should use your risk register to identify any hazards or vulnerable areas within the count centre and carry out any appropriate remedial action.

16.40 You should encourage your staff to give consideration to health and safety issues during the preparatory work involved in setting up the count centre, in order to minimise the possibility of risk to those attending the count proceedings.

16.41 Special consideration should be given to polished floor surfaces, and whether secure temporary flooring would be more appropriate. Trailing leads or cables should also be avoided. Access arrangements to any raised area must also be considered, such as to a stage to be used for the declaration of the result, particularly with regard to older or disabled people.

16.42 Instructions should be given to staff on the manual handling of ballot boxes, parcels and large batches of ballot papers. Measures should also be taken to ensure that any sharp edges on racking or table surfaces are appropriately covered or marked. Staff engaged in ballot box opening should be instructed in the safe usage of any implements used to cut open the security seals.

16.43 It is advisable to have first aid personnel available throughout the course of the proceedings. These personnel should be easily identifiable and

it may be appropriate to designate a place in the count centre where those who need assistance can go should they require any treatment.

16.44 In order to stress the importance of health and safety considerations and to draw attention to, for example, fire evacuation routes and the prohibition on smoking, you could consider preparing and distributing an explanatory count layout leaflet to all those attending the proceedings, which could be incorporated into any information booklet provided in advance of the proceedings. By providing such information, the possibility of risk or injury to those attending will be restricted to an absolute minimum.

16.45 This leaflet could also serve to highlight other related arrangements such as car parking, refreshment areas (if provided), toilet accommodation, reception services and security arrangements.

Staffing and training

16.46 In order for the count to be successful, there needs to be an adequate number of well-briefed staff. The following staff are an example of some of those typically employed:

- Deputy (Acting) Returning Officers – to make decisions on doubtful ballot papers and to give the result should you request they do so, or become unable to do so.
- Count assistants – an adequate number to verify and count the votes efficiently.
- Count supervisors – to supervise the count assistants effectively.
- Staff to receive ballot boxes as they arrive from the polling stations – these staff can then be used to open and count the unused ballot papers and to pack up documents and stationery.
- Staff at the entrance/security staff – to check entrance passes and tickets to ensure that only authorised persons are admitted to the count and that order is maintained within the count.
- Reconciliation staff – to check the ballot paper accounts. These staff are particularly important and should be skilled with figures and at spotting irregularities.
- Postal vote staff – to deal with the postal votes returned from polling stations and Royal Mail sweeps.
- Porters – for moving items, such as ballot boxes and sacks of stationery, around the venue.
- Car park attendants – to supervise activity outside the venue.

16.47 When deciding on the number of staff required, looking at the numbers of counters used at the last UK Parliamentary general election, or other previous elections, can be a good starting point. You should also consider the ratio of ballot papers to staff at previous elections. An evaluation of how adequate the numbers were last time can then be used to inform your decision. You will also need to consider how you will organise your count at the UK Parliamentary election and, based on an estimate of turnout, work out how many ballot papers you will likely need to deal with. Taken together,

these factors should help you to reach a decision as to how many staff you want to employ.

16.48 Most (Acting) Returning Officers will have a database of staff used at previous elections. Staff can often be recruited from among council employees. Also, some councils use bank and building society staff to count the ballot papers. If counting immediately following the close of poll, it is preferable, if at all possible, not to use staff who have been on polling duty all day.

16.49 You should identify potential staff now and make provisional arrangements. Once the election has been called you should confirm availability of staff as soon as possible. Once responses have been received, you should issue formal letters of appointment with details of the reporting time at the commencement of the proceedings and an outline of the procedures to be followed. This letter of appointment could also incorporate the requirements as to secrecy⁵⁷ and a statement setting out that they cannot assist or work for any party or candidate during the election. It is advisable to request that count staff confirm acceptance of their appointment. This can be done by asking them to complete and return a suitably worded form or, depending on timescales, you could consider arranging for the elections office to confirm the appointment via phone or email.

16.50 You should consider the benefits of briefing supervisory staff a day or two in advance of the count so that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them. Counting staff may then be briefed just prior to the commencement of the relevant proceedings. They should, however, be issued with guidance notes in advance.

Communication at the count

16.51 You should consider how information on the count process can be effectively provided to those attending the count both in advance of the proceedings and at the venue itself in order to allow them to meaningfully observe all of the processes and to build confidence in the administration of the count.

16.52 Providing information on the counting process can also help to lower the number of queries raised by candidates and agents, thus reducing the pressure on those working at the count.



In order to meet performance standard 7 – communication of information to candidates and agents, you will have to be able to demonstrate that you have provided information to candidates and agents on the count process, giving details of what they can expect and setting out the procedures to be followed.

⁵⁷ All count staff must be provided with a copy of Section 66(2) and (6) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

16.53 To assist in providing those attending with maximum information about facilities and procedures, you could provide information booklets in advance, giving details of what to expect at the count and setting out the procedures to be followed. Pre-election briefing sessions could also be held, or agents could be invited to witness briefing sessions for count supervisors.

16.54 You should consider the following when planning for the provision of information at the count venue:

- placing information posters and boards throughout the count venue which show the key members of staff and provide an overview of the procedures to be followed
- providing a layout plan of the venue, indicating the key areas of interest for candidates, agents and observers
- providing pictures of yourself and your key staff, to help candidates and agents identify you at the count
- appointing a staff member to respond to queries and to act as liaison between candidates, agents, observers and key staff
- using a public address system to make simple announcements about what is happening when and where
- providing a hand-out listing all ballot box numbers and the names of the polling stations they relate to

16.55 Clear signage and announcements should be used so that all present can be aware of what part of the process is being conducted where at any given time. Circulation areas for candidates and agents and the amount of space available in the vicinity of the count tables should be maximised within the constraints of the venue, while at all times safeguarding the integrity of the proceedings and the safety of the staff. Obstructions such as stored furniture should be removed.

16.56 If any candidates or agents are dissatisfied in any way with the manner in which the proceedings are being carried out, the opportunity should always be available for them to make direct representations to you as (Acting) Returning Officer at the earliest time so that any concerns may be considered, explanations and reassurances given, and corrective action taken if necessary.



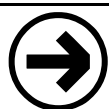
Openness and transparency at the count are essential. Any procedures conducted away from the valid scrutiny of candidates and agents risks detracting from the confidence candidates and agents should have in the result.

Security

16.57 You should contact your local police force at an early stage in your planning to inform them of the venue and plans for the proceedings. It may be helpful to meet with the police on site at the venue in advance of the election, when they may be able to give further advice on security. The police may wish to undertake security checks at the venue, and may also attend the

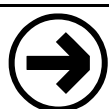
proceedings. The police do not have an automatic right of access to the count but should be permitted to attend as guests of the (Acting) Returning Officer.

16.58 At all proceedings, staff should be alert and report any suspicious packages or activity to the (Acting) Returning Officer. Contingency plans should be in place in case of any security alerts such as bomb threats or other emergency situations, including an evacuation of the venue in the event of a fire alarm. Consideration should be given to developing a policy for the security of the ballot boxes and papers during any such evacuation, which should ensure that any process does not risk staff safety. This should all form part of your wider, formal risk assessment exercise.



Further information on developing risk registers can be found in Section 4, 'Planning the election'. The performance standards template plans we have developed also include risk registers, which you can adapt to fit your local circumstances. You can download these from: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

16.59 Only authorised people should be admitted to the proceedings. All staff, candidates and their guests, agents, media representatives and persons permitted to attend at the (Acting) Returning Officer's discretion should be issued with an entrance pass or ticket and be informed that they will not be allowed into the venue unless they bring their pass or ticket. Lists should be compiled of all those who have been provided with a pass in advance of the count. Commission representatives and accredited observers must be admitted on the basis of their Commission-issued identification badges, and should not be required to show passes issued by the (Acting) Returning Officer.



For examples of the identification badges issued by the Commission to its representatives and accredited observers, see Section 19, 'Election observers'.

16.60 Staff should be appointed to control admission to the count and check the admission passes against the master list. The names of all attendees should also be logged, both to assist in the event of an emergency evacuation and to provide to the police if required in the event of a civil disturbance or challenge to the election.

16.61 Security procedures must be in place for the storage of ballot boxes and the ballot papers, to be implemented where there is a break in the proceedings or where you have decided to count on Friday. The method of storage must be such that you can be satisfied that you have taken adequate steps to ensure that the ballot papers are kept securely and cannot be interfered with. You should also communicate your arrangements to candidates and agents, as confidence in the election result will in part depend on all participants being satisfied that robust security measures have been put in place.

Other considerations

16.62 You should decide in advance on a policy on alcohol and the use of mobile phones in the count centre and communicate this to those attending. You will also need to consider whether or not to allow the use of mobile phones, laptops or other electronic communication and recording equipment by other than your staff in the immediate count area. The rules on smoking in public places and workplaces apply to any count centre and therefore smoking should be prohibited.

17 Candidates and agents

Information to candidates and agents

17.1 There may be large numbers of 'first-time' candidates and agents who may not be aware of the process and what's required of them, so it is crucial that you provide candidates and agents with relevant information and offer briefing sessions.



In order to meet performance standard 7 – communication of information for candidates and agents, you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have provided information to candidates and agents through briefing sessions and written guidance on the nomination process, postal vote opening and count process.



General guidance on pre-election briefings for candidates and agents can be found in Section 13, 'Communication'.

17.2 You should prepare your briefing sessions as soon as possible so that you are in a position to be able to brief candidates and agents whenever the election is called. The list below offers some suggestions as to what your briefings could cover:

- qualifications and disqualifications
- the nominations process
- the election timetable
- the appointment of agents (including polling and counting agents)
- the code of conduct on handling of postal votes
- what to expect on day of poll
- what to expect at the opening of postal votes
- information on the count
- candidates expenses rules
- any local arrangements
- contacts and general information

17.3 You should also prepare a nomination pack for any candidate that expresses an interest in standing for election. Each pack should contain as a minimum:

- nomination form
- consent to nomination
- home address form
- authorisation of party description and use of emblem forms
- details of how the deposit should be paid, including full details of acceptable methods of payment

- details of how to obtain the electoral register and absent vote lists, including contact details of the Electoral Registration Officer(s) in the constituency
- other local relevant information
- a print out or link to the Commission's guidance for candidates and agents, including a link or print out to the Commission's guidance on election spending



We will produce guidance for candidates and agents at the next UK Parliamentary general election, as well as nomination papers.

We have also produced a factsheet on the process of standing for election that you can provide to anyone enquiring about the process for becoming a candidate. The factsheet can be downloaded from our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

You can also direct candidates to our webpage containing guidance on party and election finance at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/candidates-agents/candidates-and-agents.

Nominations

17.4 While not a statutory requirement, we strongly recommend that you offer candidates informal checks of nomination papers prior to formal submission. Informal checks may help to uncover any errors and allow candidates to submit a fresh nomination paper before the close of nominations. If you decide to offer informal checks you should consider how you are going to manage this process, for example by putting in place an appointment system.



Giving candidates the opportunity to have informal checks of their nomination papers is also a requirement for meeting performance standard 7 - communication of information to candidates and agents.

Deposits

17.5 In order to be validly nominated, candidates must submit a deposit of £500 by the close of nominations, along with all of the relevant nomination papers.⁵⁸

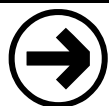
17.6 The deposit may be made by legal tender, by means of a banker's draft or, with your consent, in any other manner, which includes payment by credit or debit card and the electronic transfer of funds.⁵⁹

17.7 Credit or debit card and electronic transfer payments can only be made with your consent and so you will need to give consideration to what you will

⁵⁸ Rule 9, Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁵⁹ Rule 9, Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

accept. Whatever you decide, you need to be sure that you have received the £500 prior to the close of nominations. If you do decide to accept card and transfer payments you will need to consider how you could authenticate such payments, for example via the internet or a bank statement to confirm that you have received the full amount.



More detailed guidance on deposits will be provided in Part B, 'Action before the poll' of our manual for (Acting) Returning Officers, *Managing a UK Parliamentary general election*.

Freepost

17.8 Every candidate standing at a UK Parliamentary election is entitled to free postage on an election address to be sent out across the constituency. Candidates wishing to make use of this provision should be advised to contact Royal Mail to make arrangements.

17.9 It is, however, your responsibility as (Acting) Returning Officer to make arrangements for sending freepost election material to anonymously registered electors, as their details cannot be given to candidates. This will require using the list of anonymous electors provided by the Electoral Registration Officer(s) for your constituency to produce envelopes for sending the material to these electors.

17.10 All materials must comply with Royal Mail specifications for freepost arrangements, and so you should consider waiting for confirmation that the material has been sent out by Royal Mail to other electors to ensure that it satisfies the freepost requirements.

Use of schools and rooms by candidates⁶⁰

17.11 Local education authorities in England and Wales and education authorities in Scotland are required to maintain a list of rooms in school premises that candidates are entitled to use for election meetings. Similarly, the Electoral Registration Officer of each council must keep a list of the location and availability of other suitable meeting rooms in the electoral area.

17.12 Candidates and their election agents are entitled to inspect these lists at all reasonable times in the period between the publication of the notice of election and the day before polling day. You should liaise with the appropriate officer(s) at the relevant council(s) to obtain information on the location(s) of those lists so that you can communicate this to candidates and agents.

17.13 In broad terms, the rooms that can be used are those funded by the local education authorities and councils. For example, in England and Wales, candidates can use suitable rooms in any community, foundation or voluntary school in the constituency, and if no such rooms are available, candidates can

⁶⁰ Section 95 and Schedule 5, Representation of the People Act 1983.

use any school in an adjacent constituency. In Scotland, candidates can use suitable rooms in any school that is not an independent school within the meaning of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Any public meeting room situated in the constituency that is supported out of public funds may also be used. Candidates will need to pay for any expenses incurred during the meeting, such as heating, lighting and cleaning, and for any damage to the premises.⁶¹

17.14 Candidates and agents should be advised to contact owners of these facilities with reasonable notice or their request may be declined. The right to use the rooms described above does not authorise any interference with the hours during which a school is used for educational purposes, or with the prior letting of a meeting room.

17.15 You may wish to advise candidates and agents that the legislation defines a public meeting room as a room which it is the practice to let for public meetings, and so a specific room that they may have had the intention of using may not be on the list maintained by the Electoral Registration Officer.⁶²

⁶¹ Section 95(4), RPA 1983, as applied by Section 96(4), RPA 1983.

⁶² Section 95(7), Representation of the People Act 1983.

18 Electoral integrity



In order to meet performance standard 4 - maintaining the integrity of an election, you are required to:

- ensure that links with local police and/or single point of contact (SPOC) have been developed
- have a written integrity plan in place
- ensure you work with political parties, candidates and other relevant bodies to prevent electoral malpractice.

Your integrity plan should contain as a minimum:

- an outline of steps to be taken to deal with concerns of electoral malpractice
- a risk assessment that identifies and notes action to take to tackle any concerns about electoral malpractice

The Commission has developed a template integrity plan as part of our template planning materials which, if adapted to fit your local circumstances, could be used to assist you in working towards meeting the standard. You can download the template from:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

Dealing with allegations of offences at the election

18.1 Although you and your staff are uniquely placed to identify malpractice, you have no power to investigate allegations of electoral fraud or malpractice. Any allegations or suspicions should be promptly referred to the police Single Point of Contact (SPOC).

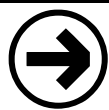
18.2 In England and Wales, the police should be alerted to Section 181 of the RPA 1983, which places a duty on the Director of Public Prosecutions (who is head of the Crown Prosecution Service) to undertake investigations into allegations of electoral fraud or malpractice. The Crown Prosecution Service urges the police to discuss allegations of electoral malpractice with their Special Crime Division in York or London at an early stage.



In Scotland, the police will carry out the necessary investigations into the alleged offence with a view to submitting a report for consideration by the Procurator Fiscal. The Procurator Fiscal will consider the evidence and all of the circumstances of the case in order to reach a decision as to whether criminal proceedings are appropriate. Where possible, the police will keep the relevant Returning Officer informed of progress.

18.3 Early contact with relevant police contacts is important. In addition to meeting in advance of the election being called, you should also arrange a follow-up meeting to take place once nominations have closed.

18.4 In addition to existing police contacts, you should make sure that you have the details of the relevant force's SPOC for electoral matters.



If you need additional information or advice on the handling and referral of electoral allegations or are having difficulties in making contact with your police SPOC, you can contact:

Richard Jordan
The Electoral Commission
Senior Adviser – Electoral Integrity
Tel: 020 7271 0562
Email: rjordan@electoralcommission.org.uk

Security

18.5 You should review previous arrangements in respect of security issues with the local police, to enable proper consideration of risk management options. This will provide a firm basis for clear communication lines should any incidents occur during the election period. This will normally include making specific arrangements for police officers to attend at polling stations, or to call in during polling day, and discussing any security issues relating to the count. Polling station staff should be given contact numbers for use in the event of problems, which should include a point of contact with the police.

Secrecy provisions

18.6 Secret voting has been a feature of elections in the UK since 1872. The concept of a secret ballot is enshrined in the First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, which is part of UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998. At a practical level, the legislation makes it clear that:

- the poll shall be taken by ballot
- the official mark shall be kept secret and the same official mark shall not be used again at elections for the same constituency for seven years⁶³
- in any legal proceedings relating to the election, no person shall be required to state for whom they voted
- the voter shall secretly mark their ballot paper and fold it so as to conceal the vote (the requirement for folding applies only to those voting at polling stations and not to those voting by post)

18.7 Section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 makes provision regarding secrecy of voting and to that end requires that the various persons concerned with the conduct of the election shall not communicate:

- the names of persons who have or have not voted
- the elector numbers of voters
- the official mark
- the candidate for whom a voter has voted

⁶³ Rules 20(1) and (2), Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

- the number or other unique identifying mark on the reverse of a ballot paper

18.8 All persons attending a polling station (other than for the purpose of voting or persons under the age of 18 years accompanying a voter), staff involved in the issue of postal votes, and all persons attending the opening of postal votes and the count, must be provided with a copy of the relevant parts of the secrecy provisions as set out in Section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. This can conveniently be done by printing the relevant details on admission documentation issued to candidates, election agents, polling agents and counting agents. In the case of Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and counting staff and staff involved in the issue and receipt of postal votes, this could be incorporated into their appointment notification.

18.9 Contravention of the secrecy requirements is an offence, and on summary conviction, an individual found to be in breach is liable to a fine not exceeding £5,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.⁶⁴

Key electoral offences

18.10 There are a number of electoral offences specified in the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the key offences are listed below:

Undue influence: where an individual, directly or indirectly, makes use of or threatens to make use of force, violence or restraint; or inflicts or threatens to inflict injury, damage or harm in order to induce or compel any voter to vote or refrain from voting.⁶⁵ This offence includes intention and not just where an act has taken place. A person may be guilty of undue influence if they impede or prevent, or intend to impede or prevent, the free exercise of the franchise of an elector.

Bribery: where any individual, directly or indirectly, gives any money or procures any office to or for any voter, in order to induce any voter to vote or not to vote for a particular candidate; or to vote or refrain from voting.⁶⁶

Treating: where either before, during or after an election, any person, directly or indirectly, gives or provides (or pays wholly or in part the expense of giving or providing) any food, drink, entertainment or provision in order to influence corruptly any voter to vote or refrain from voting.⁶⁷

Personation: where any individual votes as someone else (whether that other person is living or dead or is a fictitious person), either by post or in person at a polling station as an elector or as a proxy. Further, the individual voting can be deemed guilty of personation if they vote on behalf of a person they have reasonable grounds for supposing is dead or fictitious, or where they have

⁶⁴ Section 66(6), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁶⁵ Section 115(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁶⁶ Section 113(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁶⁷ Section 114(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

reasonable grounds for supposing the proxy appointment is no longer in force.⁶⁸

Postal and proxy voting: where an individual applies for a postal or proxy vote as some other person, otherwise makes a false statement in connection with an application for a postal or proxy vote, induces an Electoral Registration Officer or an (Acting) Returning Officer to send a postal vote or associated communication to an address which has not been agreed by the person entitled to vote, or causes a postal or proxy voting communication not to be delivered to the intended recipient.⁶⁹

False information in nomination papers: where a person knowingly gives false information in a nomination paper or in their consent to nomination, they are guilty of a corrupt practice⁷⁰.

False information in relation to registration: where an individual, for any purpose in connection with the registration of electors, provides false information to the Electoral Registration Officer in connection with the registration of electors, that person is guilty of an offence.⁷¹

18.11 It is also an offence to aid or abet the commission of the above offences.



Information regarding these offences will also be included in our *Guidance for candidates and agents* and our guidance to police forces. Copies of these will be available for download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/integrity-guidance/electoral-events and www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/

Non-electoral offences

18.12 In addition to contravention of the secrecy requirements, and the offences outlined above, there are a number of non-electoral offences that may also be relevant in an election context. In England and Wales, such examples include:

- making a false statement (Perjury Act 1911)
- forgery and using a false instrument (Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981)
- harassment (Protection from Harassment Act 1997)
- public order offences (Public Order Act 1986)

⁶⁸ Section 60(2), Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁶⁹ Section 40, EAA 2006.

⁷⁰ Section 65A, Representation of the People Act 1983

⁷¹ Section 13D, Representation of the People Act 1983.



A false statement is a false oath in Scotland under Section 44 of the Criminal Law (Consolidation)(Scotland) Act 1995. Forgery is known as 'uttering as genuine a false document' under Scots common law. Harassment is not a criminal offence in Scotland, but a person could be charged with breach of the peace (under common law) or a civil action could be taken. Vandalism is an offence under the 1995 Act.

19 Election observers

19.1 The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (as amended) makes provision allowing Electoral Commission representatives and observers accredited by the Commission to observe specified electoral proceedings.⁷²

19.2 Representatives of the Commission are entitled to observe the working practices of the Electoral Registration Officer and the (Acting) Returning Officer, as well as the proceedings at the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, the poll and the counting of the votes.

19.3 Other individuals or organisations may apply to the Commission to be accredited to observe the proceedings at:

- the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers
- the poll
- the counting of the votes

19.4 All observers are required to adhere to the Commission's Code of Practice for observers.



Our Code of practice for observers and relevant electoral officers can be downloaded from our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/electoral_observers.

19.5 Commission representatives can ask questions of electors, registration and election staff, including at the polling station and count, and also of candidates and agents, but they will not do so if this would obstruct or disturb the conduct of electoral proceedings or working practices.

19.6 Electoral observation is a legitimate and valuable part of the electoral process, and care should be taken not to hinder or obstruct the conduct of the observation. Although you are entitled to limit the number of observers who may be present at any proceedings,⁷³ the Commission advises that caution should be used in the exercise of this power. It is important to note that you or your staff are not entitled to bar all observers from a process, only to limit the number of observers present at any one time. Therefore, when selecting venues for the different electoral proceedings you must ensure that sufficient space can be made available for observers.

19.7 In all instances, you or your staff should only seek to limit the number of observers if their presence is hindering the conduct of the proceedings or jeopardising the secrecy of the ballot.



19.8 Accredited observers and Commission representatives do not need to give you advance notification of where they intend to observe, but will carry

⁷² Sections 6A-6F, PPERA.

⁷³ Section 6E, PPERA.

photographic identification. Every observer will have been supplied with an observer badge produced by the Commission, which they must wear when attending proceedings.

Quick guide to the observer badge types

Observer badge type	Who are they?	Access
	Electoral Commission representatives	Extended powers of access
	Observers accredited by the Commission	Same as candidates and agents, plus access to the issue of postal votes

19.9 If you are in doubt about the status of a particular individual seeking to gain access to a process, you can check the online registers of observers that list all observers accredited by the Commission. These are available to download from our website at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/electoral_observers.

20 Key contact details

20.1 This section contains a number of contact details you may find useful.

Electoral Commission

20.2 Section 10 of PPERA allows the Commission to provide advice and assistance to Electoral Registration Officers, (Acting) Returning Officers and registered political parties. The Commission cannot, however, give a definitive legal view on any subject as this is ultimately a matter for a court to decide in any particular case.

Devolved and English offices

20.3 The first point of contact for any queries on the administration of the election should be either the Commission's office in Scotland or Wales or the Commission's English regional office covering the (Acting) Returning Officer's constituency, as appropriate.

Scotland Office

David Freeland

Tel: 0131 225 0208

Email: dfreeland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales Office

Kay Jenkins

Tel: 029 203 46801

Email: kjenkins@electoralcommission.org.uk

Eastern and South East Office

James Steele

Tel: 020 7271 0600

Email: jsteele@electoralcommission.org.uk

John Pollard

Tel: 020 72710660

Email: jpollard@electoralcommission.org.uk

London Office

Peter Dawson

Tel: 0207 271 0689

Email: pdawson@electoralcommission.org.uk

Midlands Office

East Midlands and West Midlands

Gail Emmerson

Tel: 024 7682 0087

Email: gemmerson@electoralcommission.org.uk

North of England Office

North East and Yorkshire & the Humber
Sarah Seavers
Tel: 01904 567994
Email: sseavers@electoralcommission.org.uk

North West
Sandra Hardy
Tel: 01904 567993
Email: shardy@electoralcommission.org.uk

South West Office

South West
Elizabeth Gorst
Tel: 01392 314616
Email: egorst@electoralcommission.org.uk

Integrity

20.4 For guidance or advice on dealing with matters of electoral malpractice, fraud and related integrity issues, please contact:

Richard Jordan
Senior Adviser (Electoral Integrity)
Tel: 020 7271 0562

Karen Quintmere
Head of Electoral Administration
Tel: 020 7271 0607

Party registration and political parties

20.5 For advice on registration and political parties, please contact:

Party and Election Finance

Tel: 020 7271 0616
Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/candidates-agents

20.6 In Scotland and Wales, please contact:

Scotland

Mark Nicholls
Tel: 0131 225 0211
Email: mnicholls@electoralcommission.org.uk

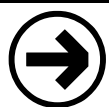
Wales

David Beacock
Tel: 0292 034 6806
Email: dbeacock@electoralcommission.org.uk

Ministry of Justice

20.7 The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is the central government department with responsibility for the legislative framework for UK Parliamentary elections, European Parliamentary elections and national referendums, including the franchise, conduct and funding.

20.8 The Elections and Democracy Division is the part of the MoJ responsible for issues concerning the conduct of elections. The division currently has six branches: Boundaries and Conduct of Elections; Registration and Franchise; Political Parties and Referendums; CORE and Electoral Modernisation; Democratic Engagement; and the Party Funding Bill team.



The Boundaries and Conduct of Elections branch has overall responsibility for policy and law on the conduct of UK Parliamentary, European Parliamentary, Greater London Authority and English and Welsh local elections, and can be contacted on 0203 334 3778.



For advice on the election funding process and related procedures in England and Wales, please contact the Election Claims Unit.

Election Claims Unit
1st floor
Hempstead House
2 Selden Hill
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP2 4XN

Email: ecu@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 020 7944 0108

Please do not contact the MoJ's Elections and Democracy Division on matters relating to the election funding process and related procedures.

Scotland Office

20.9 The Scotland Office is responsible for monitoring the accounts submitted by (Acting) Returning Officers in Scotland.



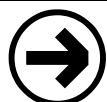
The Scotland Office can be contacted at:

Finance and Elections Branch
The Scotland Office
1 Melville Crescent
Edinburgh EH3 7HW

Tel: 0131 244 9037

Royal Mail

20.10 Royal Mail performs a number of functions at elections and may be engaged throughout the electoral process, from delivering poll cards to handling postal ballot packs.

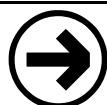


Further information may be obtained at www.royalmail.com

Access organisations

Equality and Human Rights Commission

20.11 The Equality and Human Rights Commission replaced the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Set up under the Equality Act 2006, it is a non-departmental, publicly funded body that promotes awareness and understanding of human rights and encourages good practice by public authorities. It brings together the work of the previous commissions and covers England, Scotland and Wales.



Further details can be obtained by contacting:
Commission for Equalities and Human Rights, 3 More London
Riverside, Tooley Street, London SE1 2RG.

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

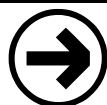
Tel: 020 3117 0235 (England)

Tel: 0141 228 5910 (Scotland)

Tel: 02920 447710 (Wales)

Plain English Campaign

20.12 The Plain English Campaign is an independent pressure group whose aim is for public information to be written in plain English – that is, language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading. The Campaign offers editing services as well as the Crystal Mark for approved documents.



Further information is available at www.plainenglish.co.uk

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

20.13 The RNID represents deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. They can provide information on communicating with deaf people.



For more information, contact:
RNID, 19–23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL, or
Empire House, 131 West Nile Street, Glasgow G1 2RX.

Website: www.rnid.org.uk
Email: informationline@rnid.org.uk
Tel: 020 7296 8000 (London)
Tel: 0141 341 5330 (Glasgow)

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

20.14 The RNIB offers information, support and advice to people in the UK with visual impairments. The RNIB has produced clear print guidelines to improve access for blind and partially sighted people.

20.15 The RNIB can also offer guidance on producing tape recordings, Braille, e-text and accessible websites.



For further details, contact:
Royal National Institute of Blind People, 105 Judd Street, London
WC1H 9NE.

Website: www.rnib.org.uk
Tel: 020 7388 1266

In Scotland, contact:
Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP.

Website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland>
Tel: 0131 311 8500

Scope

20.16 Scope is a disability organisation working throughout England and Wales. In Wales, it is known as Scope Cwmpas Cymru. Its aim is for disabled people to achieve equality. Scope runs the Polls Apart campaign to make elections accessible to disabled voters and reports have been produced on all UK Parliamentary general elections since 1992. Scope has also produced a range of guidance for staff involved in elections.



For more information, contact: Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7
9PW, or Scope Cymru, The Wharf, Schooner Way, Cardiff CF10 4EU.

Website: www.scope.org.uk
Email: response@scope.org.uk
Tel: 020 7619 7100
Tel: 02920 461 703 (Wales)

Capability Scotland

20.17 Capability Scotland works with councils and disabled people to improve access to elections in Scotland and encourages disabled people to vote.



For further details, contact:
Capability Scotland, Head Office, Westerlea, 11 Ellersly Road,
Edinburgh EH12 6HY.

Website: www.capability-scotland.org.uk

Tel: 0131 313 5510

Mencap

20.18 Mencap is a UK charity which campaigns for equal rights for children and adults with a learning disability. They also have experience in producing easy-read literature.



For further information on services provided by Mencap, contact:

Website: www.mencap.org.uk

Email: steve.mcilvenny@mencap.org.uk

Tel: 01733 246674