

Part B – Planning and organisation

Local government elections in England
and Wales: guidance for Returning
Officers

Published October 2016 (last updated December 2016)

In this guidance we use 'must' when we refer to a specific legal requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be recommended practice, but which are not legal requirements.

Translations and other formats

All of our guidance and resources for these polls are also available in Welsh. For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

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Updates to this document

Updated	Description of change	Paragraph number
December 2016	Update to reflect that the conduct Order for combined authority mayoral elections has now been laid in the UK Parliament.	N/A
December 2016	Addition of information regarding provision of polling station information and partnership work with Democracy Club	7.11

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1 Planning for an election

1.1 To plan effectively for an election, you should prepare a project plan, treat it as a 'living document', keep it under regular review, and use it to monitor progress.

1.2 You should ensure that your planning supports the delivery of the following outcomes:

- voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended
- it is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and they can have confidence in the management of the process and the result



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to develop and implement robust project planning processes. This should include evaluating the planning for and delivery of previous polls and identifying lessons learnt, updating plans as required. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place project planning documentation which is kept under regular review and which reflects lessons learned from previous polls. This part of the guidance sets out what this project planning documentation should cover.

The Commission has produced a [template project plan](#) that you may wish to use and adapt to fit your local circumstances. The template includes a number of example deliverables and tasks including all of those that should be included to be able to demonstrate that the outcomes set out in the performance standards can be delivered. In addition to the deliverables and tasks identified in the template you should also add in any other deliverables and tasks you identify as necessary, including ones specific to your local circumstances.

Combined authority mayoral elections

At a combined authority mayoral election, liaison between the local ROs and the Combined Authority Returning Officer (CARO) should start at an early stage to support the delivery of a consistently high-quality experience for voters and those standing for election across the whole of the combined authority area.

If you are not also the CARO you should liaise with them at an early stage to ascertain their objectives and success measures for the election so that you can reflect these in your planning.

We have developed [separate planning guidance](#) and a separate [project plan](#) and [risk register for CAROs](#).

1.3 Before starting your detailed planning, you should set out what you want to achieve and what success would look like. Your [project plan](#) should include clearly defined objectives and success measures.

1.4 The Commission has provided some sample aims and suggested tools that will allow you to measure the extent to which the conduct of the election has been successful as part of the [template project plan](#).

1.5 If you have not already done so, you should evaluate the planning for, and delivery of, previous polls and identify what worked well and what did not, which should inform your planning. Your project plan should also include a plan to evaluate procedures post-election and identify lessons learnt. Further guidance on reviewing election procedures can be found in [Part F – After the declaration of results](#).

1.6 You should ensure that your planning reflects the particular context and circumstances of the election, such as any legislative changes which have come into effect.

1.7 Your project plan should cover contingency planning and business continuity arrangements. The continuity arrangements should include provisions to cover loss of staff and loss of venues during the election period. Guidance on developing continuity arrangements for these specific processes is provided in the relevant sections throughout this part of the guidance.

1.8 Your project plan should also identify the resources required and you should reconcile projected costs for activities against the available budget. You should take all necessary steps to ensure that the local authority makes the necessary resources available to you to enable you to discharge your functions.

1.9 Your plans should also cover the potential for by-elections to be held in your area to fill casual vacancies. [Appendix A - 'Casual vacancies and by-elections'](#) covers how casual vacancies arise and the timing of any by-elections.

1.10 The Commission has published a [non-date specific timetable](#) containing the statutory deadlines as set out in the election rules which can be used to assist you in your planning. A date-specific timetable for will be available on our website ahead of a scheduled election and we will notify you through a Bulletin once it has been published.

1.11 You should also prepare a risk register, treat it as a 'living document' and keep it under regular review, using it to monitor the risks and document any changes in risk, as well as ensuring that mitigating actions are identified and are being taken forward as appropriate. Your risk register should identify the following:

- any difficulties and problems that may occur, and the actions taken to mitigate them

- the seriousness of any risk by indicating both the likelihood of the risk occurring and the impact of the risk if it did occur

1.10 The Commission has developed a [template risk register](#) that you may wish to use. The template provides some example risks and suggestions for mitigating those risks. In addition to the risks identified in the template you should also identify any other risks, including ones specific to your local circumstances, and how you would mitigate those.

2 Staffing

2.1 Your project plan should include identification of staffing requirements, including any necessary recruitment arrangements. It is essential that you identify the staff you will need and make the necessary appointments at the earliest opportunity.

2.2 You should seek advice from your council's human resources department as necessary to ensure that the methods used to identify, recruit, employ and pay staff are robust and comply with all legal requirements.

2.3 Following an assessment of the performance of staff used at previous electoral events, you may wish to contact staff used previously at an early stage in the planning process to check their availability.

Project team

2.4 You should establish a project team to support you in carrying out your functions and in delivering a well-run election. In addition to yourself, your project team should include any appointed deputies, other elections staff members and, where you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the ERO. It should also include any other key personnel you consider appropriate (such as, for example, colleagues from your council's communications team or your local SPOC).

Combined authority mayoral election

At a combined authority mayoral election your project team could include the other local ROs in the combined authority area, as well as the CARO.

Neighbourhood planning referendums

At a neighbourhood planning referendum that crosses local authority boundaries, your project team should include the ERO(s), the other Counting Officers and Chief Counting Officer to enable effective liaison in the planning and delivery of the polls.

2.5 The project team should have a clear remit and understanding of the tasks to be carried out. At the planning stage, a schedule of meetings should be prepared, and a record of each meeting should be kept as an audit trail of what was discussed and of any decisions made. Where possible, the RO should chair any formal meetings of the project team.

Deputies

2.6 You should ensure that deputy arrangements are in place in case you are unable to act personally. You may appoint deputies to discharge all or any

of your duties¹. Any appointed deputies should have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions they have been assigned. Appointments must be made in writing and should include details of the functions that the deputy is authorised to exercise on your behalf². The acceptance should also be made in writing.

2.7 A deputy is liable, in the same way as the RO, for a breach of official duty³.

Neighbourhood planning referendums

At a neighbourhood planning referendum that crosses local authority boundaries, the Chief Counting Officer may appoint deputies to discharge any or all of their functions. Any appointments must be made in writing and should be accepted in writing⁴.

Election office staff

2.8 Election office staff, with their experience of running elections, should be part of the project team. You should assess whether the team is adequately staffed or whether you will need to recruit any additional staff to support the effective delivery of the election.

Electoral Registration Officer

2.9 If you are not also the ERO, you will need to liaise closely with them to obtain the relevant registration and absent voting data. If there is a need for exchanging data electronically, you should agree the timings for the exchange of data and ensure that a test of the process is carried out ahead of the first scheduled transfer. There will be updates to the data at a number of points within the election timetable, as the ERO must publish two interim election notices of alteration as well as the final election notice of alteration⁵. The Commission has published a [timetable](#) containing the dates related to the publication of these notices.

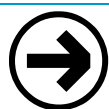
Support staff

2.10 You should identify support staff and ensure they are available to assist with any public enquiries you may receive in the run-up to the election. You should set up a dedicated team (or train front-of-house reception or call centre staff) - where you are not the ERO, working with the ERO for your local authority as appropriate - to deal with a range of basic enquiries, such as questions about whether or not a person is registered to vote, postal and proxy voting and the location of polling stations.

2.11 Any staff who will be dealing with public enquiries should receive training to deal with such enquiries and be provided with responses to frequently asked questions, as well as a list of the locations of polling stations and key dates in the election timetable. The Commission has developed a [template of](#)

[FAQs for front line staff](#) which shows the types of questions you can expect to receive in the election period and suggested answers for these which you can adapt to fit your local circumstances. A process should be in place for the escalation of more complex enquiries to the elections team.

2.12 The ERO will need to consider whether they will need any additional support staff to assist with the processing of registration and absent vote applications in the lead-up to the elections – and in particular in the lead-up to the registration deadline on the 12th working day before the poll.



Further information on processing registration and absent vote applications in the lead-up to an election can be found in [Part 4 - Maintaining the register throughout the year](#) and [Part 5 – Absent voting](#) of the Commission’s guidance for EROs.

Staff for specific election processes

2.13 As well as establishing your project team and support staff, you will need to appoint staff to help you undertake the various election processes. You should identify staffing requirements and put processes in place for recruiting the necessary staff. You should have access to a database of staff used at previous elections. Staff can also often be recruited from among council employees. Local authorities can permit their staff to work on the election, but they are not required to do so.

2.14 As part of your identification and recruitment of staff, you should consider the skills appropriate to each role. For example, those with experience working in finance could be recruited for the recording of unused ballot papers at the verification and count, or to work at postal vote opening sessions to record the daily totals.

2.15 As there is no age restriction for staff working on specific election processes, you could liaise with local further and higher education establishments to identify young people who could be recruited to work at polling stations or at the verification and count, which could also help to boost their engagement with the democratic process.



Information on the payment of fees to staff after an election can be found in [Part F – After the declaration of results](#).

Polling station staff

2.16 You must appoint and pay a Presiding Officer and such Poll Clerks as may be necessary to staff each polling station⁶. This cannot be any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate in or about the election⁷.

2.17 In order to ensure that voters can receive a high-quality service, when deciding on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations you will need to ensure that polling stations are properly staffed, giving consideration to the factors set out in paragraph 2.22 below.

2.18 The Commission recommends the following ratios (which exclude postal voters) when allocating electors and staff to polling stations:

- A polling station should not have more than 2,500 electors allocated to it.
- In addition to a Presiding Officer, there should be one Poll Clerk for polling stations with up to 1000 electors.
- One additional Poll Clerk should be appointed for polling stations with up to 1,750 electors.
- One further Poll Clerk should be appointed to a polling station with up to the maximum of 2,500 electors.

Combination

The ratios outlined assume the election is not combined. In the event of a combined election, in addition to a Presiding Officer, there should be one Poll Clerk for polling stations with up to 750 electors and one additional Poll Clerk should be appointed for polling stations with up to 1,500 electors.

2.19 These ratios are recommended minimum levels and there may be circumstances in which you wish to employ a higher number of staff.

2.20 Any polling station over 2,000 electors will create particular challenges in ensuring voters can vote without delay, taking into account the hours of poll and the fact that voters will not typically vote in an even spread across the day. To be able to respond to these challenges, staff should be capable of being deployed flexibly to respond to peaks in voter activity and limit the time voters are expected to queue to receive their ballot paper. One mechanism for managing larger polling stations effectively could be to split the register within that polling station to create two separate issuing desks, each managed by two members of staff, thereby doubling the capacity for processing, while recognising that there would need to be sufficient space within the polling station for this to operate effectively.

2.21 It is important that when allocating electors and staff to polling stations the reasoning behind the decisions on allocation can be explained. Each decision should be taken on a case-by-case basis and not for the electoral area or local authority as a whole.

2.22 In deciding on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations, as a minimum you should consider:

- any particular local circumstances such as population increases and demographic trends
- levels of postal voters

- projected turnout, taking into account the potential for late engagement and interest in the election by which point scope for adjusting plans will be limited – as a minimum you should assume that the turnout will be not less than the turnout at the last equivalent election
- voter throughput and flow, including how the voter will move through the voting process from entering to exiting the polling station
- any local or national issues which may affect turnout
- the electoral system in use and the importance for staff to be able to spend sufficient time explaining the voting process to electors
- at combined polls, the impact the combination of polls will have, such as on the time taken to issue ballot papers and for voters to complete more than one ballot paper

2.23 This list is not exhaustive, and you should also consider any other factors that you consider appropriate.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to decide on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations, giving consideration to the factors set out in this guidance, in order to ensure that polling stations are properly staffed so that voters can receive a high-quality service. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to set out the approach you have taken to allocating electors and staff to polling stations.

2.24 There are different options open to you for deploying staff within polling stations. Your plans should be sufficiently flexible to allow you to deploy staff to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout polling day. While voters in a queue at their polling station at 10pm must be issued with their ballot paper⁸, it is still important that sufficient staff are in place to enable the delivery of a high-quality service to voters throughout polling day. You should, however, be prepared to respond if there is a queue at one or more polling stations in your area at 10pm. The Commission's handbook for polling station staff outlines the procedures to be followed throughout polling day and at the close of poll.

Example

If you have 1,200 electors allocated to a polling station, you should appoint one Presiding Officer and two Poll Clerks to that polling station, and decide what roles the staff at that polling station should carry out.

So, for example:

- all three staff could be involved in the issuing process, or
- one member of staff could act as an information officer to provide information to voters and to be available to respond to any questions from voters, while the other two staff members carry out the issuing process

Although you should decide on what roles the staff at each polling station should carry out, it might be necessary to adapt this at different points in the day, for example, at any particularly busy points. It is therefore essential to retain flexibility to allow you to adapt to changing circumstances throughout polling day.

If the polling station is located in a polling place which contains multiple polling stations, one or more members of staff could be used as an information officer covering all of the polling stations and to assist with directing voters to the correct polling station. Also, staff from one polling station in the polling place could potentially be used to assist staff in another polling station within that building if required, for example as a result of a high number of voters attending one of the stations at a particular time when the other station is quiet.

2.25 While appointing 'stand-by' staff may not always be practical or feasible within your budget, you should nevertheless be able to deploy staff flexibly on polling day to respond to specific issues that may arise.

2.26 You may also consider appointing part-time Poll Clerks to provide assistance at expected peak polling hours or in the run-up to 10pm. In addition, you could appoint a team of back-up polling station staff to be deployed at peak times to specific polling stations or to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout polling day or at the close of poll. If parts of the local authority area are not easily accessible, it may be helpful to have teams positioned in different parts of the area.

2.27 To be able to deploy staff flexibly on polling day, staff will need to be trained appropriately. Further guidance on training can be found in **chapter 3-Training**.

Polling station inspectors

2.28 Polling station inspectors play an important role in the effective management of the polls. They provide an essential communication link between you and your polling station staff including dealing with queries and problems arising at polling stations on polling day.

2.29 You should make arrangements to appoint polling station inspectors to visit and inspect polling stations on your behalf on polling day. In deciding on the allocation of polling station inspectors to polling places, you should consider:

- the geography of the area and travelling distance between polling places
- the number of polling stations in each polling place
- the experience of polling station staff at each polling station
- expected turnout levels and any particular local circumstances
- the number of visits polling station inspectors will be expected to make to each polling station during the day

2.30 Polling station inspectors should ensure that all of their assigned polling stations are properly set up in such a way as to take account of voter needs and contribute to the smooth running of the polling station, and are fully equipped and accessible to all voters. They should also ensure that the polling station meets your expectations of service to voters.

2.31 The polling station inspector should work with the Presiding Officers and other polling station staff to identify and deal with any problems arising throughout polling day and at the close of poll, and should escalate any issues to you as appropriate.

2.32 The polling station inspector may be involved in liaising with the electoral registration office regarding polling day amendments to the register and emergency proxy applications. In these instances, you should have a process in place for communicating any changes, and should advise polling station inspectors of their role in it, if any.

2.33 For initial visits, polling station inspectors should aim to visit all of their allocated polling stations as quickly as possible in order to be able to re-assure you that all stations have opened on time and are operating effectively. These visits could be preceded, where possible, by a separate communication sent by Presiding Officers to their polling station inspectors, prior to the opening of the poll. For example, polling station inspectors could be notified via text message confirming whether the polling station is set up and ready for opening, and whether there are any issues. This should then help the polling station inspector prioritise their visits to polling stations.

2.34 Subsequent visits throughout the day can be used for a variety of purposes including collecting postal votes, answering any questions that polling station staff may have, to check that all notices remain properly displayed and to deliver any missing or additional equipment that is required. Polling station inspectors should therefore carry with them spare equipment and stationery in case of any shortages or missing items. This should include polling station handbooks and quick guides, ballot papers, equipment, stationery and other items such as forms, envelopes and copies of the register of electors.

2.35 You should provide polling station inspectors with instructions as to their role and a checklist of tasks that they should carry out. A [checklist](#) that may be given to polling station inspectors for them to complete during their polling station visits is available. This document also contains a list of what each polling station inspector should receive prior to polling day.

2.36 Beyond highlighting any issues, completed checklists can also be used to inform an evaluation of the suitability of polling stations as part of the post-election review process.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

2.37 You should identify staffing requirements for your postal vote issuing and opening sessions. The following staff may be required:

- specially trained supervisory staff
- clerical staff
- IT staff

2.38 You must not appoint any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate in or about the election. The number of different polls taking place and your decision on whether to do a combined or separate issue of postal votes may have an impact on the number of staff required for the issuing (if this is to be done in-house) and opening of postal votes, and you will need to plan for this accordingly.



Further guidance on factors to consider in determining whether or not to combine the issue of postal votes is provided in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

2.39 In devising your plans you should also be mindful of the demands on time the issue and opening of postal votes can place on core staff. There will be a number of postal vote issues in the immediate run-up to polling day to pick up those who have applied to vote by post and to register in the lead-up to the registration deadline⁹. You will need to consider how to manage this, ensuring postal votes can be issued to electors as early as possible.



Further information on the issue of postal votes is provided in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

2.40 You should take into account the total number of current postal voters and projected turnout of postal voters when deciding on your staffing arrangements. For planning purposes, taking into account the potential for late engagement and interest in the election by which point scope for adjusting plans will be limited, as a minimum you should assume that the turnout of postal voters will be **not less** than the turnout of postal voters at the last equivalent election. Also, your review of recent electoral events will give you an indication of how robust your previous staffing assumptions were.

2.41 This assessment may need to be revised after you have received the final postal voters' lists from the ERO. In any event, you should build sufficient flexibility and contingency into your staffing arrangements to deal with a last-minute increase in numbers of postal voters, an increase in turnout, or varying volumes of postal votes being returned on different days. Your arrangements also need to be such that you can ensure you can effectively manage those delivered to polling stations on polling day.

2.42 Even if you decide to outsource all or part of the postal vote issuing process you should designate a member of the project team to monitor outsourced work and the work of the contractor, and specifically to attend those parts of the issuing process that have been contracted out. This person should monitor the work of the contractor, which should include carrying out tasks such as spot checks to ensure that the postal voting stationery does not contain any errors, the postal ballot packs are being correctly collated and that any postal votes that need to go overseas are being prioritised. Further guidance on managing contractors and suppliers can be found in **Chapter 5** below.

2.43 How the verification of personal identifiers is to be carried out, including how much of this process is automated and how much of it needs to be done manually, will impact on the numbers of staff you will require for opening returned postal votes. You must have arrangements in place to enable the checking of 100% of postal vote identifiers¹⁰.



Further guidance on the postal vote issue and opening processes is provided in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Verification and count staff

2.44 In order to ensure that voters can have confidence that their votes will be counted in the way they intended, you will need to put in place appropriate resources to ensure that the verification and count are timely and that the processes to be followed are designed and managed in such a way as to secure accurate results with a clear audit trail.

2.45 Decisions on when to commence verification may have staffing implications, and you will need to plan accordingly.

2.46 You should identify the number and type of staff you will require to run your verification and count, and make the necessary appointments as soon as possible.

2.47 You must not appoint any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate in or about the election¹¹.

2.48 If the verification process is commenced immediately following the close of poll, you should, wherever possible, not use staff who have been on polling duty all day.



The Commission has produced guidance on the verification and count process.

Guidance on the principles of an effective verification and count process is contained in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

For practical guidance on the verification and count process, see our verification and count resource '[Planning for an effective verification and count: a toolkit for Returning Officers](#)'.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to put in place appropriate resources to ensure the verification and count are timely and to ensure the verification and count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to set out how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision.

You will need to ensure that count processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed.

Mayoral elections

As mayoral elections with more than two candidates are conducted using the supplementary vote electoral system, there will potentially be two count stages. You should consider how you will arrange your verification and count processes in these circumstances and assess the likely time required for these procedures and the staff you will need for each stage of the process.

At a combined authority mayoral election, you will need to work closely with the CARO to inform your planning on the verification, counting and the transmission of local totals. The CARO will put in place a protocol for a two-way communication of verification and count information and may also direct to hold a central count in some or all constituent authorities.

3 Training

3.1 Your project plan should contain a plan for training which identifies the training needs of both permanent and temporary staff.

3.2 While training activities for temporary staff may not take place until shortly before the election, planning for those activities should start at the earliest opportunity.

3.3 It is vital that each member of the team, whether permanent or temporary, understands their particular role and any statutory obligations associated with the work they are undertaking. All staff should receive training on the legislative requirements and responsibilities relevant to their role, as well as training on ensuring equal access and good customer care.

3.4 You should also develop methods of evaluating the training sessions and materials in order to inform future planning. If you have training personnel within your local authority they may be able to assist you with this process.

Combined authority mayoral elections

At a combined authority mayoral election the CARO may also facilitate training within the combined authority area. Where this is the case, you should ensure that you and your staff attend the relevant training sessions.

Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and polling station inspectors

3.5 Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and other front line staff are frequently the only members of your staff that voters will meet in person. It is therefore particularly important that such staff are trained to understand their role and to perform their duties professionally and effectively, and are able to provide a high standard of customer care. It is important for such staff to be able to communicate well with all voters, and so accessibility issues should be covered in training sessions for all external facing staff. You will also need to ensure that polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations and polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to make an assessment regarding access needs, identifying any problems and actions taken to remedy these and you will need to have in place guidance/training to be provided to polling station staff.

3.6 All polling station staff should be required to attend a face-to-face training session. The training session should address:

- the tasks to be carried out ahead of polling day
- the setting up and management of the polling station
- who can attend a polling station and the procedures to be followed on polling day itself
- the importance for polling station staff to be customer-focused and to offer assistance to all voters, including disabled voters
- the security of election stationery, including returned postal votes
- the procedures to be followed at the close of poll
- health and safety issues

3.7 A template [PowerPoint briefing for polling station staff](#) is available, which can be used for your polling station staff training sessions and updated with any additional local information you consider necessary. A [quiz for polling station staff](#) and [role play exercises and scenarios](#) that you can use as a mechanism for testing and embedding learning are also available.

3.8 Additionally, given the importance of ensuring that the ballot paper accounts are completed correctly in order to provide an audit trail of the number of ballot papers issued and to provide the foundation for an accurate verification process, the Commission has developed an [exercise on completing the ballot paper accounts](#), which you can use at your training sessions.

3.9 A [template graphical guide to packaging materials at the close of poll](#) which you could adapt and provide to polling station staff [is also available](#).

3.10 For flexible resourcing to be able to work effectively, you should train Poll Clerks and Presiding Officers in such a way as to ensure that both have the technical knowledge to carry out each other's roles if required and as far as the law permits.

3.11 Polling station inspectors should receive the same training as polling station staff in order for them to be able to be deployed flexibly and carry out polling station duties if required. You should also provide an additional briefing for polling station inspectors, covering items that are specific to their role.

3.12 Both polling station staff and polling station inspectors should be given a copy of the Commission's [handbook for polling station staff](#) and [polling station quick guide](#), and be instructed to read both ahead of polling day and to bring their copies with them on polling day itself. Polling station inspectors should be given spare copies of the handbook and quick guide that they can provide to polling stations in the event of polling station staff forgetting to take their copies on polling day.

Local authority mayoral elections

We have made available an [insert for use with the local elections polling station handbook](#) to cover the specific circumstances of a local authority mayoral election.

Combined authority mayoral elections

We have produced a [polling station handbook](#) and [quick guide](#) for standalone combined authority mayoral elections, as well as a [handbook](#) and [quick guide](#) for areas where the poll at a combined authority mayoral election is combined with the poll at another local election.

3.13 In addition, you should provide polling station staff and polling station inspectors with contact numbers for use in the event of any problems. As well as numbers for the elections office, this should include a contact number for the police.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

3.14 You should make arrangements for the briefing of all postal vote issue and opening staff. Briefings on the particular procedures to be followed may be provided to postal vote issue and opening staff immediately prior to commencement of the issuing or opening processes. All staff should, however, be provided with guidance notes in advance.

3.15 Also, you should consider training supervisory staff a day or two in advance of the issuing or opening session so that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them.

3.16 Whether you are issuing in-house or have contracted out the issuing of postal votes, you should ensure that supervisory staff are appropriately trained to carry out the required quality assurance checks.

3.17 Supervisory staff at postal vote openings should be trained to ensure that the opening procedures and the verification process are correctly followed and an audit trail is maintained.

3.18 Any person who will be undertaking the verification of postal vote identifiers and has been delegated the authority by you to make decisions on postal voting statements should be provided with a copy of the [Commission and Forensic Science Service guidance on signature checking](#), and be instructed to follow it. You should also consider whether any additional training may be appropriate for anyone undertaking this role.

Verification and count staff

3.19 You should make arrangements for the briefing of all verification and count staff so that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them. All briefings should, as a minimum, cover the procedures relevant to the roles. Prior to the start of the verification and count proceedings, you should undertake a walk-through of the procedures you are expecting everyone to follow so that everyone is aware of what is expected of them at each stage, and how the different roles relate to each other.

Combined authority mayoral elections

If you are also the CARO, you will need to ensure that all count staff receive relevant training on the transmission of local totals. Further guidance is included in our [CARO planning guidance](#).



Guidance on the principles of an effective verification and count process is contained in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

For practical guidance on the verification and count process, see our verification and count resource '[Planning for an effective verification and count: a toolkit for Returning Officers](#)'.

4 Venues

4.1 Your project plan should cover the identification of suitable venues for all processes that you are responsible for.

4.2 Identifying appropriate venues for all of the various election activities should be done as early as possible. The managers of these premises should be contacted at an early stage and informed of the relevant dates, and the necessary booking arrangements made. These activities, done at an early stage in the planning process, will highlight where venues are not available and should allow sufficient time to act on the information and identify alternative premises.

4.3 As part of your review of previous electoral events, you should have undertaken an evaluation of the suitability of venues used. The results of this should be used to inform your planning and to ensure that any identified barriers to access can be overcome.

4.4 Under the Equality Act 2010, service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting people with disabilities at a substantial disadvantage compared to people who are not disabled¹². In order to comply with the duty, you should work closely with people who have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people. The equalities officer at your local authority should be able to provide you with advice and assistance.

4.5 Contingency arrangements should be put in place for all venues to address the risk of the loss of a venue. As part of this you should prepare a list of alternative venues, including making arrangements for the use of stand-by portable polling stations/mobile vehicles and alternative venues for the issue and opening of postal votes and the verification and count if necessary. Staff should be briefed on contingency arrangements: for example in the case of the loss of a polling station on polling day, they could be advised to set up a temporary polling station in their car until alternative arrangements can be made. You should ensure that any changes made to venue location are communicated to candidates, agents, electors and any others as appropriate.

Polling stations

4.6 You should undertake an evaluation of the suitability of the polling stations you are intending to use.

4.7 Ideally, you will have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area, with owners willing to hire them out for polling station use at low cost. Unfortunately, in practice, this is often not the case and in some areas there may be little choice available.

4.8 In order to ensure that voters can receive a high-quality service you will need to ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations. As part of your planning, you should ensure that any additional equipment you have identified as required to make the polling station accessible will be delivered and set up in good time for the opening of the poll.

4.9 You should work closely with people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises. You should be able to demonstrate that an assessment has been conducted of the polling stations to be used at the election. Where access problems exist, you should document the problems, identify potential improvements and record any action taken to try to remedy these problems.

4.10 Schools that are publicly funded, including academies and free schools, can be used as polling stations free of charge, and the legislation allows you to require a room in such schools for use as a polling station¹³. You are also entitled to use, free of charge, any local authority funded room as a polling station¹⁴. You will, however, need to pay for any lighting, heating, etc., costs incurred when using such rooms as polling stations¹⁵. You should liaise with the relevant schools and managers of local authority funded rooms at the earliest opportunity to confirm that you want to use certain rooms within their premises as polling stations.

4.11 It is essential that polling stations provide sufficient space for voting to take place.



Further information on polling station voting, including polling station set-up, can be found in [Part C – Administering the poll](#).

Last-minute changes to polling stations

4.12 There may be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling station is required at short notice. As part of your planning, you should compile a list of stand-by or portable polling stations that could be used in such circumstances. Local authorities are responsible for designating polling places and polling districts and you must, except in the case of special circumstances or where the parliamentary polling place is outside the electoral area, designate a new polling station within the same polling place¹⁶.

4.13 Usually, if there is a need to change the polling place, council agreement will be required. If delegation procedures are in place, you should follow these and contact the person or persons who are entitled to make changes to the scheme of polling places. However, flood, fire or vandalism occurring in the immediate lead-up to polling day could constitute a 'special circumstance', enabling you to designate a polling station outside the polling place without the need to seek council agreement.

4.14 You should amend the notice of situation of polling stations to reflect any changes to your polling stations.

4.15 There are a number of mitigating measures you can take to ensure that electors who are affected by a late change to a polling station are able to vote with minimum disruption. You should have a protocol for what to do in case of a last-minute change. As a minimum, you should:

- use social media to inform electors that there has been a change to a polling station
- if time allows, send out a letter to all affected electors informing them of the change to their polling station
- if time allows, use the local media to disseminate information to the affected electors – for example, through issuing press releases
- put up signs at the old polling station informing electors about the change, including directions to the new one
- display clear and visible signage at the new polling station

Postal vote issue and opening venues

4.16 You should take into account the following key factors when selecting venues for postal vote issuing and opening sessions:

- lessons learnt from previous electoral events
- volume of postal ballot packs to be issued
- estimated volume of returned postal votes
- intended workflows
- IT requirements
- security and storage requirements
- disabled access, both to and within the venues



Guidance on the layout of postal vote issue and opening venues can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Verification and count venue

4.17 You should ensure that the verification and count processes are designed and managed to secure an accurate result, with a clear audit trail and that they are transparent, with everything carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend. Therefore, when selecting the venue for your verification and count, you should consider the following points::

- lessons learnt from previous electoral events
- access arrangements for vehicles and parking
- entrances for those entitled to attend and staff, and for the delivery of the ballot boxes

- disabled access, both to and within the venue
- size of the venue taking into account the space required to conduct the verification and count processes, sufficient storage space for parcels, ballot boxes and other equipment, and adequate space for those entitled to attend and observe proceedings at the count
- lighting within the venue
- platform or stage for announcing the results, and for making regular announcements throughout the proceedings
- acoustics within the venue
- internal and external IT and communication systems including, at a combined authority mayoral election, any needed for communicating with and transmitting information and local totals to the CARO
- facilities for those attending the verification and count
- media requirements
- furniture requirements: if there are insufficient tables and chairs in the venue, for example, these will need to be hired or acquired from another location
- security and storage requirements
- contingency arrangements to address the risk of a loss of venue

Combined authority mayoral election

At a combined authority mayoral election the CARO can direct that the counting of votes for the combined authority mayoral election be conducted at a central location¹⁷. If there is to be a central count, you should consider how you will arrange your verification and count processes in these circumstances and work closely with the CARO to ensure that appropriate plans are in place.



Guidance on the layout of verification and count venues can be found in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

For practical guidance on the verification and count venue and a checklist of useful materials, see our verification and count resource '[Planning for an effective verification and count: a toolkit for Returning Officers](#)'.

5 Managing contractors and suppliers

5.1 You can outsource particular work required to deliver the election, but not the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the legislation.

5.2 Do not automatically assume that outsourcing is your only and best option. You should make an assessment of the need to outsource, and your decision should be taken as part of an assessment of the costs, risks and benefits of outsourcing work, as compared to in-house delivery by your staff. Your review of previous electoral events and consideration of the specific requirements for the election will help to inform your decision as to whether or not to outsource a particular function or task.

5.3 If outsourcing is considered appropriate, your project plan should cover the management of contractors and suppliers and the development and management of contracts.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#) you will need to put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required by the specification. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to have in place arrangements for the management of contractors and suppliers.

Procurement

5.4 Where a decision has been made to outsource, you should commence the procurement process as soon as possible. Your local authority will have adopted standing orders or regulations relating to procurement and contracts. You should take advice from relevant staff at your local authority on the procedures to be followed and legal requirements for procuring supplies and services. You will also need to ensure that projected costs reconcile with the budget available.

5.5 All stages of the procurement process should be documented and the risks of outsourcing should be clearly acknowledged, with contingency arrangements identified and built into the process.

5.6 Good public procurement practice recommends obtaining at least three written quotations from prospective suppliers. Some local authorities may, however, have a standing list of approved contractors who have already been through a tendering process and in some instances it may be more effective and economical to use such existing contractors and systems.

5.7 The Commission has produced a [contract management checklist](#) designed to highlight key considerations relevant to outsourcing work and managing contracts.

5.8 A detailed specification of requirements is essential for effective procurement, and should be developed for all outsourced work. Suppliers should be able to provide robust information on how they are going to deliver the work as required by the specification.

5.9 When evaluating the bids received, the final price in the suppliers' proposals should not be the only consideration in choosing a contractor. The focus should be on 'value for money', with the final decision being a judgement based on the best combination of the cost of the goods or service and the ability to meet your requirements as laid out in the specification. Work needs to be completed on time and to a high standard, and therefore each bid should be carefully considered to assess exactly what it offers.

5.10 You should take steps to ensure that the selected contractor understands the requirements and has the experience and suitability to undertake the work being outsourced. The [contract management checklist](#) sets out the minimum steps you should take to be satisfied that the company will have the capacity to complete any contracted work on time and to the standard required.

5.11 Contractors may sub-contract work out and you should give prior written consent before sub-contractors are to be used. You should ensure that any sub-contractors are aware of the specific requirements as detailed in the specification.

5.12 Once you have made your final decision, you should notify unsuccessful applicants and be prepared to debrief them should they request it.

5.13 You should have a formal, written contract in place with every contractor to which you have outsourced a function or task. It is essential that statutory requirements and their implications are fully explained wherever contractors are used, and that these requirements are explicitly stated in the contract for any work. Contracts should be developed with advice from other departments of the local authority, for example, legal services and procurement. Experienced managers in these fields can be used to ensure that appropriate and rigorous procurement and contract management procedures are followed, thereby minimising risk.

Contract management

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

5.15 In order to assist contractors and suppliers in delivering the work on time, it is essential to keep to agreed timescales for providing the information or data they need to do the job. You should ensure that contractors are aware of how IER may impact on timescales. For example, EROs have until the determination deadline (i.e. 6 working days before the poll) to receive the required evidence from a prospective elector under the exceptions process and make their determination¹⁸. If they also applied to vote by post, this will impact on the number of postal votes to be included in the last issue. If there is slippage, for example because of the time required to process bulk last minute postal vote applications, you should advise the contractors as soon as possible.

5.16 You should document all stages of the process. In particular, you should keep a formal record in order to be able to demonstrate that the processes are undertaken in accordance with the law.

5.17 Any variations from the agreed specification could result in a breach of legislation and any such breach is the personal responsibility of the RO, so any variations should be formally documented and signed off by you or by someone authorised to act on your behalf.



Further guidance on what to consider if you have outsourced the postal vote issue can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Royal Mail

5.18 You should already be in contact with your Royal Mail account manager, and you should continue to liaise with them on a regular basis. At an early stage in your planning process you should take steps to ensure that any business reply licences you hold are up to date.

5.19 It is important that you have early discussions with Royal Mail to ensure that any arrangements you put in place with them in relation to postal voting will help to maximise the time available to postal voters to receive, complete and return their postal vote. For example, you should take steps to ensure that the correct postage will be included on any postal votes being sent to addresses outside the UK.

5.20 You should also consider whether to put arrangements in place for any final sweeps of postal votes and weigh up what the benefits of the sweep would be. If you do decide to carry out sweeps, you should make contact with Royal Mail to discuss arrangements.



More information on working with Royal Mail in respect of postal voting can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Finding printers

5.21 If you decide that you need to outsource production and are having difficulty finding a suitable printer, the British Printing Industries Federation may be contacted for assistance:

British Printing Industries Federation
Head Office
Unit 2 Villiers Court
Meriden Business Park
Cope Drive
Coventry, CV5 9RN
Tel: 0845 250 7050
www.britishprint.com

6 Preventing electoral fraud and maintaining the integrity of the election

6.1 Voters and campaigners should be confident that elections are free from fraud, and that the results you declare are a true and accurate reflection of the will of the electorate. Trust and confidence in the integrity of elections is essential but can be fragile – it will be difficult for you to rebuild trust or confidence which has been lost as a result of allegations or proven cases of fraud.

6.2 While you will need to be able to work with the police and prosecutors to investigate any allegations which might be made, you should also put in place effective strategies for preventing electoral fraud from the outset.

6.3 In order to ensure that voters and candidates can have confidence that votes cast will be counted in the way that voters intended, you will need to have in place plans and processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential electoral fraud.

6.4 Your plans should be developed in consultation with your local police force single point of contact (SPOC) and include specific steps to deal with any potential electoral fraud, and should also identify how you will communicate your approach to maintaining electoral integrity, in order to support public confidence in the election.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to have in place processes for dealing with integrity problems.



A [template memorandum of understanding](#) between the Returning Officer and the police on joint planning for elections and the reporting and investigating of electoral fraud is available on the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice [website](#).

Offences

6.5 There are a number of electoral offences specified in electoral law. We have produced a [factsheet](#) which provides information on these offences.

Assessing and managing the risk of electoral fraud

6.6 You are uniquely placed to identify incidents and patterns of activity that might indicate electoral fraud in your area. Effective early action to address possible fraud could help to avoid costly police investigations or legal challenges to the results of elections.

6.7 You should ensure that you have mechanisms in place to assess the risk of electoral fraud in your area, including considering:

- whether there has been a history of allegations of electoral fraud in the area at previous elections, including in specific wards
- whether the election is likely to be particularly close and hard fought
- whether there is a marginal seat which would need only a relatively small swing in the number of votes to change control
- whether the overall outcome of the local government election (e.g. political control of a local authority) could be decided by a change in a relatively small number of seats
- whether there is a contest which is based on strong personal disagreements as well as political arguments
- where there is a highly mobile population with a frequent turnover of electors
- where there are electors who may be more vulnerable because of low levels of literacy and/or English language ability

6.8 Your plans for managing the risk of electoral fraud in your area will need to reflect any specific risks you have identified in addition to any general fraud detection plans.

6.9 For example, you should consider the risks associated with houses of multiple occupation, student halls of residence or care homes where other people may have access to personal mail or where care givers may assist residents in care homes with completing postal vote applications or postal votes.

6.10 Your plans should also set out mechanisms for monitoring indicators of possible electoral fraud and setting thresholds for action in response. Although there are no definitive signs of possible electoral fraud, you should be aware of and consider all the data which is available to you including:

- whether there have been unusual patterns in registration or absent vote applications at previous elections
- whether there have been unusual patterns of rejected ballot papers, including rejected postal ballot packs, at previous elections
- whether there is any unusual pattern of registration or absent vote applications in the period leading up to an election

6.11 You should also communicate and explain your approach to tackling fraud to provide reassurance to voters and campaigners.

6.12 Consideration should be given to sharing the approach to tackling electoral fraud with parties, candidates and agents at briefing sessions and/or within the information provided to them. You should also consider inviting the police to attend any such briefing sessions and invite them to supply you with any relevant documentation to include in your information pack.

Combined authority mayoral election

At a combined authority mayoral election the CARO may also share the approach to tackling electoral fraud with parties, candidates and agents at briefing sessions and/or within any written information provided to them. The CARO may also consider inviting the police to attend any such briefing sessions.



Following consultation with Returning Officers, police forces and political parties, the Commission has produced a [Code of Conduct for campaigners at elections and referendums](#). The Code applies to all campaigners and sets out agreed standards of appropriate behaviour before and during an election or referendum.

The Code also makes it clear that if a Returning Officer considers it appropriate to address further specific local risks, and has consulted with the relevant national and local parties, we will support them in introducing additional local provisions which go beyond the terms of the nationally agreed code.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have developed a [template letter seeking agreement from candidates to abide by the Code of Conduct](#) and this should be provided to all candidates standing at an election.

Dealing with allegations of electoral fraud

6.13 Allegations and cases of electoral fraud will not only have a negative impact on the confidence of electors and campaigners, but they may also have a significant impact on your capacity to manage the election process effectively.

6.14 It is therefore crucial that you put in place detailed and robust plans for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of the election in your area. This should include working closely with the local police, ensuring you have in place good lines of communication and have agreed an approach for referring allegations of electoral fraud.

6.15 Every UK police force has a named single point of contact officer (SPOC) for election-related crime. Your local police force SPOC will be a key partner to help you to ensure that any possible instances of fraud are quickly

identified and dealt with. You should make sure that you are clear who your SPOC is and how you contact them.



A [template memorandum of understanding](http://library.college.police.uk/docs/APPREF/Elections-memorandum-of-understanding.doc) between the Returning Officer and the police on joint planning for elections and the reporting and investigating of electoral fraud is available on the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice [website](#).

6.16 You should establish and maintain contact with your SPOC from the outset of your pre-election planning process, with regular contact scheduled into your project plan. Early discussions with your SPOC should cover your mechanisms for identifying possible fraud and what actions should be taken where any suspicions arise. If you have any problems establishing contact with your SPOC, please contact your [local Commission team](#).

6.17 You should discuss your plans for maintaining the integrity of the election with your SPOC at the earliest opportunity. A [checklist of topics that should be considered](#) at any pre-election planning meeting between you and your SPOC is available. You should, as part of this meeting, consider the possibility of any joint publicity work that can be carried out with the police, for example, jointly running public awareness campaigns within the electoral area to highlight what can be done to help detect and prevent electoral fraud.

6.18 As part of your early liaison with your SPOC you should establish a clear agreement about the division of responsibilities between you and your SPOC, so that there is early clarity about each other's roles. In particular, you should agree with your SPOC an approach for referring allegations of fraud you may receive for further investigation where appropriate. For example, will you be the initial point of contact and refer allegations to the SPOC, or will the SPOC be the initial point of contact and advise you of allegations? In addition, you should agree a mechanism for handling evidence, so that the police can carry out any forensic analysis, where necessary.



The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have provided [guidance to local authorities for handling evidence](http://library.college.police.uk/docs/APPREF/Local-authority-guidance-for-handling-evidence.pdf).

6.19 You should ensure that all candidates and agents understand how to raise specific concerns about electoral fraud relating to the election, including what type and level of evidence will be necessary to enable allegations to be investigated by the police. You should also ensure that they understand how allegations will be dealt with, and what information and feedback they should be able to expect about the progress of any investigations.

6.20 The police will investigate any allegations of fraud until, following consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), they are either satisfied that no further action is necessary or appropriate, or they forward the case file to the CPS for prosecution. The police should keep you and, where appropriate, the ERO informed of the progress of the case.

6.21 The Commission and the National Police Chiefs' Council (formerly the Association of Chief Police Officers) have supported the College of Policing to produce a [manual of guidance for policing elections](#), which is available to download from our [website](#).



More information for EROs on identifying suspicious registration and absent vote applications can be found in [Part 5 – Absent voting](#), of the Commission's guidance for EROs.

Dealing with allegations of financial offences

6.22 Candidates and their agents must follow rules set out in legislation about how much they can spend at an election. We produce guidance for candidates and agents, parties and non-party campaigners outlining rules on spending. This can be found on our [website](#).

6.23 In England, any queries on election spending should be referred to the Electoral Commission's Party Election Finance team via email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk or telephone: 0333 103 1928.

6.24 In Wales, any queries on election spending should be referred to our Wales office either by telephone on 02920 346 800 or via e-mail to infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk.

Security

6.25 Your project plan should include a review of security arrangements with the local police. You should also consider any security risks as part of your contingency planning exercise and include these in your risk register.

6.26 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.

6.27 You should also take all necessary steps to ensure the security of ballot boxes and relevant stationery from the close of poll through to the declaration of the result, particularly where there is a break in proceedings. You should liaise with your SPOC on this.

6.28 Whichever method of storage you choose, it should be such that you can be satisfied that you have taken all necessary steps to ensure that ballot boxes and other items are kept securely at all times and cannot be interfered with.

6.29 In addition, you should take all necessary steps to ensure that police officers attend at polling stations or call in during polling day, as appropriate, and discuss any security issues relating to any other aspects of the process including community safety for voters.

7 Communications

Raising awareness

7.1 You must take such steps as you think appropriate to encourage the participation of electors in the election, and in carrying out such activity you must have regard to any guidance issued by the Electoral Commission¹⁹.

7.2 Where you are not also the ERO, you should liaise with them to ensure that any public awareness activity you carry out is aligned with their work and is designed in such a way as to maximise impact ahead of the registration deadline. Any public awareness activity and messaging should aim to ensure that everyone who wants to vote has the information they need to be able to do so, and can vote using their preferred method.

7.3 Online registration in particular brings greater opportunities to engage local residents in the democratic process and to boost the levels of registration amongst under-registered groups, with the election providing a hook for local public awareness activity. And you do not need to do this on your own – opportunities for working with local partners who can reach out to voters in under-registered groups in your area could be a valuable part of your engagement work locally.



General guidance to EROs on working with partners is contained in chapter 5 of [Part 1 of the Commission's guidance for EROs](#).

7.4 When planning your public awareness activity you should consider and document:

- the identification of your target audience
- the objectives and success measures of the activity
- risks – identification and mitigation
- resources - financial and staffing

7.5 In the lead-up to scheduled polls, the Commission may run a public awareness campaign to encourage registration. Such campaign will usually involve mass media advertising, working with partners and public relations activities. We will also provide resources that can be used locally, such as template press releases and social media content. We will provide you with information on our public awareness campaigns via the [Bulletin](#).

7.6 We also publish a voter registration newsletter, [Roll Call](#), which aims to help local council communications teams stay up-to-date with the latest campaign information and resources. You and your council communications team can sign up to receive the newsletter [here](#).

Information to electors

7.7 Public awareness activity that provides essential information to electors to enable them to take part in an election should reach as wide an audience as possible.

7.8 You will need to identify appropriate methods of communication (for example websites, emails, social media, posters, flyers, raising at community meetings and with partners) and you should seek advice from relevant staff at your local authority, including experts in the communications department.

7.9 Information required by electors in order to successfully participate may include:

- details of the election(s)
- the date and hours of poll
- the location of polling stations
- any key deadlines (e.g. deadlines for applying for postal or proxy votes)
- how to vote (i.e. how to mark the ballot paper(s))
- assistance available to electors (e.g. information for disabled voters)
- how votes are counted
- how the results will be made known

7.10 It is important that public awareness activity provides information that enables electors to take part in elections. You should ensure that all of your outgoing communications provide appropriate contact details to allow anyone to respond and obtain information.

7.11 ‘Where is my polling station?’ is a common question in the run-up to polling day and on polling day itself. So voters can easily access information on the location of their polling station, we are working with Democracy Club to display polling station locations on our About my vote website. This service can also be easily embedded into your website.

7.12 You can help us by making polling station location data available in an open format, either by publishing the data on your website (through an API or at a particular web address), or by giving the data to Democracy Club. The data you send to the printers in order for poll cards to be printed will likely be enough. The data you provide will help to create a central place where voters can find their polling station, making it easier to inform the public of where their polling station is located.

7.13 You can find out more about how to publish polling station data in an open format on [Democracy Club’s website](#).



We provide templates and tools on [our website to support you with providing information on elections](#). We will keep you updated of public awareness templates and tools via the [Bulletin](#).

There is also a frequently asked questions page on [our website](#) <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/default.aspx> to support you with providing information on the election.

Local authority mayoral elections

At a local authority mayoral election you are required to produce a booklet containing candidates' election addresses and arrange for delivery of it to every eligible elector²⁰. Further information on this can be found in [Part C – Administering the poll](#).

Combined authority mayoral elections

At a combined authority mayoral election the CARO is required to produce a booklet containing candidates' election addresses and arrange for delivery of it to every eligible elector²¹. Further information on this can be found in the [CARO guidance – Delivery of key processes](#).

Media liaison

7.14 Media liaison should be included in your communication plans to support the delivery of an election. You should ensure that stakeholder coordination and communication is embedded throughout your planning, with particular arrangements in place for working with the media, including:

- strategies for dealing with both proactive communication and media liaison in relation to specific events such as the counting of votes and the declaration of results
- dealing with general media enquiries
- reactive handling of any issues that arise in relation to the election, for example allegations of electoral fraud

7.15 It is important that media communication is properly managed in order to maintain public confidence that the election is being well-run. To achieve this effectively, there should be a clear process in place which you and your communications team can follow to respond to any issues that arise.

7.16 In order to assist you and your communications team with media liaison at the count, we have developed some [tips for managing the media at the count](#).

Combined authority mayoral elections

At a combined authority mayoral election the CARO should establish a process which you and your communications team can follow to respond to any issues that arise in relation to the election across the whole of the combined authority area.

8 Accredited observers and Commission representatives

8.1 Observers accredited by the Commission are entitled to observe:

- the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers
- the poll
- the verification and counting of the votes²²

8.2 Your project plan should include processes to manage potential enquiries from observers and to support their attendance at the electoral processes they are entitled to attend. This should include providing observers with information on the location and timing of the above processes.

8.3 Commission representatives are also entitled to observe these processes and, in addition, are entitled to observe your working practices²³.

8.4 Accredited observers and Commission representatives do not need to give advance notification of where they intend to observe, but will carry with them a photographic identification card issued by the Commission.

Quick guide to the observer badge types

Observer badge type	Who are they?	Access
 <p>The Electoral Commission Rebecca Brown Commission Representative</p>	Electoral Commission representatives	Same as candidates and agents, plus access to the issue of postal votes, and working practices of the RO and ERO
 <p>The Electoral Commission Jane Doe Valid from 04/04/20XX Valid to 31/12/20XX Accredited Observer</p>	Observers accredited by the Commission	Same as candidates and agents, plus access to the issue of postal votes

8.5 If you are in doubt about the status of a particular individual seeking to gain access to election processes, you can check the registers of observers on the [Commission's website](#).

8.6 You have a legal duty to have regard to the [Commission's Code of practice for observers](#) when managing the attendance of observers²⁴. Observers will have agreed to comply with the standards of behaviour set out in the Commission's Code of practice. If you think there has been a breach of the Code of practice, please inform your [local Commission team](#).

Appendix A - Casual vacancies and by-elections

Terminology in this Appendix

This appendix covers casual vacancies in respect of principal area councils and parish or community councils.

References to a **by-election** should be read as a reference to an election to fill a casual vacancy.

How casual vacancies occur

8.7 A casual vacancy occurs when an elected member ceases to be an elected member as a result of, for example, their death, resignation, becoming disqualified, or being no longer qualified to remain elected.²⁵

8.8 When a casual vacancy occurs, usually, but not always, it will lead to a by-election.

Resignation

8.9 An elected member can resign at any time by giving written notice of their resignation to the Proper Officer of the authority.²⁶

8.10 The resignation takes effect as soon as the notice of resignation is received and this is the date that the casual vacancy is deemed to have occurred.²⁷ There is no provision for a resignation to be withdrawn once it is given.



Parish and community council elections

In the case of a parish or community council, the notice of resignation needs to be given to the chairman of the parish or community council unless the person resigning is the chairman, in which case notice has to be given to the parish or community council.²⁸

Failure to sign the declaration of acceptance of office

8.11 Once elected, a person must sign a declaration stating that they accept the position of an elected member before they can sit or vote at any meeting.²⁹

8.12 The declaration must be made by the person elected and delivered to the Proper Officer of the authority within two months of the date of poll.³⁰ If no

declaration of acceptance is made, the seat will automatically become vacant.³¹



Parish and community council elections

In the case of a parish or community council, the declaration must be made before or at the first meeting of the parish or community council to which they have been elected. The parish or community council can, however, agree to it being made at a later meeting.³²

Failure to attend meetings

8.13 If an elected member fails to attend any meetings of the authority for a period of six months without being subject to any of the special exceptions listed below, they will cease to be qualified to be a member of the authority.³³

8.14 The special exceptions are where:

- the authority has resolved during the period to excuse a particular member from missing a meeting³⁴
- the member is serving in the armed forces at a time of war or emergency and the Secretary of State decides they should not lose their seat due to their service³⁵ ⁱ
- the member is suspended from office³⁶

8.15 Qualifying meetings are full meetings of the council and any meeting of the authority, its committees or joint boards. Where a member acts as a representative of the local authority with another organisation, attendance of any meetings of that body is also classed as a qualifying meeting provided that the elected member is a member of the body concerned.

8.16 Once an elected member has missed meetings for a period of six months without being subject to a special exception, the council must formally declare the seat to be vacant. This must be done immediately, six months after their last attendance. The date of the vacancy is the date on which the council makes the declaration.³⁷

Death of an elected member

8.17 A casual vacancy occurs on the date of an elected member's death.³⁸

ⁱ The authority should not declare a member who may be protected by this provision to have lost their seat without liaising with the Secretary of State

Decision of an election court

8.18 Where there has been a decision of an election court that the election of a particular elected member was void, the casual vacancy occurs on the date of the certificate by an election court stating that the election was void.

Disqualification

8.19 There are a number of disqualifications that may apply to an elected member during their term of office.³⁹ Typical examples are:

- taking up paid employment with the authority they have been elected to
- taking a politically restricted post in any local authority
- becoming the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order
- being sentenced to a period of imprisonment of 3 months or more without the option of a fine



Further information on disqualifications can be found in Part 1 – Can you stand for election? of our guidance for candidates and agents at [principal area elections](#) and [parish and community council elections](#).

8.20 Where someone becomes disqualified from acting as an elected member, the authority must declare the seat to be vacant as soon as possible after it becomes aware of the fact.⁴⁰ However, where the disqualification relates to a conviction, time must be allowed for any appeal to be made and dealt with and the casual vacancy only arises once the relevant time period has expired.⁴¹

Losing the qualification of being a registered elector

8.21 Most qualifications only apply at the time of a candidate's nomination and their election. However, if someone is only qualified to be elected and be an elected member as a result of being a registered elector and they are subsequently removed from the register, they are no longer qualified to act as an elected member.

8.22 Whether or not a person only qualifies to be an elected member as a result of being a registered elector is a matter of fact and does not simply link back to the information they provided on their consent to nomination when standing for election. A person may have only indicated that they qualified on the basis of being a registered elector, but they may still meet one or more of the other qualifications. It is only where they do not meet any of the qualifications, irrespective of what they indicated in their nomination papers, that the vacancy would arise.

The date the casual vacancy is deemed to have occurred

8.23 The table below provides a summary of the reasons a casual vacancy can occur and of the date the vacancy is deemed to have occurred in each case.

Reason for vacancy	Date the casual vacancy is deemed to have occurred
Death of elected member ⁴²	The date of death of the councillor
Resignation ⁴³	Date the written resignation is received by the Proper Officer
Failure to accept office ⁴⁴	<p>Principal area council – two months after polling day</p> <p>Parish or community council – immediately after the first meeting of the parish or community council, unless that meeting agrees that the acceptance may be made at a later meeting (in which case, immediately after that meeting)</p> <p>Local authority mayoral election – two months after polling day</p>
Failure to attend meetings ⁴⁵	Date the local authority declares the elected member has failed to attend meetings for six months
Otherwise disqualified or no longer qualified ⁴⁶	<p>Date that a High Court or a local authority declares that an elected member is disqualified or is no longer qualified</p> <p>Conviction – When the time period for an appeal has elapsed or, if an appeal is made, when the appeal is dismissed</p>
Election court decision ⁴⁷	Date of the certificate by an election court that the election was void

Notice of vacancy

8.24 The local authority is required to publish a public notice whenever there is a casual vacancy.⁴⁸ There is no prescribed form for the notice, but it should state the local authority and the area in which the vacancy has arisen along with any other appropriate information, such as the number of electors required to call a by-election, if relevant (see 'Requests to hold an election' below).

8.25 The notice of vacancy must be published immediately where the authority has declared the seat vacant because of a failure to attend meetings or because a councillor has become disqualified or ceases to be qualified.⁴⁹

8.26 In all other cases the notice should be published as soon as practicable after the date on which the vacancy is deemed to have occurred.⁵⁰

8.27 A notice of vacancy must also be published even where no election can be held as a result of the six-month rule. In that case, the notice would not include an invitation to electors to request a by-election but should include the date of the next scheduled election at which the seat is to be filled. Further information on the six-month rule can be found in paragraph **8.37**.



Parish and community council elections

The parish or community council is responsible for publishing the notice of vacancy.⁵¹

For a parish or community council, the notice of vacancy should state that any notice requesting a by-election must be made to the Proper Officer of the relevant principal area council and give an address for any request to be sent to.⁵²

Timing of by-elections

8.28 The day of a by-election to fill a casual vacancy must be fixed by the Returning Officer. The timing of a by-election to fill a casual vacancy depends on whether the seat has been declared vacant by the local authority or the High Court.⁵³

8.29 If a seat has been declared vacant by the High Court or the local authority, the by-election must, subject to the six-month rule, be held within 35 working days of the date of the declaration.⁵⁴ Further information on the six-month rule can be found in paragraphs **8.37** to **8.39** below.

8.30 In all other cases, such as on the death or resignation of the elected member, a by-election is triggered by local government electors requesting that a by-election take place.⁵⁵

Requests to hold a by-election

8.31 Requests to hold a by-election to fill a casual vacancy must be made in writing by two local government electors from within the local authority area.⁵⁶ The requests do not have to arrive at the same time and can be in any form, for example, letter, fax or email, and do not necessarily have to be signed. They can be a request by two electors, or two separate requests from individual electors in the local authority area.

8.32 There is no need for electors to wait for the notice of vacancy to be published by the relevant authority before submitting a request for a by-election. Regardless of when the requests arrive, even if they arrive before the notice of vacancy is published, this triggers the start of the election timetable.

8.33 The requests must be sent to the Proper Officer of the authority and can be inspected by any person once they have been received.



Parish and community council elections

Where a casual vacancy occurs at a parish or community council a request for a by-election must be made within 14 working days of the publication of the notice of vacancy by ten electors from within the relevant electoral area (i.e. from the parish or community area or from the ward if the parish or community council is warded). The requests from the ten electors may be submitted together, separately, or a combination of the two.

Requests for by-elections for a parish or community council must be made to the Proper Officer of the relevant district or unitary council in England or the county or county borough council in Wales.⁵⁷

Subject to the six-month rule (see paragraph 8.37), if the required ten requests for a by-election to fill a casual vacancy on a parish or community council have not been received in the 14 working days after the notice of vacancy has been published, the parish or community council must fill the vacancy by co-option. This co-option should take place as soon as is practicable after the end of the 14 working day period.⁵⁸

This means that the parish or community council must, at its next meeting, consider the co-option of a person to the council. There are no set procedures for how a person should be co-opted and the process for this is a matter for the remaining members of the parish or community council.⁵⁹ If they do not fill the vacant seat at the next meeting, it should remain a matter of business until the seat has been filled through their chosen co-option process.

8.34 Once the requests have been received, polling day for the by-election must be set by the Returning Officer within 35 working days of the date of receipt of the requests.⁶⁰ There is no time limit for receiving the requests but, if the required number is not received, the seat will remain vacant.

8.35 The table below provides a summary of how casual vacancies occur and when a by-election would be held.

How vacancy was caused	When by-election to be held
Declaration by the High Court or the local authority (e.g. as a result of failure to accept office or attend meetings, or becoming disqualified) that the seat is vacant	Within 35 working days of the date of the declaration. This means that polling day must be between 25 and 35 working days of the declaration, as fixed by the Returning Officer. ⁶¹
Any other reason (e.g. as a result of death or resignation)	<p>Principal council - Within 35 working days of a request by two electors, or two separate requests from individual electors in the local authority area, for a by-election to be held. This means that polling day must be between 25 and 35 working days of the requests being received, as fixed by the Returning Officer. There is no time limit for the requests to trigger a by-election to arrive.⁶²</p> <p>Parish and community council – A by-election can only be held if requests to hold an election are made:</p> <p>within 14 working days of the publication of the notice of vacancy by ten electors, whether together, separately, or a combination of the two, in the electoral area (i.e. the parish or community, or from the ward if the parish/community is warded)</p> <p>If this is not the case, the casual vacancy must be filled by co-option rather than a by-election.</p> <p>If a by-election is triggered it must have a polling day within 60 working days of the publication of the notice of vacancy as fixed by the Returning Officer.⁶³</p>

Election timetable

8.36 The Commission has produced a [generic timetable](#) for local government by-elections which you can use as the basis for preparing the timetable for a specific by-election.

Six-month rule

8.37 If a casual vacancy occurs in the six months before the date on which that elected member would have retired, an election is not to be held, unless more than one third of the authorities' seats are vacant.⁶⁴

8.38 The relevant dates are the date the vacancy is deemed to have occurred and the date that the elected member would have ordinarily retired (not the date of the scheduled election).⁶⁵ Elected members are due to retire on the fourth calendar day after the ordinary day of election and it is this date that is relevant for calculating the six month period.⁶⁶ Where the fourth date falls on a bank holiday, elected members will retire on the next working day.

8.39 Also, it is only if the elected member would have ordinarily retired within six months of the vacancy occurring that the six-month rule applies. This means that in cases where the authority is elected by thirds or halves, the Proper Officer will need to check whether the relevant elected member would have in fact retired within six months.

Unfilled seats at a council election

8.40 When there are fewer validly nominated candidates than seats available, all the remaining validly nominated candidates after the deadline for withdrawals must be declared elected.⁶⁷ The seats that remain unfilled must be filled through a by-election.⁶⁸ The Returning Officer must choose a date for the by-election where the polling day will be within 35 working days of the date that would have been the polling day if the election had been contested.⁶⁹



Parish and community council elections

Where there are not enough validly nominated candidates at the ordinary election of a parish or community council, those candidates who are validly nominated are elected.⁷⁰

If the parish or community council is quorate, i.e. at least 3 and at least one third of the total seats on the council are filled, the elected councillors may co-opt councillors to fill the remaining seats.⁷¹ If, however, after a period of 35 working days from the date that would have been the polling day if the election had been contested, the council has not filled all of the vacancies by co-option, the relevant principal council may use their powers as described below. However, if the parish or community council is not quorate after the

ordinary election, they may not proceed with co-option (or indeed carry out any other business). In this case, the relevant principal council may use their powers as described below.

If at any point after the ordinary election for the parish or community council, the council cannot operate, such as where less than the quorum of councillors remain and an election is not held (for example, because a number of councillors have resigned but there have not been enough requests received for an election to be held to replace them), the relevant principal council may use their powers as described below.

If there is a by-election for a parish or community council and there are not enough candidates to fill the vacancies, any validly nominated candidates remaining after the deadline for withdrawals are declared elected and a new election must be held for the remaining vacancies.⁷² The polling day for the new election must be within 35 working days of date that the polling day would have been held if the first election was contested.⁷³

Power of the relevant principal council

In the event of the situations described above, the relevant principal council (i.e. a district or unitary council in England or a county or county borough council in Wales) may:⁷⁴

- by order make direct appointments of people as parish or community councillors
- do anything necessary or expedient for the proper holding of the parish or community council meeting and properly constituting the council
- direct that a new election is held to fill the remaining vacancies, and fix the date for that election

The principal council must not exercise this power within 35 working days of the ordinary date of election and may allow a parish or community council a period longer than 35 working days to fill vacancies by co-option.

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- ¹ Section 35(4), Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) (as amended by Schedule 2, Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007).
- ² Section 35(4), RPA 1983 (as amended by Schedule 2, Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007).
- ³ Section 63(1) and (3)(e), RPA 1983.
- ⁴ Regulation 10(7), Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012.
- ⁵ Sections 13AB and 13B, RPA 1983.
- ⁶ Rule 24(1), Schedule 2, Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (Principal Areas Rules 2006); rule 24(1), Schedule 2, Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (Parishes and Communities Rules 2006); rule 26(1), Schedule 1, Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007 (Mayoral Rules 2007); rule 26(1), Schedule 1, Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2016 (Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016).
- ⁷ Rule 24(1), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 24(1), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 26(1), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 26(1), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ⁸ Rule 35(6), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 35(6), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 37(6), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 37(6), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ⁹ Section 13B, RPA 1983 and rule 22(1), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 22(1), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 24(1), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 24(1), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹⁰ Regulations 84 and 85A, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001.
- ¹¹ Rule 24(1), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 24(1), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 26(1), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 26(1), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹² Sections 20, 29 and 31, Equality Act 2010.
- ¹³ Rule 20(1)(a), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 20(1)(a), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 22(1)(a), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 22(1)(a), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹⁴ Rule 20(1)(b), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 20(1)(b), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 22(1)(b), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 22(1)(b), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹⁵ Rule 20(2), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 20(2), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 22(3), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 22(3), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹⁶ Rule 23(3), Principal Areas Rules 2006; rule 23(3), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006; rule 25(3), Mayoral Rules 2007; rule 25(3), Combined Authorities Mayoral Rules 2016.
- ¹⁷ Article 6(2), Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2016.
- ¹⁸ Section 13B, RPA 1983.
- ¹⁹ Section 69(1) and (2), Electoral Administration Act 2006.
- ²⁰ Regulation 6, Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2007.
- ²¹ Article 8, Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections) Order 2016.
- ²² Sections 6C(1), 6A(5)(e) and 160(1), Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA 2000).
- ²³ Sections 6A(1) and 6B(1), PERA 2000.
- ²⁴ Sections 6F(7) and 6E(4)(b), PERA 2000.
- ²⁵ Section 83, 84, 85, 86 and 87 Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972).
- ²⁶ Section 84, LGA 1972.
- ²⁷ Section 84(1) and 87(1), LGA 1972.
- ²⁸ Section 84, LGA 1972.
- ²⁹ Section 83, LGA 1972.
- ³⁰ Section 83(1) and (2), LGA 1972.
- ³¹ Section 83, LGA 1972.
- ³² Section 83(4), LGA 1972.
- ³³ Section 85, LGA 1972.
- ³⁴ Section 85(1), LGA 1972

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- ³⁵ Section 85(3), LGA 1972. The council should not declare a councillor who may be protected by this provision to have lost their seat without liaising with the Secretary of State.
- ³⁶ Section 85(3A), LGA 1972.
- ³⁷ Section 86, LGA 1972.
- ³⁸ Section 87, LGA 1972.
- ³⁹ Section 79 and 86, LGA 1972; Section 78, 79, 80, Local Government Act (LGA 2000); Section 34 of the Localism Act 2011; Part 2 RPA 1983.
- ⁴⁰ Section 86, LGA 1972.
- ⁴¹ Section 87(1)(d), LGA 1972.
- ⁴² Section 87(1)(c), LGA 1972.
- ⁴³ Section 84 and 87(1)(b), LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁴ Section 83, LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁵ Section 85 and 87(1)(f), LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁶ Section 87(1)(ee) and (f), LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁷ Section 87(1)(e), LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁸ Section 87(2), LGA 1972.
- ⁴⁹ Section 87(2)(a), LGA 1972.
- ⁵⁰ Section 87(2)(b), LGA 1972.
- ⁵¹ Section 87(2), LGA 1972.
- ⁵² Rule 5, Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁵³ Section 89(1)(a), LGA 1972.
- ⁵⁴ Section 89(1)(a), LGA 1972.
- ⁵⁵ Section 89(1)(b), LGA 1972.
- ⁵⁶ Section 89(1)(b), LGA 1972.
- ⁵⁷ Section 89(1)(b), LGA 1972 and rule 5, Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁵⁸ Rule 5, Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁵⁹ Rule 5(5), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁶⁰ Section 89(2), LGA 1972.
- ⁶¹ Section 89(1)(a), LGA 1972.
- ⁶² Section 89(1)(b), LGA 1972.
- ⁶³ Rule 5, Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁶⁴ Section 89(3), LGA 1972.
- ⁶⁵ Section 89(3), LGA 1972.
- ⁶⁶ Section 7, LGA 1972.
- ⁶⁷ Rule 14(2), Principal Areas Rules 2006 and rule 14(2), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁶⁸ Section 39(1), RPA 1983.
- ⁶⁹ Section 39(1), RPA 1983.
- ⁷⁰ Rule 14(2), Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁷¹ Rule 5, Parishes and Communities Rules 2006.
- ⁷² Section 39, RPA 1983.
- ⁷³ Section 39, RPA 1983.
- ⁷⁴ Section 39, RPA 1983.