

Priority	Medium
Event specific	3 May 2012 elections
Action required	Yes
Area	Great Britain
Retain	Until 29 June 2012
Circular reference	EC21(2011)

Guidance and resources for the 3 May 2012 polls

14 October 2011

Purpose

1. The purpose of this Circular is to provide information on the guidance and resources the Electoral Commission will be providing to support Returning Officers in planning for and delivering the 3 May 2012 polls.
2. This Circular also requests order numbers for hard copies of polling station handbooks and quick guides.

Guidance for Returning Officers

3. The Commission will be producing guidance to support Returning Officers in the practice and procedure of running the 3 May 2012 elections and in meeting the Electoral Commission's performance standards, with the requirements of each of the standards embedded throughout the guidance.
4. The guidance will be divided into six parts, covering the following areas:
 - Part A – Returning Officer role and responsibilities
 - Part B – Planning and organisation
 - Part C – Administering the poll
 - Part D – Absent voting
 - Part E – Verifying and counting the votes
 - Part F – After the declaration of results
5. The guidance for Returning Officers will be available on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators by 16 December 2011. This webpage is being redesigned to help you to quickly identify where to find the guidance relevant to you. All of the

guidance and resources for each particular election type will sit only one click away from this page.

6. Guidance for Returning Officers in Wales will be available in English and Welsh.

Project plans and risk registers

7. The Commission will also be producing template project plans and risk registers to support Returning Officers in planning for and administering the 3 May 2012 polls.
8. These templates, which will be produced in both Word and Excel format, will be available on our website www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators by 16 December 2011.

Guidance for candidates and agents

9. Our guidance for candidates and agents will be available on our website at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents> by 30 December 2011.
10. We are redesigning the relevant webpages to help candidates and agents to quickly find the information they need and to facilitate local printing. All of the guidance materials for candidates and agents, including guidance on election spending, will be presented by election type, with all of the relevant guidance for each election type available for download from a single webpage. The contents of each guidance document will be clearly signposted, both on the webpages and on the documents themselves.
11. We have also consolidated the number of guidance parts and created an overview document which will explain how all of the guidance parts fit together and set out who does what at an election. There will then be six guidance parts broadly following in chronological order the processes candidates and agents will need to go through:
 - Part 1: Can you stand for election?
 - Part 2a: Standing as an independent candidate
 - Part 2b: Standing as a party candidate¹
 - Part 3: Spending and donations
 - Part 4: The campaign
 - Part 5: Your right to attend key electoral events
 - Part 6: After the declaration of result
12. There will be four sets of guidance reflecting the various elections scheduled for 3 May 2012:
 - Local government elections in England and Wales

¹ Part 2 of the guidance for candidates and agents at a GLA election will be divided by contest rather than by whether a candidate is standing as an independent or representing a political party. There will therefore be one document for mayoral candidates (Part 2a), one for Assembly constituency candidates (Part 2b) and one for London member candidates (Part 2c).

- Parish and community council elections in England and Wales
 - Local government elections in Scotland
 - Greater London Authority elections
13. Should there be any mayoral elections in May 2012 resulting from any mayoral referendums, we will also publish guidance for candidates and agents for those elections.
 14. All of the guidance documents for candidates and agents at elections in Wales will be available in English and Welsh.
 15. We will also be producing, by 13 January 2012, nomination forms to assist candidates standing for election in preparing to submit their nomination. Other resources for candidates and agents, as well as a nominations checklist to assist Returning Officers with receiving and checking nominations, will be available by 31 January 2012.

Polling station handbook and quick guide

16. There will be five separate sets of polling station handbooks and quick guides to cover the different polls taking place across Great Britain:
 - Local government elections in England and Wales
 - Local government elections in Scotland
 - Greater London Authority elections
 - Mayoral referendums²
 - Combined mayoral referendum and local government elections
17. Our polling station handbooks and quick guides are designed to assist polling station staff working at an election and describe the procedures to be followed and how to deal with any issues that may arise.
18. The polling station handbook and quick guide for local government elections in England and Wales will be available in English and in Welsh.
19. Our polling station handbooks and quick guides will be available on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators by 31 January 2012, with hard copies available to order. Details on how to order hard copies of the polling station handbooks and quick guides can be found below.

Doubtful ballot paper booklet and placemats

20. We will again be producing doubtful ballot paper placemats and booklets to assist Returning Officers in adjudicating doubtful ballot papers.

² Mayoral referendums can be held in England and Wales under existing legislation as a result of a council resolution or local petition. Also, subject to confirmation of provisions in the Localism Bill, currently before the Parliament, the Government has said it intends to require mayoral referendums to be held in eleven cities in England (Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield and Wakefield).

21. The booklets and placemats will provide suggested examples of allowed and rejected votes, all of which are based on previous case law or taken from the specific rules.
22. Our doubtful ballot paper booklets and placemats will be available on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators by 31 January 2012.

Supporting resources

23. We will also develop a range of support products, designed to assist you in the preparation for and delivery of all election processes. These resources will be available on our website www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators by 31 January 2012.

Forms and notices

24. We will be producing text and design templates for key voter forms and notices for the May 2012 polls. These resources are intended to help administrators to produce voter materials that are accessible and meet good practice guidelines. They will be adapted from those produced for May 2011 to enable them to be used for the particular polls taking place on 3 May 2012. We will produce:
 - text and design templates for poll cards and postal voting statements
 - non-statutory quick guides to postal voting
 - 'guidance for voters' and 'instructions for voters' notices

Scope

25. The text and templates will cover, in **England and Wales**, elections to local councils and parish/town/community councils, and local governance referendums (in England only), including relevant combinations.
26. Subject to discussion and agreement with the Electoral Management Board, we expect to work with its Forms Working Group to develop templates for use at the local government elections in **Scotland**. In relation to **London**, we are currently discussing with the Greater London Returning Officer and London Elects how forms and notices will be developed for the 2012 Greater London Assembly and Mayor of London elections.
27. We are working closely with our lawyers to ensure that any text and templates we produce are lawful and comply with the statutory requirements for the relevant polls. The legislation allows poll cards and postal voting statements to be produced in a form 'to like effect' as the prescribed form contained in the relevant legislation. While notices for the local elections and referendums in England and Wales must contain the content exactly as specified in the relevant legislation,³ they can be designed and produced in a way that ensures they are accessible, including being illustrated, and we will produce illustrated notices where this is appropriate based on the content of the prescribed notice.

³ Although prescribed forms can commonly be adapted 'so far as circumstances require'.

28. We will consult with members of the Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group (including representatives of print and software suppliers) on the content and designs of the text and templates.

Format and sizing

29. We have taken on board feedback received after the 2011 polls and have made some changes to the format that the templates are produced in. Forms and notices that need to contain variable data will be provided in MS Word format. This will enable data from software systems to be integrated into the templates more easily. We will also provide visual examples of how the templates should look, in pdf format, along with the 'artwork' files for printers to use.
30. The templates will be designed to be printed in the same sizes as for 2011, as shown in the table below. These are the optimum sizes to enable the text to be printed in a size that is easily readable, based on how and where the document will be displayed or used.

Document	Size	Format
Poll cards	A5	MS Word template/text + pdf illustrative example + artwork files
Postal voting statement	A4	
Postal voting guides	A4	MS Word
Polling station notices	A2	If fixed number of candidates/votes): pdf
Polling booth notices	A3 ⁴	If variable number of candidates/votes: MS Word

Timetable

31. We will publish the text and templates on our website as follows:
- Poll cards, postal voting statements and postal voting guides: by **23 December 2011**
 - Notices for polling stations/polling booths: by **10 February 2012**.

Police and Crime Commissioner elections

32. We will also be producing guidance and resources for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be held in England and Wales on 15 November 2012. While further details on when these products will be made available will be circulated in due course, we are currently working to ensure that the guidance will be available on our website by 31 March 2012.

Ordering process

33. If you would like to order hard copies of the polling station handbooks and quick guides, please complete the product request form at Appendix A and e-mail it to your local Commission office by **Friday 16 December 2011**. Please note, the Commission will be printing products to order and therefore if orders are not received by the above deadline, we may not be able to fulfil your order.

⁴ Where the notice displayed in polling stations and polling booths has the same content, then the notice will be produced in both A2 and A3.

Contact

34. For any further information and to submit orders for materials, please contact:

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This circular is for the attention of:

The Returning Officer

District, metropolitan borough and London borough authorities in England
Unitary authorities in England, Scotland and Wales

This circular is for the information of:

The Electoral Registration Officer

District, metropolitan borough and London borough authorities in England
Unitary authorities in England and Wales

Unitary authorities and joint boards in Scotland

This circular was approved by Ailsa Irvine, Head of Electoral Guidance and Events.