

# Managing a local government election in England and Wales

Guidance for Returning Officers

## Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: [publications@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:publications@electoralcommission.org.uk)

### The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections.

#### **Head office**

The Electoral Commission  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Fax: 020 7271 0505

[info@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:info@electoralcommission.org.uk)

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

#### **Wales**

The Electoral Commission  
Caradog House  
1–6 Saint Andrews Place  
Cardiff CF10 3BE

Tel: 029 2034 6800

Fax: 029 2034 6805

[infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk)

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

#### **Scotland**

The Electoral Commission  
38 Thistle Street  
Edinburgh EH2 1EN

Tel: 0131 225 0200

Fax: 0131 225 0205

[infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk)

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

# Contents

## Part A – Context

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Legislation
- 3 The electoral framework
  - Timing of elections
  - Timetable
  - Casual vacancies and by-elections
- 4 Roles and responsibilities
  - The Electoral Registration Officer
  - The Returning Officer
- 5 The role of other organisations
  - The Electoral Commission
  - Ministry of Justice
  - Communities and Local Government
  - National Assembly for Wales
  - Local Government Association
  - National Association of Local Councils
  - One Voice Wales
  - Royal Mail

## Appendix – Resources

Contact details for ordering Electoral Commission forms and leaflets

## Part B – Action before the poll

- 1 Timetable
- 2 Register of electors
  - Legal requirements
  - Register to be used for nominations
  - Amending the electoral register – clerical errors
  - Polling station registers
  - Access and supply
- 3 Guidance for candidates and agents

Briefings  
Nomination pack  
Access need for candidates

#### 4 Nomination process

Publication of the notice of election  
The register of political parties  
Qualifications for candidature  
Forms that may be used for nomination  
Delivery of nomination papers  
Inspection of nomination papers  
Preparing a form for signature  
Informal checks  
Nomination paper  
Nominations in other languages  
Candidate's consent to nomination  
False statements in nomination papers  
Correction of minor errors  
Decision as to validity of nomination papers  
Withdrawal of a candidate  
Nomination in more than one electoral area  
Storage of the nomination papers  
Statement of persons nominated  
Uncontested elections

#### 5 Appointment of election, polling and counting agents

Appointment of election agents  
Appointment of polling and counting agents

#### 6 Death of a candidate

New election

#### 7 Production and distribution of poll cards

Production  
Distribution

#### 8 Production and allocation of ballot papers

Ballot paper security  
Form of ballot paper  
Allocation of ballot papers  
Corresponding number list

#### 9 Polling notices and equipment

Notice of poll  
Notice of situation of polling stations  
Polling station equipment, notices and supplies

## Part C – Absent voting

- 1 Introduction
  - The absent voting procedure
- 2 Postal voting and integrity
  - Postal voting, houses in multiple occupation and residential establishments
- 3 Absent voting timetable and information
  - Timetable for absent voting
  - Communicating the absent voting process
- 4 Proxy voting
  - Limits on numbers of proxies
- 5 The issue and distribution of postal ballot packs
  - Persons entitled to be present
  - Secrecy requirements
  - Timing of the issue
  - Preparation of postal vote stationery
  - Logistics
  - Procedure for issuing postal votes
  - Re-issuing postal ballot packs
  - Late issue of postal ballot packs
- 6 Replacement postal votes
  - Replacement of spoilt ballot papers
  - Replacement of lost ballot papers
- 7 Receipt, opening and storage of postal votes
  - Receipt of postal votes
  - Security of postal ballots received
  - Postal ballot papers delivered to the polling station
  - Recording and evidencing actions
  - The opening process
  - Postal ballot boxes and packets
  - Opening the postal voters ballot box
  - Opening and verification of postal votes that have been delivered to polling stations
  - Confirming receipt of postal voting statements
  - Checking the postal voting statements and verifying personal identifiers
  - Opening the postal ballot paper envelopes
  - Matching up separated documents
  - Sealing the postal ballot box
  - Retrieval of cancelled postal votes

## Statement as to postal ballot papers

### Appendix – Resources

Notification of secrecy requirements  
Checking signatures at postal vote openings

## Part D – The poll

### 1 Polling day issues for the (Acting) Returning Officer and staff

Introduction  
Hours of poll  
Public enquiries  
Emergency proxy applications  
Replacements for lost or spoilt postal ballot packs  
Polling station visits  
Responding to emergencies

### 2 Managing the polling station

Briefings for polling station staff  
Equipment  
Persons entitled to attend proceedings on polling day  
Provision of informal turnout information by Presiding Officers  
Personation  
Anonymous electors

### 3 The register of electors

Clerical errors

### 4 Tellers and polling agents

Tellers  
Polling agents

### 5 Procedure at the close of poll

### Appendix – Resources

Equipment checklist  
Accessibility checklist for polling day – setting up a polling station  
Notification of secrecy requirements

## Part E – Verification and count

- 1 Count preparations
- 2 Attendance at the count
  - Counting agents
  - Observers
  - Admission to the count
- 3 The verification and count processes
  - Communicating the process
  - Receipt of ballot boxes
  - Verification
  - Postal ballot papers at the count
  - Security of stored ballot boxes
  - Counting the votes
- 4 Doubtful ballot papers
- 5 Recounts
- 6 Equality of votes
  - Methods
  - Procedure
- 7 Declaration of result
- 8 Storage and disposal of documents

## Appendix – Resources

Notification of secrecy requirements

## Part F – After the declaration of result

- 1 Retention, storage and inspection of election documents
  - Forwarding documents to the Electoral Registration Officer
  - Retention of documents
  - Public inspection of documents
  - Documents not available for inspection
  - Retention of the nomination papers
  - Marked register of electors and absent voter lists
  - Copies of other documentation open to public inspection
- 2 Candidates' election expenses
  - Candidates' returns – election expenses

### 3 Returns to the Electoral Commission

- Candidates' expenses
- Performance standards
- Other returns

### 4 Election petitions

- Form of petition
- Costs

### 5 Review of election procedures

- The Returning Officers' review
- Reporting by the Electoral Commission

## Appendix – Resources

- Access to election documentation after the election

## Part G – Combination of polls

### 1 Introduction

### 2 Combination arrangements

- Combined or not combined
- Postponement of any poll at parish or community council elections in England and Wales
- The Returning Officers
- Timetables

### 3 The franchise

### 4 Postal votes

- Combined issue of postal votes
- Postal votes issued separately
- Other postal vote documentation

### 5 Notices and ballot boxes

- Notice of poll
- Poll cards
- Polling station notices
- Ballot boxes

### 6 The poll

- Marking the register
- Corresponding number lists
- Official mark on ballot papers
- Return of postal votes to polling stations
- Close of poll

- 7 The count and after
  - Attendance of counting agents
  - Verification procedure and the count
  - Death of a candidate
  - Expenses

## Part H – Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Development of performance standards for Returning Officers
  - Consultation and development of standards
  - Links with guidance and support from the Commission
- 3 The performance standards framework
  - Objectives for performance standards
- 4 The self-assessment process
  - Completing the performance standards self-assessment
  - Planning and organisation
  - Integrity
  - Participation
- 5 Legislation
  - Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000
- 6 Vision for quality electoral services

# Key



Highlights important administrative and good practice issues



Provides links to other parts of the guidance and to other materials and reference sources



Indicates issues relating specifically to England



Indicates issues relating specifically to Wales



Indicates issues relating specifically to Scotland