

# Part C - Administering the poll

Local government elections 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)

---

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Candidates and agents.....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Access to the register of electors.....	1
	Guidance for candidates and agents.....	2
	The nomination process.....	5
	Inspection of nomination papers.....	17
	After the close of nominations.....	17
	Death of a candidate.....	18
	Agents at the election .....	19
<b>2</b>	<b>Production of notices, poll cards and ballot papers.....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Production and publication of notices.....	23
	Production of poll cards.....	27
	Production of ballot papers.....	29
<b>3</b>	<b>Polling station voting.....</b>	<b>34</b>
	Setting up polling stations.....	34
	Polling station equipment and materials .....	35
	Allocation of ballot papers.....	36
	Polling station registers and absent voting lists .....	37
	Corresponding number lists.....	38
	Packets for postal ballot papers delivered to polling stations.....	39
	Polling station log.....	40
	Polling station notices .....	40

# 1 Candidates and agents

## Access to the register of electors

1.1 By law, the Electoral Registration Officer is required to supply you with such copies of the electoral register as are required for the different aspects of the election.

1.2 The register that will be required for nominations is the one that is in force on the last day for the publication of the notice of election, i.e. the one in force on the 25<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll. If you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer you should receive copies from them soon after the publication of that register. You will also receive any further amendments that may be made to that register, including through the election notice of alteration published by the Electoral Registration Officer on the fifth working day before the poll.

### Supply of the register to candidates

1.3 A candidate at a local government election in England and Wales can request a copy of the full register for the ward in which they are standing.



Some parishes and communities will be warded. However, if the parish or community is unwarded, a candidate at a parish or community council election is legally entitled to a copy of the register for the whole of the parish or community.

1.4 At a local government election, a person will become a candidate either:

- on the last day for publication of notice of election if, on or before that day, they are declared by themselves or by others to be a candidate at the election, or
- otherwise, on the day on which they are declared by themselves or others to be a candidate or when they are nominated as a candidate (whichever is the earlier)

1.5 By law, candidates must make a written request to the Electoral Registration Officer for the register. The Electoral Registration Officer should produce a form for candidates to sign in order for them to obtain the register. This form should provide information on the permitted purposes for which the data can be used and should also allow the candidate the option of requesting either a paper or data copy of the register. The Commission has produced a [template electoral register request form](#) that can be used.

1.6 As soon as the written request is received and the person has become a candidate as defined above, they should be supplied with a copy of the register as soon as is practicable so that they can use the register to assist them with completing their nomination paper, as well as for campaigning.

1.7 The Electoral Registration Officer cannot, however, supply a copy of the register to a candidate earlier than the last date for publication of the notice of election, i.e. the 25<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll.

1.8 The Electoral Registration Officer should not withhold the register until a later date such as until the candidate submits a nomination paper: if a candidate or their supporter declares that they are a candidate, they are eligible to be supplied with the register from the last date for publication of the notice of election. No deposit or payment can be required in order for a register to be supplied.



Detailed information on access and supply of the full electoral register to candidates, registered political parties (who can request a copy at any time) and others can be found in [Part H, 'Access and supply', of the Commission's guidance, Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: Guidance for Electoral Registration Officers.](#)

## Guidance for candidates and agents

### Guidance on spending limits

1.9 Candidates are required by law to follow certain rules regarding how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election.

1.10 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2c](#) – Candidates and agents, you must ensure that candidates and/or election agents are issued with information on calculating the expenses limit (including the electorate figure), spending returns and declarations in order to enable them to meet reporting requirements.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2c](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that information is issued to candidates and/or election agents on calculating the expenses limit (including the electorate number).

1.11 You should provide the candidate with an accurate electorate figure to allow them to calculate their spending limits. The electorate number candidates will need is the total number of electors on the local government register on the last day for the publication of the notice of election (i.e. on the 25<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll), excluding any attainers who will not be 18 years old on or before polling day.

1.12 The Commission has produced [guidance for candidates and agents](#) on spending and donations which you can use to provide candidates and agents with information on spending returns and declarations in order to enable them to meet their reporting requirements.

## Guidance on the election process

1.13 You must, as a requirement to meet [performance standard 2c](#), ensure that candidates and/or election agents are issued with written guidance on the election process, including local arrangements.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2c](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that candidates and/or election agents are issued with written guidance on the election process, including local arrangements.

1.14 You should prepare a nomination pack for any person who expresses an interest in standing for election.

1.15 The nomination pack should contain:

- a nomination form
- a consent to nomination form
- a form for candidates to give notice of appointment of an election agent
- forms for candidates to give notice of appointment of polling agents, postal voting agents and counting agents
- a certificate of authorisation to allow a candidate to stand on behalf of a registered political party
- a form for the candidate of a political party to request the use of an emblem
- written guidance for candidates and agents covering key aspects of the electoral process, including the qualifications and disqualifications for election, the nominations process, campaigning dos and don'ts, accessing electoral proceedings and what happens after the declaration of the result. The guidance should include details of any local arrangements, such as the arrangements for the opening of postal votes, the poll and the count.
- details of how to obtain a copy of the electoral register and the absent voters' lists, including contact details of the Electoral Registration Officer and forms to make such requests
- a notice stating the total electorate eligible to vote at local government elections on the last date for publication of the notice of election to be used to calculate the expenses limit
- any other relevant information

1.16 The Commission's guidance for candidates and agents can be found on our website at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents/local-elections-in-england-and-wales](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents/local-elections-in-england-and-wales). We

have also produced [a set of nomination papers](#) that you can include in your nomination pack, which contains a nomination form, a consent to nomination form, a certificate of authorisation, an emblem request form and an election agent appointment notification form.



Guidance and nomination papers for candidates at parish and community council elections can be found on our website at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents/parish-community-elections-england-wales](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents/parish-community-elections-england-wales).

#### Questions from candidates on whether they are eligible to stand

1.17 Questions of eligibility or disqualification are for the candidate only and you should not give advice on such matters. The candidate should be directed to the Commission's guidance for candidates and agents in the first instance. Should they have any further concerns, they should be advised to seek their own legal advice.

## Briefings

1.18 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2c](#), you must ensure that candidates and/or election agents are offered a briefing session on the election process, including local arrangements. The Commission has produced a [template presentation for candidates and agents](#) that you could use for this purpose.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2c](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that briefing sessions have been offered, the date(s) of briefing sessions (where applicable) and confirmation that any briefing resources have been prepared (where applicable).

1.19 All briefing sessions should highlight the importance of following the election rules. In particular, you should provide a briefing on the nomination process including deadlines, submission rules, the use of commonly used names, and the use of party names, descriptions and emblems.

1.20 You should also highlight any security arrangements that have been put in place in consultation with the police.

1.21 The briefings should allow for the fact that there may be people who have little or no knowledge of election rules and procedures or who have not involved themselves in elections for some time.

1.22 You may choose to hold more than one briefing session: for example, one before the close of nominations and one afterwards (i.e. once the list of candidates has been confirmed after the close of nominations).

### Access needs for candidates

1.23 You should bear in mind that candidates and agents may have specific access needs, 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 (or, in Wales, in a language other than English and Welsh).

## The nomination process

### The nomination period

1.24 It is your decision as to when to accept nominations following the publication of the notice of election: you can start to accept nominations on the same day that the notice of election is published, allowing candidates more time to submit their nomination papers, or you can choose to start accepting nominations on the day following the publication of the notice of election. Whichever time is chosen, it should be clearly stated on the notice itself.

1.25 The close of nominations is 12 noon on the nineteenth working day before the poll. This deadline cannot be moved for any reason. If both the nomination form and the consent to nomination have not been delivered by that time, the nomination has not been made which means that you cannot rule the nomination valid or invalid.

### Forms for nomination

1.26 The nomination form and the consent to nomination are both prescribed in the appendix to the election rules. Candidates do not have to use a nomination form that you have produced, as long as their nomination form is as prescribed.

1.27 The consent to nomination form can be a form to 'like effect', but must include all of the signatures and information required by law – including a copy of Sections 80 and 81 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and Section 79 of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended).

1.28 A candidate wishing to stand on behalf of a registered political party and use one of their registered descriptions or party names must, by law, also submit a certificate of authorisation and, if they wish to use one of the party's registered emblems, a written request to use an emblem.

1.29 Nomination papers can only be produced in English or, in Wales, in English and/or Welsh, and not in any alternative languages or formats. However, you are required by law to prepare nomination papers for signature if someone requests. This means providing all of the documents required for nomination and completing them with all of the information given to you so that only the required signatures need to be added.

1.30 The Commission has produced [a set of nomination papers](#), which includes all of these forms, that you can provide to candidates.



A separate [set of nomination papers](#) has been produced for parish and community council candidates.

## Informal checks

1.31 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2c](#) you must ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to their formal submission.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2c](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that arrangements are in place for candidates to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission.

1.32 All candidates and agents should be given an equal opportunity to access an informal check. Informal checks are designed to assist candidates and agents with participating effectively in the electoral process so that, if possible, any errors made by them in completing the paperwork do not deny electors the opportunity to vote for that candidate. 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.

1.33 When conducting an informal check it should be made clear that the nomination papers are being looked at informally. At the conclusion of the informal check, you should offer to return the nomination papers if an issue has been identified. If no issues have been identified, you should offer to accept them formally.

## Delivery of nomination papers

1.34 The law requires that nomination papers must be delivered to the location at the council offices and at the times and dates specified by you on the notice of election.

1.35 You should provide clear signage from the entrance of the building to the room set aside for delivery. This route, or an appropriately signposted alternative, should be fully accessible.

1.36 You or an appointed deputy should be present throughout the period for nominations and only you and your staff should deal with nominations. You should give details to other local authority staff, such as reception staff, of what to do if a person tries to deliver a nomination paper to them, making it clear that they should not handle nomination papers and should not offer to deliver them but should instead direct them to you.

### Times and manner of delivery

1.37 Nomination papers must be delivered at the times stated on the notice of election, up to 12 noon on the nineteenth working day before the election. This deadline is set by law and cannot be extended for any reason.

1.38 Nomination papers may, by law, be delivered by hand or by post. There is no provision allowing nominations to be submitted by fax or electronically, and so any received in this way should not be accepted.

1.39 Delivery is determined as being when the nomination papers are delivered at the place specified in the notice of election. Nomination papers delivered by post are deemed to be received when they are delivered to the exact place as stated on the notice of election.

1.40 Candidates and agents should be advised to deliver nomination papers by hand to avoid any potential issues of postal delay or non-delivery.

1.41 No appointment is required to deliver a nomination paper, and on receipt you or your staff should endorse the documents with the date and time of delivery.

1.42 A candidate is deemed to be validly nominated only if you have, by 12 noon on the 19<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll, received the following completed forms:

- a nomination form
- a consent to nomination form
- if the candidate is standing on behalf of a political party, a certificate of authorisation from the party

1.43 Once a nomination paper has been formally delivered, no changes can be subsequently made to it (subject to your power to correct minor errors). At the point of formal submission you should therefore endorse the paper with the date and time of delivery, so that you have a record of when each paper was formally submitted. If a candidate later decides that they want to make changes, for example to the description, the only way this can be done is by withdrawing their candidature and then submitting new nomination papers within the statutory timeframe. Similarly, there is no provision to allow a subscriber to withdraw their signature from a nomination paper once it has been delivered.

### Multiple nomination papers

1.44 There is no limit to the number of nomination papers that may be delivered for the same candidate. If a candidate is validly nominated by more than one paper, the candidate should choose which one of the valid nomination papers (the 'selected' nomination paper) should be used for the details to be added to the statement of persons nominated and the ballot papers. If the candidate cannot or does not do this, then you must, by law, choose which one of the papers will be used.

1.45 If more than one nomination paper is delivered and one of the nomination papers is invalid, that paper is excluded from the papers that can be chosen by the candidate or yourself. As long as at least one nomination paper is valid, the candidate can be validly nominated.

1.46 You should also remind any person delivering the nomination papers that it is a criminal offence to knowingly make a false statement on nomination papers. If the nomination form includes a commonly used name, you should highlight that the offence also applies if a candidate has given a commonly used name that they do not actually commonly use. You may warn candidates that the penalty for a false statement is either a fine, currently set at a maximum of £5,000 (or unlimited upon indictment), and/or up to one year's imprisonment.

## Requirements of nomination

1.47 This section contains an explanation on what must, by law, be included on the nomination papers submitted by or on behalf of the candidate. It is designed to assist you in reviewing and ultimately determining the validity of nomination papers.

### Candidate's names

1.48 The candidate's full names must, by law, be listed on the nomination form, with their surname given first followed by all of their other names in full.

1.49 The nomination form contains no space for prefixes or suffixes and candidates should be advised not to use prefixes such as Mr, Mrs, Dr or Cllr as part of their full name. The same applies to suffixes. If a prefix or suffix is included as part of the actual name the nomination form would not be invalid as a result, but the prefix or suffix should not be transferred to the statement of persons nominated. If a candidate has submitted a nomination form with a prefix or suffix as part of their actual name, you should inform the candidate and their agent that it will not appear on the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll or the ballot paper, but that their nomination as a candidate has not been affected.

1.50 However, if a candidate has a title, they can use this as their full name. For example, if the candidate's actual name is Joseph Smith, but their hereditary title is Joseph Avon, they can use the name Joseph Avon as their full name.

### Commonly used names

1.51 Where a candidate commonly uses a different surname or forename, they may include the commonly used name on the nomination form in addition to their full name.

1.52 The only grounds you have in law for rejecting a commonly used name is that you consider that:

- its use may be likely to mislead or confuse electors, or
- it is obscene or offensive

1.53 It is not for you as Returning Officer to decide whether the given commonly used name is a 'name' as such or to embark on any enquiries. It is the candidate's responsibility to complete the nomination form and to be satisfied that the given commonly used name is a name that they genuinely commonly use. In the course of providing informal advice, you may wish to draw the candidate's attention to our [guidance for candidates and agents](#) on commonly used names.

1.54 The table below contains a number of worked examples of various combinations of commonly used names and how this would affect the appearance of the candidate's name on the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll and the ballot paper:

Candidate's actual surname	Candidate's other names in full	Commonly used forenames	Commonly used surname	Name to go on statement of persons nominated and notice of poll	Name to go on ballot papers
Elector	Ann	Elsie	Voter	Voter, Elsie	VOTER Elsie Voter
Elector	Ann	[Blank]	Voter	Voter, Ann	VOTER Ann Voter
Elector	Ann	Elsie	[Blank]	Elector, Elsie	ELECTOR Elsie Elector

1.55 If either the commonly used forenames or commonly used surname box is left blank, then the candidate's actual forenames or surname, depending on which commonly used name box has been left blank, will go on the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll and on the ballot paper.

1.56 You should advise the candidate that the use of commonly used names applies only to the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll and the ballot papers. The candidate's actual name should appear on any documents that are required to show the candidate's name, such as the imprint and candidate's spending returns.

1.57 If you refuse the use of a commonly used name, the validity of the paper remains unaffected. Instead, the effect is that the candidate's full name will appear on the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll and the ballot paper. This should be made clear to candidates and agents and you must, by law, write to the candidate setting out the reasons for refusing to allow the use of the commonly used name.

#### [Candidate's home address](#)

1.58 The candidate's full home address must, by law, be included on the nomination form. You should advise candidates that business addresses are

not legally permitted. If any detail of the home address is wrong or omitted, the nomination is not automatically invalid if the description of the place is such as to be commonly understood (see also paragraph [1.102 below](#)).

### Subscribers

1.59 Nomination papers must, by law, include an indication of support for the candidate from 10 registered electors in the ward.



At parish and community council elections, only two such electors are required to subscribe the nomination paper.

1.60 You must, by law, reject a nomination if the nomination form is not subscribed as required. It is essential that the correct version of the register is used for checking that the subscribers are valid: the version of the register to be used is the one that is in force on the last day for publication of the notice of election (i.e. the version in force on the 25<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll).

1.61 An elector may not subscribe more nominations than there are vacancies in the ward.

1.62 Also, during the election period, subscribers may not subscribe additional nomination papers for candidates standing in an election in any other ward/division in the same principal area.

1.63 If subscribers sign more nominations than there are vacancies or more nomination papers for other elections in any other ward/division in the same principal area, their signature will only be valid on the first papers delivered to you (up to the permitted number). Where multiple nominations have been delivered by a candidate, if an elector subscribes any delivered nomination paper, even if it is not the selected nomination paper, it will count towards the maximum number that they may subscribe.



At parish and community council elections, an elector may not subscribe more nominations than there are vacancies in the parish or community (if it is unwarded) or the ward (if the parish or community is warded).

An elector may subscribe both a parish/community and a principal area nomination paper.

1.64 You should have a robust system in place to ensure that no elector subscribes more nomination papers than they are entitled to. Both a hard copy of the register and the electoral management system should be used in order to minimise the risk of missing a subscriber who has subscribed more papers than they are allowed, with the hard copy of the register physically marked when nominations are formally submitted.

1.65 If an elector is later removed from the register or dies before the election (or indeed even before the nomination is delivered), their signature remains valid and the nomination is not affected.

1.66 If a candidate dies or withdraws their nomination paper, their subscribers may subscribe another nomination paper.

1.67 A person who is shown on the register as being under 18 years old at the time of nomination can only subscribe a nomination paper if they will be 18 years old on or before polling day.

1.68 Each subscriber is required by law to sign the nomination paper in the appropriate place. By law, their name must be printed and their elector number must be included in the spaces provided alongside their signature, along with the polling district's identifying letters.

1.69 As, by law, you must accept the nomination form at face value, you must accept that the signature made on the nomination paper is that of the person listed on the register under the relevant elector number, even if the signature suggests another name. You may draw the attention of the person delivering the paper to the issue if you are concerned, but you must by law take the elector number and the signature at face value.

1.70 At a principal area election, only the first 10 subscribers on any nomination paper can be considered. If more subscribers are included, any subsequent names must, by law, not be considered at all. If one of the first 10 subscribers is invalid, irrespective of whether more subscribers have been added to the ballot paper, the nomination paper must, by law, be held invalid.



At a parish or community council election, only the first two subscribers can be considered.

1.71 Occasionally a mistake is made with the subscribers on a nomination paper, and one or more of the names may be crossed out on the form. If the signature, printed name and elector number for a subscriber are clearly crossed out, you should ignore it and treat it as if that line did not appear at all. If asked, you should advise that any crossings out should be clear and, ideally, initialled. You should not cross out any entry. If the entry that has been crossed out was that of a proposer or seconder, then the new proposer or seconder must, by law, be indicated. Where an entry has been crossed out, the first ten subscribers excluding that entry must, by law, still be valid for the nomination to be valid.

1.72 Signatures on nomination papers, once given, cannot be withdrawn by subscribers. If a subscriber contacts you to say that they wish to withdraw their subscription, you should inform that that this is not permitted by law and that the subscription remains valid.

### Candidate's description

1.73 The legislation is precise about candidates' descriptions. If a candidate wishes to have a description other than 'Independent', and/or 'Annibynnol' in Wales, that description must be authorised by a registered political party. A description may be either the registered party name or one of the descriptions the party has registered with the Commission.



For parish and community council elections, any candidate can choose to use a description. Any description used must, by law, not exceed six words in length. Descriptions used at parish and community council elections do not have to be registered with the Commission. However, any description must, by law, not lead electors to associate it with a registered political party unless the description has been registered by that party and its use has been duly authorised.

Candidates may use acronyms or abbreviations as part of their description. It is for you as Returning Officer to determine how you will count these. However, you may wish to follow the principle underpinning the Commission's policy for counting the number of words in a description or party name: if an acronym or abbreviation is in the Collins English Dictionary, it will count as one word; if an acronym or abbreviation is not in the Collins English Dictionary, it will count as separate words.

1.74 You should firstly check that the description or the party name as given on the nomination form is registered on the Commission's register of political parties (<https://pefonline.electoralcommission.org.uk>) and matches it exactly. If it does not, you must, by law, reject that nomination. Even if a registered party is well known, it is vital to check the register of political parties for the exact details of the party as registered with the Commission.

1.75 Registered political parties may register up to 12 descriptions with the Commission. Where a registered political party has chosen not to register any descriptions, only the exact party name as registered with the Commission can be used.

1.76 In Wales, a candidate may use either the English version, Welsh version or both versions of either the party name or a description as long as they are registered with the Commission. Translations of party names are listed on the website under 'other name' and translations of descriptions are listed to the right of the description under 'translation(s)'. If the party has not registered a translation, a translation of any party name or description cannot be used.

1.77 For the purposes of maintaining a clear audit trail and in case of any future challenges, you should print a copy of the relevant part of the Commission's register of political parties showing the descriptions and party name at the time of your determination.



For up-to-date information about political parties, registered descriptions and registered emblems, you should check the register of political parties on the Commission's website at <https://pefonline.electoralcommission.org.uk>.

If you have any queries, you should contact [your local Commission office](#).

1.78 By law, the removal or substitution of any registered descriptions may take effect up to and including the day before the date of publication of the notice of election for any particular election (note that this is not the last day for publication of the notice of election but the **actual** day of publication). After that point, any changes or deletions to any party descriptions do not apply for that election.

1.79 For example, if you decide to publish your notice of election at an ordinary election before the last day that the notice must be published by law, it is possible that a nomination may be submitted which bears a registered party description that no longer appears on the register of political parties. If the deletion of the description has taken effect after you have published your notice of election but before the last day for publication of notice of election, the deletion does not apply to your election and the 'old' description is still valid. In any such circumstances you can check with [your local Commission office](#) whether or not the submitted party description applies for your election.

1.80 You should also note that political parties may change their registered party name and emblems, and add any new description if they previously had registered fewer than 12, at any time until the close of nominations.

#### [Descriptions not yet registered](#)

1.81 Where a candidate attempts to submit a nomination paper bearing a description that has yet to be registered, you should advise the candidate not to formally submit the paper, but to take it back and submit it once the description has been successfully registered.

1.82 If a candidate formally submits their nomination form with a description that is not yet registered, you must, by law, determine the nomination invalid on the basis that, when the determination is made, the description provided does not match any registered with the Commission. You may wish to contact the Commission for confirmation that a description is not yet registered before making your determination. You can do this by contacting [your local Commission office](#).

#### [The certificate of authorisation](#)

1.83 If the description used on the nomination form matches one contained on our register of political parties or is a registered party name, you should check that the candidate has submitted a certificate authorising the use of the description or party name ('the certificate of authorisation'), signed by or on behalf of the party's Nominating Officer, before the close of nominations.

1.84 You can check who the Nominating Officer for a particular party is by referring to the Commission's register of political parties. However, as long as the person who has signed the certificate claims that they have been authorised to do so by the registered Nominating Officer, the certificate should be taken at face value.

1.85 A Nominating Officer may stand as a candidate. If this happens, the candidate, as Nominating Officer, may authorise their own description. A person authorised by the Nominating Officer to sign a certificate of authorisation may also be a candidate and sign a certificate for their own nomination.

1.86 A certificate of authorisation can allow the candidate to:

- use a specific description or the party name, or
- choose either the party name or one of the party's registered descriptions

1.87 If a candidate stands as representing two or more parties, e.g. the Square Party and the Circle Party, an authorising certificate setting out the joint description is required from the Nominating Officer (or someone authorised to act on their behalf) of each of the parties. In this example, the Nominating Officer (or someone authorised to act on their behalf) of both the Square Party and the Circle Party is legally required to issue certificates that authorise the use of a joint description, and that joint description must, by law, be registered with the Commission.

1.88 Joint descriptions are listed on the Commission's register of political parties on the registration page for the relevant parties within the descriptions section, and in each case the description will be followed by the words '(Joint Description with the xx party)'. An example would be 'The Square and Circle Party Candidate (Joint Description with the Circle Party)', which would be listed on the Square Party page. Please note that the words in brackets are for explanatory purposes only and do not form part of the description.

#### [Request for a party emblem](#)

1.89 If requested, the candidate of a registered party can choose to have a registered emblem of the party they are representing displayed on the ballot paper. To qualify, a candidate must, by law, have used a party name or description other than 'Independent' and/or 'Annibynnol'.

1.90 Candidates standing on behalf of more than one party who use a joint description may choose to use a registered emblem of one of the parties that have authorised the use of the description. There is no provision for joint emblems to be registered with the Commission.

1.91 The candidate, not the election agent or the Nominating Officer, must by law make the request in writing not later than the deadline for delivery of nominations. If the party has more than one registered emblem, the candidate should specify which one they want to use. If the candidate does not specify one, or the registered party changes the emblem after the nomination papers

have been submitted but before the close of nominations, you should try to contact the candidate and ask them to select one. You should also tell them that if they do not select a particular emblem before the close of nominations, you will not be able to print an emblem against their name on the ballot paper.

1.92 The candidate may provide a high-resolution copy of the emblem for use in the printing of ballot papers, or may request that you download the emblem from the Commission's website. You should ensure that whatever copy is used is in the same form as the registered emblem.

#### Candidate's consent to nomination

1.93 By law, the consent form must be signed and dated by the candidate and the date must be on or within one month before the last day for the delivery of nomination papers.

1.94 The consent must also, by law, be witnessed by another person. The witness must witness the candidate signing the consent form and then sign it as a witness. They are also legally required to provide their name and address on the consent form.

### Considerations when carrying out the determination

1.95 There is case law which makes clear that you must not undertake any investigation or research into any candidate and that your duty does not go beyond seeing that the form is correct on its face. You should not, for example, investigate whether the name or address given on the nomination form is genuine. You will also need to disregard any personal knowledge you may already have of the candidate. Any determinations need to be made on the basis of the paper itself.<sup>1</sup>

1.96 You are also under a legal duty to determine a nomination as soon as is practicable after nomination papers have been formally submitted. The sooner you carry out the formal determination, the greater the chances of those candidates who have made a mistake and whose nomination has been rejected being able to submit new papers before the close of nominations.

1.97 By law, the only grounds you have for determining that a nomination is invalid are:

- that the particulars of the candidate or the persons subscribing the nomination form are not as required by law, or
- that the paper is not subscribed as required, or

---

<sup>1</sup> In very limited circumstances, there is an exception, also based on case law, to the principle of accepting nomination papers at face value. You may come across a situation where the candidate's nomination is clearly a sham and the nomination is not actually a nomination and does not need to be determined - for example, if a form is submitted for 'Mickey Mouse of Disney Land'.

- that the description used is not authorised by a certificate signed by, or on behalf of, the party's Nominating Officer or is not registered with the Commission

1.98 We have produced a [nominations checklist for Returning Officers](#) which sets out what you will need to consider and specific things to look out for when determining a nomination.

#### What to do after your formal determination

1.99 Once you have made a decision that a nomination paper is valid, it cannot be challenged during the election, although it may be challenged after the election by way of an election petition.

1.100 If a nomination paper is determined to be invalid, you must, by law, state that fact on the nomination paper, write the reasons for rejection and sign it. If a nomination paper is ruled invalid, it is important to take steps to contact the candidate and agent as soon as possible so that they may have the opportunity wherever possible to submit another set of nomination papers before the close of nominations.

1.101 You are legally required to send notice of your decision that a nomination paper is valid or invalid to the candidate at their home address as given on the nomination paper. This should be done as soon as practicable after your decision has been made.

## Correction of minor errors

1.102 You are permitted by law to correct minor errors made on nomination papers at any time before you publish the statement of persons nominated. This includes the correction of errors in relation to a person's elector number and obvious errors of spelling of a candidate's details. You have a legal duty to have regard to the Commission's guidance on the correction of minor errors.

#### Errors in elector numbers

1.103 Where an elector number has been entered incorrectly, you may amend it if you are satisfied that an error has been made. However, where the elector number has been omitted altogether, this does not amount to an error, and the nomination paper should be rejected on the basis that the number has not been supplied and so the particulars are not as required by law.

#### Errors of spelling

1.104 Dealing with the 'obvious' errors of spelling may be more difficult, as what is obvious to one person may not be so to another. Care should be taken in exercising this power.

#### Errors in a home address

1.105 Where a home address is not absolutely correct there may not be a need to make a correction. By law, errors in a home address do not affect the

full operation of a nomination form, as long as the address can be commonly understood.

## Inspection of nomination papers

1.106 You should keep the nomination papers secure. By law, you must allow public inspection during office hours on any working day from the close of nominations up to and including the day before polling day.

1.107 After that point, the nomination papers are not open to public inspection, but you should securely store them for one year after the election.

1.108 There is no right of objection to a nomination at a local government election.

## After the close of nominations

1.109 After the close of nominations you are required to publish a statement of persons nominated and a notice of poll. For details on what these notices should contain, see [Chapter 2 - Production of notices, poll cards and ballot papers](#).

### Withdrawal of a candidate

1.110 It is possible for a validly nominated candidate to withdraw their candidature. For this to be effective, the candidate must by law deliver to you a signed notice, attested by one witness, by 12 noon on the sixteenth working day before the poll. The withdrawal notice is not prescribed in legislation. We have produced a [template withdrawal notice](#) that you could give to any candidate who requests one.

1.111 If the candidate is not in the UK, a withdrawal will be effective if a notice of withdrawal, signed by the proposer and accompanied by a written declaration that the candidate is abroad (also signed by the proposer), is delivered to you by the deadline. If the candidate was nominated by more than one nomination paper, each proposer must, by law, sign the notice and declaration. If any of the proposers are outside the UK they do not need to sign the notice, but the notice must, by law, include a statement that they are also outside the UK.

1.112 When a candidate has withdrawn, you should amend the published statement of persons nominated to indicate those who have withdrawn and no longer stand nominated.

1.113 The details of any candidates who by the close of withdrawals remain validly nominated must, by law, be printed on the ballot papers. If a candidate

has not withdrawn by the deadline, their name must, by law, go forward to the ballot paper, even if they subsequently change their mind and wish to withdraw.

## Nomination in more than one electoral area

1.114 If a candidate is validly nominated for more than one ward of the same local government area, they must by law withdraw from all of those wards except one. If the candidate does not do this, they are deemed to have withdrawn from all of the wards and are no longer a candidate for election to that particular council.



A candidate may stand and be elected to both a parish or community council and a principal area council for the same or a different area.

## Uncontested elections

1.115 If the election in any electoral area is uncontested, you must by law, as soon as practicable after the latest time for the delivery of notices of withdrawals of candidature, declare the remaining validly nominated candidate(s) elected. You must, by law, give their names to the Proper Officer of the council for which the election is held, and give public notice of the name of each elected person. No poll is held.



At a parish or community council election, you are required to give public notice to the Proper Officer of the parish or community council. If there is no Proper Officer, the notice must, by law, be given to the chairman of the council or, if there is no chairman, to the Proper Officer of the district in which the parish is situated, or in Wales, the county or county borough council in which the community is situated. In all cases, you are also required to give the names of those elected to the Proper Officer of the council of the district in which the parish is situated, or in Wales, the county or county borough in which the community is situated.

## Death of a candidate

1.116 The possibility exists of a candidate dying during the course of an election campaign. The procedure to be followed at local government elections depends on the time when you are notified of the death of the candidate. It is the time when you are notified of the death that is important, not the actual time of death.

1.117 Should you receive proof and be satisfied that a candidate has died after accepting their nomination as valid but before the deadline for the withdrawal of nominations, you should wait until that deadline has passed. Where you have received proof to your satisfaction that a candidate has died, the candidate is deemed not to be standing for election. If the number of validly nominated candidates, excluding the deceased, is more than the number of

people to be elected, the poll must by law be countermanded. If the number of validly nominated candidates, excluding the deceased, is the same as or fewer than the number of people to be elected, then all are deemed elected and you must, by law, order a new election for any remaining vacancies.

1.118 If proof of the death of a validly nominated candidate at a contested election is received before the opening of the poll, the notice of poll is countermanded and the poll does not take place. A new election is required by law.

1.119 If proof of the death of a validly nominated candidate at a contested election is received after the opening of the poll but before the declaration of result, the poll is abandoned and a new election is required by law. However, in this case, because the poll will have started, the documentation (i.e. issued and un-issued ballot papers, etc.) is required by law to be returned to you and sealed up in the normal way.

1.120 Any postal votes received back must, by law, also be sealed in packets and any envelopes not opened at the time of the notification of the death must be sealed in packets unopened.



For further guidance on the storage of election documents and who may access them after the election, see [Part F 'After declaration of results'](#).

## New election

1.121 Where a new election is required after the countermanding or abandonment of a poll due to a candidate's death, you are required by law to select a new day for the poll, and this must fall within 35 working days of the day fixed for the first poll. New nominations can be made, but candidates already validly nominated at the original poll do not have to be nominated a second time.

# Agents at the election

## The election agent

1.122 Each candidate is required by law to have an election agent and notice of the appointment must be delivered to you by the latest time for delivery of notices of withdrawals, which is noon on the sixteenth working day before the poll. [Forms for the notification of appointment of an election agent](#) have been developed by the Commission.

1.123 A candidate may appoint themselves as election agent. Also, if no agent is formally appointed by the above time, the candidate is deemed to be their own election agent.

1.124 A candidate is also deemed to be their own agent if they revoke their agent's appointment, or the agent dies, and a replacement is not appointed on the day of the death or on the following day.

1.125 If a candidate is acting as their own election agent, irrespective of whether they became an agent as a result of not appointing one or because they had given you written notice of their own appointment, they can also revoke their own appointment and appoint a new agent. By law, they must notify you in writing of any such changes.



Election agents are not required at parish or community council elections.

1.126 The election agent is required by law to have an office, and the notice of appointment must set out the office address to which all claims, notices and documents may be sent. The law requires that this office has to be:

- within the local government area, or
- in the parliamentary constituency or one of the constituencies of which the area is comprised, or
- in an adjoining Welsh county or county borough, or
- in an adjoining London borough, or
- in an adjoining district

1.127 The election agent's office address will often be the same as their home address, but it might be that of the local political party office or an office especially set up for the election.

1.128 Where a candidate acts as their own election agent as a result of not having appointed anybody else, the office address is deemed to be the address on the statement of persons nominated, i.e. the address provided on the nomination form. If that address is outside the relevant qualifying area as defined in the bullet points above, the office address is deemed to be the address of the person named in the statement of persons nominated as proposer.

1.129 If, however, the candidate gives you written notification of their appointment as their own election agent, they must, by law, give an office address within the qualifying area as defined in the bullet points above.

1.130 Upon notification of an election agent's name and address, you are required by law to publish a notice setting out those details and the name of the candidate as soon as possible. The notice must, by law, be updated if any agent's appointment is revoked, or an agent dies, with the new agent's details published on the revised version.

## Other agents

1.131 Candidates can appoint agents to observe the opening of postal votes, the poll and the count.



For further details on the role of these agents, see Part 5: Your right to attend key electoral events of our [candidates and agents guidance](#).

### Mayoral referendums

All references to candidates and agents in this section should be read as petition organisers and counting and polling observers appointed for the purposes of the referendum. In addition to the count, counting observers at a mayoral referendum may also attend the opening of postal votes.

At a mayoral referendum, as Counting Officer you are under a legal duty to appoint polling and counting observers. To assist you in this duty, the petition organiser may nominate polling and counting observers for you to appoint and you must, by law, not reject such nominations without good cause.

Polling and counting observers must, by law, be nominated in writing by the fifth working day before the poll. The written notice must, by law, contain the name and address of each nominee.

1.132 You are required by law to ensure that all appointed agents are given a copy of the [relevant secrecy requirements for the opening of postal votes, the poll](#) and [the count](#), which we have published on our website. We have also produced bi-lingual versions in English and Welsh for Returning Officers in Wales to provide to those attending the [opening of postal votes, the poll](#) and [the count](#).

### The opening of postal votes

1.133 Postal voting agents are permitted by law to observe the opening of returned postal votes and the checking of signatures and dates of birth provided on returned postal voting statements. The law requires that you are given written notice of the name and address of any postal voting agents before the start of any particular session that the agents are seeking to attend. A [form for the notification of appointment of a postal voting agent](#) has been developed by the Commission.

1.134 You are legally required to give candidates at least 48 hours' notice of the time and place of any postal vote opening session and the number of agents a candidate may appoint to attend each opening.

### The poll

1.135 Polling agents are entitled by law to access polling stations for the purpose of detecting personation. They can also observe the procedures to be followed inside a polling station. The law requires that you are notified in writing of any polling agents that have been appointed by not later than five working days before the poll for their appointment to be in force for the poll. A [form for the notification of appointment of a polling agent](#) has been developed by the Commission.

1.136 Candidates can appoint up to four polling agents, or such greater number as prescribed by you, to attend at a particular polling station, although by law only one polling agent may be admitted at the same time to a polling station on behalf of the same candidate. The same polling agents may be appointed to attend more than one polling station.

#### The count

1.137 Counting agents can be appointed by a candidate to observe the verification and counting processes. The law requires that you are notified in writing of the appointment of counting agents by not later than five working days before the poll for their appointment to be in force for the count. A [form for the notification of appointment of a counting agent](#) has been developed by the Commission. You are legally required to give counting agents who have been appointed notice in writing of the time and place at which the verification and count will begin.

1.138 You are permitted by law to limit the number of counting agents but the number that may be appointed by each candidate must be the same and, unless there are special circumstances, must not be less than the number obtained by dividing the number of counting assistants (i.e. those staff employed on the counting) by the number of candidates.

1.139 When determining the maximum number of counting agents per candidate, each candidate should, as far as possible, be permitted to appoint sufficient numbers of counting agents to enable full and proper scrutiny of the verification and count processes. You should, however, consider any health and safety implications, including fire regulations for the count venue, when deciding on maximum numbers of counting agents per candidate.

## 2 Production of notices, poll cards and ballot papers

### Production and publication of notices

2.1 You are legally required to publish notices by posting them in a conspicuous place within the local government area. This should be defined as including local authority offices, noticeboards, libraries and other public buildings. The notice may also be given in such other manner as you think fit.

2.2 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#) – Producing ballot papers, poll cards and notices, you must ensure that notice of election and the notice of poll are accessible for anyone interested in them, such as through using the local authority’s website in order to facilitate access to them.



See Part B – Planning and organisation for more general guidance on communicating information to electors.

### Translation and formats of notices

2.3 You are legally required, where you consider it appropriate to do so, to ensure that notices are translated or provided in another format. You may produce them:

- in Braille
- in languages other than English (or in Wales, English and Welsh)
- using graphical representations
- in audio format
- using any other means of making information accessible

### Notice of election

2.4 You are required by law to publish the notice of election by not later than 25 working days before polling day. A separate notice can be produced for each ward, or a combined notice can be produced including all of the wards in the local authority area with elections.

2.5 The notice of election must be produced in accordance with the legislation, and must include the following:

- the place and times at which nomination papers can be delivered, and at which nomination papers may be obtained

- the date of the poll if the election is contested
- the date by which applications for absent votes (including emergency proxies) must reach the Electoral Registration Officer in order to be effective for the election

2.6 The notice should also include the date by which applications for registration must, by law, reach the Electoral Registration Officer in order to be effective for the election, and show the number of councillors to be elected in each ward.

2.7 The address given for the delivery of nomination papers should be exact, and include any room number. This will avoid any doubt should nominations be delivered close to the deadline. All reception staff at offices of the building and other connected buildings should be informed that they should not take receipt of nomination papers.

2.8 The Commission has developed a [template notice of election](#) which you can use. For electoral administrators in Wales [a bi-lingual template notice of election](#) is available.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with a link to the page on the local authority website on which the notice of election has been published.

### Mayoral referendums

The Commission has produced a template [notice of referendum](#) for mayoral referendums. The notice must, by law, state:

- the date of the poll
- the date by which applications to vote by post or proxy (including emergency proxies) must reach the Electoral Registration Officer in order to be effective for the referendum

The notice should also include the date by which applications for registration must reach the Electoral Registration Officer in order to be effective for the referendum.

### Statement of persons nominated

2.9 You are required by law to publish a statement of persons nominated for each ward by no later than 12 noon, 17 working days before the poll.

2.10 The statement of persons nominated must, by law, include the name, address and description (if any) of all candidates who have been validly

nominated and those who no longer stand nominated (i.e. invalid and withdrawn candidates, if any), including the reason why they no longer stand nominated.

2.11 The names of the candidates on the statement must, by law, be listed in alphabetical order of their surname; this is also how they will appear on the ballot paper. Where there are two or more candidates with the same surname, the alphabetical order of the other names will decide which candidate is listed first.

2.12 If a person has requested the use of a commonly used name on their nomination paper, the commonly used name must, by law, be shown on the statement instead of the actual name. Where a candidate has requested the use of a commonly used surname, the candidate's alphabetical position on the statement of persons nominated and on the ballot paper must, by law, be made by reference to their commonly used surname.

2.13 If, however, you have rejected the use of any commonly used name as you think it is likely to mislead or confuse electors, or is obscene or offensive, the actual name must, by law, be published on the statement of persons nominated instead of the commonly used name.

2.14 Where a candidate withdraws from the election between publication of the statement and the deadline for withdrawals, the statement must, by law, be amended to indicate that fact.

## Notice of poll

2.15 If there are more candidates than there are vacancies and there is to be a contest, you must, by law, publish a notice of poll for each ward by not later than the sixth working day before polling day. The notice of poll must be produced in accordance with the legislation. It must include:

- the date and hours of the poll
- the number of councillors to be elected in the ward
- the particulars of the candidates
- the names of the subscribers

2.16 No later than the publication of the notice of poll, you are also legally required to give public notice of:

- the situation of each polling station in the area
- the description of voters entitled to vote there

2.17 The Commission has developed a [template notice of poll and a notice of situation of polling stations](#) which you can use. For electoral administrators in Wales [a bi-lingual template notice of poll and notice of situation of polling stations](#) is available.

2.18 You should give a copy of the notice of poll to all candidates and election agents as soon as practicable after its publication. You must, by law, give a copy of the notice of situation of polling stations and descriptions of voters entitled to vote there to all election agents as soon as practicable after giving the notice, and you should also give a copy to all candidates. You should be prepared to make these notices available to any accredited observers on request.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with a link to the page on the local authority website on which the notice of poll has been published.

### **Combination**

At combined polls, the notice of situation of polling stations and description of voters for each electoral event must, by law, state that the poll is being combined with another poll and specify the details of that other electoral event.

### **Mayoral referendums**

At a mayoral referendum, the notice of poll must, by law, include:

- the date and hours of the poll
- the question to be asked in the referendum

The Commission has produced at [template notice of poll and notice of situation of polling stations](#) that you could use.

# Production of poll cards

2.19 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#), you must ensure that poll cards are produced in accordance with any [example templates](#) that the Commission has issued or designed in line with the criteria set out in the [Electoral Commission guidance](#). We have produced [bi-lingual templates](#) for Returning Officers in Wales.

2.20 Each poll card must, by law, follow the prescribed form in the election rules or be a form to 'like effect'. The example templates produced by the Commission are in a form to 'like effect' and contain the legislative requirements. If you are not using the Commission's templates, you must ensure that you include all of the elements shown on the front and the back of the poll card, which can be found in the appendix to the election rules.

2.21 The poll card must include:

- the name of the council and the ward to which councillors are being elected
- the elector's name, qualifying address and number on the register
- the date and hours of the poll
- in the case of a polling station voter, the situation of the polling station
- in the case of a postal or postal proxy voter, confirmation that they will receive their ballot paper by post, with an indication as to when they are likely to be sent out, and information on how the elector may arrange to cancel their postal vote
- in the case of a proxy or postal proxy voter, the proxy's name and address in addition to the details of the elector for whom the proxy is voting
- such other information as you consider appropriate
- the prescribed instructions to be included on the back of the poll card

2.22 In the case of an anonymous elector, the name and address of the anonymous elector are to be omitted. The Commission's example templates include template poll cards for anonymous electors.

## Combination

Where the poll at a local government election is combined with another poll and where combined poll cards are issued, information about both electoral events should be provided. If there only some wards in your area with combined polls, you should make arrangements to ensure that only the electors in those wards with the combined polls are sent a combined poll card.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that your poll cards have been produced in accordance with any example templates that the

Commission has provided or designed in line with the criteria set out in the [Electoral Commission guidance](#).

2.23 You will need to dispatch your poll card data to your printers. If you are outsourcing the production of poll cards, you should ensure that your software is able to produce a data file that your printers can use to produce the materials to the specification required. At an early stage in discussions with suppliers you should address in what format you will supply the data and in what format they will send you any proofs, and this should be included in your specification and contract.



Further details on the management of contractors and suppliers can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

2.24 You should conduct a test-run by submitting sample data to the printers in advance of 'live' data being submitted. This will also enable pre-proofs to be developed, so that it is clear which part of the data should go where on the poll card.

2.25 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#), you must ensure that you have a process in place for proof-checking poll cards. You should also have in place arrangements to check the actual stationery being produced, which will highlight if any of the signed-off proofs have been inadvertently altered.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that arrangements for proof checking poll cards are in place.

2.26 Electoral registration data held by contractors should be destroyed as soon as possible after polling day. A written undertaking should be produced for contractors to sign confirming this. It should state that the contractor understands 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, after the election, they will return any discs and paper records provided to them and securely destroy any other electronic or paper copies of the data.

## Poll card delivery

2.27 You are required by law to send out poll cards as soon as practicable after the publication of the notice of election.



This does not apply to parish or community council elections. The parish or community council can, however, request that you issue poll cards. Any such request must, by law, be made by 12 noon on the nineteenth working day before the poll.

2.28 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#), you must ensure that the first issue of poll cards is carried out by not later than 24 working days before polling day.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with the scheduled and actual date of despatch of poll cards.

2.29 By law, a poll card must be sent to the elector's qualifying address or, in the case of a proxy, to the proxy's address as shown in the list of proxies.

2.30 In the case of anonymous electors, the poll card must, by law, be sent to the elector's qualifying address or, where a different address has been specified on their registration application, the poll card must be sent to that other address. The law requires that a poll card must be sent to anonymously registered electors in a covering envelope.

2.31 You can deliver poll cards by hand, by post, or by some other method determined by you as the most appropriate for the area. If you decide that poll cards are to be delivered by hand, you should appoint sufficient staff to enable the efficient delivery of poll cards to be completed. You should have in place a mechanism for monitoring the delivery of poll cards across the whole of your area.

2.32 For poll cards delivered by post, you should track deliveries so that you are well placed to be able to respond to any queries from electors. If you are using Royal Mail for posting poll cards, you should liaise with them on a regular basis.

#### [Poll cards delivered to electors registered under the 11-day rule](#)

2.33 An update of the registration data should be sent to your printers as soon as practicable after the registration deadline to enable the production of poll cards for new electors.

2.34 If you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer, you should liaise with them regarding the potential for sharing distribution costs by combining the required confirmation of registration with the poll card for those registering under the 11-day rule.

## Production of ballot papers

2.35 The form of the ballot paper is prescribed in legislation and you have a legal duty to follow this precisely. By law, ballot papers for postal voters and for polling station use must be the same in form, except that the official mark may be different if desired.

2.36 The colour of local government ballot papers is not prescribed and is for you as Returning Officer to determine. Tendered ballot papers are required by law to be a different colour from the ordinary ballot papers.

### Combination

At combined polls, different-coloured ballot papers must, by law, be used for each poll.

## The 'official mark'

2.37 An appropriate security mark – the 'official mark' – is required by law to be added to the ballot paper. The mark should be distinctive and does not have to be a perforation added at the time of issue of the ballot paper, although stamping instruments may still be used to create a perforating official mark. It could be a printed emblem or mark or a special printing device such as a watermark. It should be capable of being seen on the front of the ballot paper so that it can be seen without having to turn the ballot paper over.

2.38 By law, the official mark:

- Can be the same for all ballot papers at the election or different official marks can be used for different purposes at the same election, for example one for postal votes and another for polling station ballot papers.
- Cannot be re-used for five years for elections to the same local government area.

## Candidate details

2.39 By law, candidates must appear on the ballot paper as listed as in the statement of persons nominated. The surname, or commonly used surname where supplied and allowed, of each candidate must, by law, be printed by itself in large capital letters, with the other details printed in ordinary type, i.e. in normal sentence structure. The exception is if two or more candidates share the same surname. In this case, those candidates' other names should be printed in small capital letters.

2.40 The address details of the candidate, as shown on the statement of persons nominated, must by law be printed below their name.

2.41 Under the address details, the description (if any), as stated in the statement of persons nominated, must, by law, be printed.

2.42 If a candidate standing on behalf of a political party has requested it, the requested emblem of the party they represent must by law be included next to their name. There is no provision for joint emblems to be registered with the Commission but a joint candidate may pick a single emblem of any of the parties that have registered the joint description and who have authorised the candidate.

2.43 The candidate may provide a high-resolution copy of the emblem for use in the printing of ballot papers, or may request that you download the emblem from the Commission's website. You should ensure that whatever copy is used is in the same form as the registered emblem.

2.44 You should use the maximum possible sizes of font. To ensure consistency, the same font size should be used for each candidate for each equivalent line.

## Form of the reverse of the ballot paper

2.45 The following information is required by law to be included on the ballot paper reverse in the following format:

No. [ballot paper number]  
[other unique identifying mark]

Election for the [ward name] ward of the [district/parish/community] of  
[District/parish/community/county/London borough/county borough name]

on [day/month] 20[XX]

### Mayoral referendums

At mayoral referendums, the following must, by law, be included on the ballot paper reverse:

No. [ballot paper number]  
[other unique identifying mark]

Council referendum on [date] [name of voting area]

2.46 The ballot paper number:

- should be unique for each ballot paper at the election
- must be printed on the back of the ballot paper

2.47 Ballot paper numbers should run consecutively, but do not have to start at '1'.

2.48 The unique identifying mark can be letters and numbers and could be a repeat of the ballot paper number with the addition of a prefix or a suffix. Also, a unique identifying mark can be, but does not have to be, a barcode. It is not the same as the official mark.

2.49 The unique identifying mark:

- should be unique for each ballot paper

- can be re-used at the next poll
- must be printed on the back of the ballot paper

## Printing of ballot papers

2.50 The ballot paper must, by law, be printed in accordance with the directions for printing in the appendix to the election rules.

### Mayoral referendums

At a mayoral referendum, you must follow the directions for printing contained in the appendix to the referendum regulations.

2.51 You should commence the printing of ballot papers as soon as possible after the nomination process has been completed, the deadline for withdrawals has passed, and final proofs have been signed off.

2.52 You must, as a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#), ensure that a process is in place for proof-checking ballot papers. You should also have in place arrangements to check the actual ballot papers being produced, which will highlight if any of the signed-off proofs have been inadvertently altered.

2.53 When proof-checking ballot papers, you should check that:

- every candidate is included on the ballot paper
- every detail on the ballot paper is spelt correctly
- every emblem that has been validly requested has been included
- all party descriptions and emblems have been printed next to the correct candidate

2.54 Once you have received the batches of printed ballot papers, you should carry out a final check before any ballot papers are issued either at a postal vote issuing session or supplied to a polling station. This should be done by checking at least the first and last ballot paper in every book and by checking that the ballot paper numbers in each book or packet run sequentially.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that arrangements are in place for proof-checking ballot papers.



General guidance on the management of contractors and suppliers and on monitoring their work can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

2.55 Careful consideration needs to be given to the number of ballot papers that will need to be printed to allow you to allocate a sufficient number of ballot papers to polling stations and issue postal ballot packs. You should base your print-run on 100% turnout of eligible electors. There are significant risks attached to printing ballot papers based on lower turnout levels. For example, if you start running out of ballot papers on polling day it will be more difficult at that stage to print additional ballot papers and send these to the affected polling stations in a timely manner.

2.56 If you decide for any reason not to print ballot papers based on 100% turnout of eligible electorate, you should carefully assess the risks.

2.57 As part of your risk assessment you should consider:

- expected turnout levels – you should assume that the turnout will not be less than the turnout at the last local government election
- any particular local circumstances
- any local or national issues which may affect turnout

2.58 You should also take steps to ensure that additional ballot papers can be printed at short notice if required and decide how polling station staff would be briefed should this situation occur.

2.59 Guidance on the allocation of ballot papers to polling stations can be found in paragraph 2.55 above.

## Ballot paper security

2.60 Once the official mark is printed on your ballot papers, they are effectively 'live'. Regardless of whether you have outsourced your printing or are printing in-house, you must, as a requirement to meet [performance standard 2b](#), take steps to ensure the security of ballot papers during production and storage. Your security arrangements should prevent unauthorised access to or use of the ballot papers during all stages of the production process and storage between printing and the poll.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2b](#), you must provide the Commission with confirmation that steps are taken to ensure the security of ballot papers.

## 3 Polling station voting

3.1 We have produced a [polling station handbook](#) which covers in detail the voting procedures and what to expect on polling day.

### Mayoral referendums

We have also produced a [polling station handbook for stand-alone mayoral referendums](#) and [one for combined local government elections and mayoral referendums](#).

3.2 The guidance contained in the polling station handbooks has not been reproduced here. Instead, this part of our guidance focuses on the preparations Returning Officers will need to make in advance of polling day.

## Setting up polling stations



Guidance on the identification of suitable polling stations can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

3.3 You should take all necessary steps to ensure that polling stations are laid out with the voter in mind. In particular, the needs of voters with a range of disabilities should be taken into account. The positioning of all of the required furniture and equipment, as well as where all of the notices should be displayed, should also be considered, along with the placement of signage within the polling station and external signage.

3.4 You should develop plans for the layout of each of your polling stations which can be used to assist those setting up the polling stations.

3.5 Whoever is in charge of setting up polling stations should be instructed on how to do so and what the layout should be capable of achieving.

3.6 You must, as a requirement to meet [performance standard 2a](#) – Polling station set-up, ensure that all polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs, considering voter throughput and flow, including how the voter will move through the voting process from entering to exiting the polling station.

3.7 Even if polling station staff are not expected to set up polling stations, they should be instructed to check that the polling station has been set up properly, and should have reference to any layout plans you have produced and the polling station set-up checklist in the Commission's [polling station handbook](#) when doing so. The polling station handbook also covers the positioning of equipment and display of notices, and provides examples of layouts for both a

room where there is one polling station and a room where there is more than one polling station.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2a](#), you must provide confirmation that guidance/training has been provided to polling station staff on how to set up polling stations.



Further guidance on training polling station staff can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

3.8 Polling station inspector visits can be used to check polling station set-up and to ensure that all notices remain properly displayed throughout polling day.



Further details on the role of polling station inspectors can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

## Polling station equipment and materials

3.9 You are legally required to provide polling stations with certain materials:

- ballot box(es)
- ballot papers (including tendered ballot papers)
- materials to enable voters to mark their ballot papers (in practice, pencils - you may wish to provide a string to attach pencils to the polling booths)
- relevant part of the register
- absent voters lists – postal voters', proxy voters' and postal proxies lists
- form to record the details of electors who have been issued ballot papers after the correction of a clerical error (which may be appended to the polling station register)
- corresponding number list(s)
- large-print version of the ballot paper
- enlarged hand-held sample copy of the ballot paper
- voting device for use by blind or partially sighted voters
- ballot paper accounts
- declaration by companions of voters with disabilities
- list of tendered votes
- list of votes marked by the Presiding Officer
- statement of number of votes marked by the Presiding Officer
- list of voters with disabilities assisted by companions
- Guidance for voters notice
- Instructions for voters notice (to be displayed inside the polling booth)
- polling screens
- packets, with seals, in which to place postal ballot papers returned to the polling station

3.10 In addition, you should provide:

- a copy of the requirements as to secrecy
- envelopes, with seals, in which to place any ballot papers that have been issued but which the elector has not placed in the ballot box
- form or list to record electors marked as postal voters but who claim not to have applied for one
- notepaper for use by polling station staff
- stationery items as required, e.g. paper clips, drawing pins, adhesive tack, adhesive tape
- plastic sacks for returning stationery and equipment to the verification venue
- envelopes for making up assorted packets

3.11 You should check that all polling station equipment is fit for purpose and that you have a sufficient quantity. You should have prepared your polling station equipment and materials in good time before polling day, for either delivery to polling stations or collection by Presiding Officers.

3.12 As part of your evaluation of the suitability of your polling stations you will already have considered accessibility issues both inside and outside of each of your polling stations. You should ensure that any additional equipment you have identified as required to make the polling station accessible is delivered and set up in good time for the opening of the poll.

3.13 The law requires that polling station staff are to be provided with [a copy of the relevant secrecy requirements](#). We have produced the [relevant secrecy requirements in English and Welsh](#) for Returning Officers in Wales.

#### Mayoral referendums

We have also published [polling station secrecy requirements for mayoral referendums](#).

## Allocation of ballot papers

3.14 By law, you must provide each polling station with such number of ballot papers as, in your opinion, may be necessary. Careful consideration needs to be given to the number that will be required in each case, particularly if you are considering allocating fewer ballot papers than would be required in the event of 100% turnout of eligible electorate (i.e. all electors entitled to vote in person at the polling station).

3.15 As part of your consideration, you may wish to consider expected turnout levels. In such a case, you should assume that the turnout will not be less than the turnout at the last local government election.

3.16 If you decide for any reason not to allocate ballot papers to polling stations based on 100% turnout of eligible electorate, you should take steps to ensure that additional ballot papers can be provided to any polling station that may require them in a timely manner.

3.17 When allocating ballot papers to polling stations, it is important to ensure that the numbers on the ballot papers allocated to each polling station run consecutively in order to avoid any problems with completing the corresponding number list or ballot paper account. Further guidance on the printing of ballot papers is provided in [Section 2 – Production of notices, poll cards and ballot papers](#) above.

3.18 By law, tendered ballot papers must also be supplied to Presiding Officers. Tendered ballot papers should be supplied to polling stations in a sealed envelope with instructions stating that the envelope should be opened and the ballot papers within it issued only in prescribed circumstances, and a brief description of those circumstances should also be provided. This can help to avoid tendered ballot papers being issued in error.

3.19 You should take all necessary steps to ensure that all polling station staff understand that there are limited circumstances in which tendered ballot papers can be issued, and are made aware of what these circumstances are and what processes they will be required to follow for issuing them. The circumstances under which tendered ballot papers can be issued and the processes for doing so are covered in the Commission's [polling station handbook](#).



Further guidance on training polling station staff can be found in [Part B – Planning and organisation](#).

## Polling station registers and absent voting lists

3.20 By law, you must provide each Presiding Officer with the appropriate part of the register for their polling station and appropriate absent voting lists. Polling station registers can be printed once the election notice of alteration has been published, i.e. five working days before polling day.

3.21 Procedures should be put in place to deal with any necessary amendments to polling station registers and proxy lists notified by the Electoral Registration Officer after that time resulting from alterations as a result of correcting clerical errors or court decisions on registration appeals and the granting of emergency proxy applications.

3.22 Whether such determinations are made before polling day or on polling day itself, if you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer, you should agree

with them a method for communicating the relevant information to Presiding Officers, which may be done orally or in writing.

3.23 Where a clerical error has been rectified and the relevant elector arrives at the polling station and applies for a ballot paper, the Presiding Officer is legally required to issue a ballot paper in the usual manner. The Presiding Officer is also under a legal duty to make a written record of the elector to whom a ballot paper has been issued following an alteration to the register due to a clerical error. This record should include the elector's name and elector number. To assist Presiding Officers, you should attach an additional sheet to the polling station registers to allow them to record any such amendments.

3.24 Similar processes should also be developed to communicate additions to the proxy voters' list as a result of emergency proxy applications.

3.25 Where an elector makes a complaint to polling station staff that suggests that they should be on the electoral register, the Presiding Officer must, by law, communicate that representation to the Electoral Registration Officer as soon as is practicable. For this to work effectively there will need to be suitable communication systems in place between Presiding Officers and the Electoral Registration Officer.

## Corresponding number lists

3.26 You are under a legal obligation to prepare and provide for each polling station a corresponding number list. The corresponding number list is a prescribed document that can be found in the appendix to the election rules. A form to 'like effect' may be used.

3.27 There are two types of corresponding number list: one list, which is the list to be used at postal vote issuing sessions, contains the number and unique identifying mark of every ballot paper produced, as well as the elector numbers of postal voters; and another list, which is the one to be used in polling stations, contains the ballot paper numbers and a column to add the elector numbers of voters to whom those ballot papers are issued.

### Combination

Where polls are combined, the law requires a combined corresponding number list to be used. If the issue of postal votes has been combined, then a combined corresponding number list will also have to be used at the issue of postal votes.

The corresponding number lists are prescribed in the legislation but forms to 'like effect' can be used. In practice, you will need to give consideration as to how you will produce the combined corresponding number lists for use at combined polls. For example, the franchise requirements may be different at different electoral events and therefore not all electors may be entitled to all of the ballot papers. Equally, some electors may choose not to accept a ballot

paper for a particular poll. One possible solution could be to use a separate sheet of paper for each poll, but which are then joined together in some way (for example, by staple) at the end of the process.

## Packets for postal ballot papers delivered to polling stations

3.28 Postal voters can return their postal vote by hand to any polling station in their electoral area.

### Combination

At a combined poll where the issue of postal ballot papers has been combined, postal votes may only be returned to that part of the electoral area that is common to all of the combined polls in respect of which postal ballot papers have been issued.



Polling station staff should be appropriately briefed to identify which postal votes can be returned to their polling station. Further details on training of polling station staff can be found in [Part B: Planning and organisation](#).

3.29 You should provide polling stations with sufficient packets for received postal votes. Records of all such packets should be kept so that each one can be accounted for. The packets should be clearly labelled as containing postal votes. The labels should include the name of the polling station and polling station identifier. You should ensure that the packets are capable of being securely sealed. Polling agents are entitled, by law, to attach their seal to sealed packets before they are removed from the polling station and must therefore be permitted to do so.

3.30 You should emphasise to Presiding Officers the importance of maintaining the security of postal votes returned to polling stations by instructing them to immediately place any returned postal votes in the packets provided and to ensure that the packets are stored securely.

3.31 You should arrange for postal votes to be collected from polling stations throughout the day as this will help to reduce the number that will have to be dealt with after the close of poll. Polling station inspectors can perform this duty. You should ensure that processes are in place to maintain a clear audit trail and to ensure the security of collected postal vote packets while in transit.

## Polling station log

3.32 You should prepare a polling station log for polling station staff to use to record any problems or anomalies. In particular, polling station staff should be advised to use this log to record anything that may help to explain any apparent issues with the ballot paper account at the verification – for example, if a voter has been seen leaving the polling station with a ballot paper.

## Polling station notices

3.33 The contents and display of the ‘Guidance for voters’ notice and the ‘Instructions for voters’ notice are prescribed in legislation.

3.34 As a requirement to meet [performance standard 2a](#), the ‘Guidance for voters’ and ‘Instructions for voters’ notices must be designed and printed in accordance with any [example templates](#) that the Commission has issued or designed in line with the criteria set out in the [Electoral Commission guidance](#). We have produced [bi-lingual templates](#) for Returning Officers in Wales.

3.35 The ‘Guidance for voters’ notice is required by law to be printed in conspicuous characters and exhibited inside and outside of the polling station. The ‘Instructions for voters’ notice is required by law to be exhibited in every polling booth.



To demonstrate that you have met [performance standard 2a](#), you must provide confirmation that your ‘Guidance for voters’ and ‘Instructions for voters’ notices are designed and printed in accordance with any example templates that the Commission has issued or are designed in line with the criteria set out in the [Electoral Commission guidance](#).