

European Union Referendum: Management

14 June 2016

Overview

This briefing sets out how the referendum is being run, and provides additional detail about how the count process will work, which differs in some respects to elections.

A separate [briefing](#) has been produced to cover a number of issues that have attracted public attention in the past few weeks and where Parliamentarians may be asked to comment. We are encouraging anyone who is commenting on the referendum and its conduct to read that note before they comment on the nature and extent of any issues that have arisen.

The Electoral Commission's role in referendums

The Electoral Commission has specific responsibilities and functions in relation to the delivery and regulation of referendums held under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA).

A general overview of the Commission's role and various aspects of the referendum are given in [this handbook](#).

Who is delivering the referendum?

The Chair of the Commission, Jenny Watson, is the Chief Counting Officer for the referendum and responsible for certifying the outcome of the referendum. The CCO can appoint a Deputy Chief Counting Officer (DCCO), who for the purpose of this referendum is the Director of Electoral Administration at the Electoral Commission, Andrew Scallan CBE.

Counting Officers (COs) are responsible for the voting process in their area, including the declaration of local totals for their voting area. There are 382 COs for the referendum, one for each local government area in Great Britain, plus one each for Northern Ireland and Gibraltar. The Chief Electoral Officer is the CO for Northern Ireland.

Regional Counting Officers (RCOs) will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the referendum in their electoral region, and will collate the local totals into a regional total. In addition to the Northern Ireland counting area, there are 11 electoral regions across Great Britain.

The CCO is able to issue directions about the conduct of the referendum. It is the responsibility of COs and RCOs to comply with them. The CCO took the decision to issue

directions only in relation to aspects of the poll where it is important to ensure there is consistency, in order to achieve the overall objective of ensuring confidence in the result, based on an accessible, consistent and efficient electoral process operated to the highest standards of integrity. You can view the full list of directions [here](#).

Where issues arise in the conduct of the poll, the CCO / DCCO are supporting COs and RCOs to ensure they are resolved quickly.

The count process

Postal vote opening sessions

Ballot paper counting will take place under the direction of the 382 COs at local count venues across the UK and in Gibraltar.

COs will already have begun the process of opening, **but not counting**, postal votes that have been returned to them. This is done in order to count the number returned, to check that the number of the postal voting statement matches the number on the envelope containing the ballot paper and, if so, to then check personal identifiers (the signature and date of birth) on the postal voting statement against those held on record. Following verification of the personal identifiers, the ballot paper can be removed from its envelope to check that the number on the back of the ballot paper matches the number on the ballot paper envelope. Valid ballot papers, not votes, are counted and that number is recorded before the valid ballots are placed into ballot boxes to be stored securely before they are delivered to the count venue for counting after the close of poll.

Although campaigners can appoint postal voting agents to observe the opening process, they cannot interfere with it. Ballot papers will be kept face down throughout a postal vote opening session. Anyone attending an opening session must not attempt to see how individual ballot papers have been marked. It follows therefore that keeping a tally of how ballot papers have been marked is not allowed. This has been made clear to Counting Officers and their staff, as well as to campaigners. Anyone who attempts to tally postal votes may be reported to the police.

Counting of ballots

The way in which ballot papers are verified and counted will be the same as at other polls. However the management structure for the referendum differs from that used at elections, reflecting the fact that the referendum is one poll, producing a single result for the whole of the UK and Gibraltar. The CCO has directed that count processes will be carried out overnight, starting at the close of poll (10pm BST). Announcements should be made by COs on the local turnout once the verification process has been completed. COs will then submit local totals to their RCO for approval. Once this approval has been given, the CO will declare for their voting area, which means that people at these events will be the first to hear to the local totals.

The RCOs will each collate and submit their regional total to the CCO for approval. Once this approval has been given, the RCOs will declare the total for their region.

The CCO will be based in Manchester Town Hall and will declare the national referendum result from there once all regional totals and the total for Northern Ireland have been approved and declared.

A more detailed account of how the counts and result processes will work for this referendum is available [here](#).

Information for voters

The Commission's public awareness campaign will continue, with the focus now on informing electors how they can participate in the poll. In particular we will be reminding electors that:

- polling stations will be open on Thursday 23 June from 7am until 10pm;
- that their poll card will tell them where their polling station is but they do not need to take it with them in order to cast their vote;
- the question they will see on the ballot paper gives them a choice to "Remain" or "Leave", and how to complete it (i.e. they should put one cross in one box).

We will also be reminding people of the franchise, making clear that EU citizens (except for citizens from the Republic of Ireland, Cyprus and Malta living in the UK) cannot vote in the referendum unless they also hold a nationality that makes them eligible to vote.

This information is set out in the [voter information guide](#) that the Commission sent to all UK households in May, and is also available on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

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