

Situations and procedures

UK Parliamentary General Election 2017: Political Parties (GB & NI)

This document is for political parties
campaigning at the UK Parliamentary
General Election in 2017

Forms you might need:

Campaign
spending return
(RP11 (GB/NI))

Contents:

The regulated period

Spending limits

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Reporting requirements and deadlines

Translations and other formats

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

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Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

Terms and expressions we use

You will normally be doing enough to comply with the law if you follow this guidance.

We use 'must' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements.

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service. If you are unsure of how any of the rules apply to you, please call us for advice. We are happy to help, so please get in touch.

We use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we take enforcement action, using our investigatory powers and sanctions, where it is necessary and proportionate to do so in order to meet our enforcement aims and objectives.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement

UK Parliamentary General Election 2017 (GB & NI)

This document explains:

The rules on spending for political parties contesting the UK Parliamentary general election in June 2017.

This document covers:

- the regulated period
- spending limits
- campaign spending
- reporting requirements
- key dates and events

Related documents:

- [Overview of party campaign spending](#)
- [Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)
- [Overview of donations to parties \(GB\)](#)
- [Overview of loans to parties \(GB\)](#)
- [Overview of donations to parties \(NI\)](#)
- [Overview of loans to parties \(NI\)](#)

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Summary

Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) there are rules on spending and fundraising that political parties must follow in the run-up to elections.

This document explains the main rules for the UK parliamentary general election to be held in 2017.

It covers the regulated period, spending limits, campaign spending, reporting requirements and the deadlines.

Introduction

Under PPERA, there are rules on fundraising and spending that political parties must follow in the run-up to certain elections.

This guidance provides information on the regulated period, spending limits, campaign spending, reporting requirements and deadlines for the UK parliamentary general election (UKPGE) to be held on 8 June 2017.

In this guidance, we use 'you' or 'the responsible person', to refer to the person who is responsible for campaign spending.

You should read this guidance alongside the related documents we refer to. They provide important information which will help you to follow the rules.

This guidance and the related documents we refer to apply to political parties only. The rules for candidates are different, and we issue separate guidance for candidates and their agents contesting the UKPGE.

Our guidance for candidates and agents contesting the UKPGE is available here:

[Guidance for candidates and agents: UK parliamentary general election](#)

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The regulated period



Campaign spending is what your party spends on activities to promote the party or criticise other parties during a particular period in the run-up to the election.

This period is called the 'regulated period'. Where we use the term 'regulated period' we mean the time when the spending limits and rules apply.

The regulated period for the 2017 UKPGE began on 9 June 2016 and ends on polling day, **8 June 2017**.

The regulated period for the UKPGE overlaps with the regulated period for the Northern Ireland Assembly election on 2 March 2017.

Spending in the regulated period

Spending in the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly election

If you stood candidates in the Northern Ireland Assembly election held on 2 March 2017 and spent money promoting your party in those elections, this spending will count towards your spending limit for the UKPGE.

If you have already reported your regulated spending in the election then you will not have to itemise that spending or provide invoices again.

Spending in the May 2017 polls

There are local elections in England, Scotland and Wales in May 2017. These are:

- Local elections in Wales and England
- Combined authority mayoral elections in England
- Council elections in Scotland

Spending to promote your party in the local elections in Scotland, Wales and England, including combined authority mayoral elections in England, will count towards your UKPGE spending limit.

Spending in by-elections

If you spent money promoting your party at a by-election in the UKPGE regulated period and it did not fall to be reported in the candidate's spending return, it will also count towards your spending limit and need to be reported.

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The spending limit

How much you can spend in the regulated period depends on how many candidates are standing for your party.

The regulated period for the UKPGE overlaps with the regulated period for the election to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March 2017. If you stood candidates in this election as well as the UKPGE, this will affect your spending limit.

If your party is only standing one candidate at the General Election, all campaign spending will likely count against the candidate's spending limit.

Our candidates and agents guidance for the UKPGE is available here:

[Guidance for candidates and agents: UK Parliamentary General Election](#)

Parties standing candidates in Great Britain

For political parties that are contesting the UKPGE in Great Britain, your party's spending limit is whichever the greater is of:

Either:

Part of GB	Spending limit
England	£810,000
Scotland	£120,000
Wales	£60,000

Or:

£30,000 x the number of seats your party is contesting in each part of Great Britain. Each part of Great Britain has a separate limit based on the number of seats your party is contesting in each area.

Part of GB	Number of seats
England	533
Scotland	59
Wales	40
Total:	632

For example:

Your party is contesting 200 constituencies in England, 20 constituencies in Scotland and 10 constituencies in Wales at the UKPGE. Your spending limit will be:

Part of the UK	Spending limit
England	£6,000,000 (200 x £30,000)
Scotland	£600,000 (20 x £30,000)
Wales	£300,000 (10 x £30,000)

This is because the total for each area is **greater** than the fixed amount shown in the first table .

Parties standing candidates in Northern Ireland

Parties standing candidates in the UKPGE in Northern Ireland who did not contest the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2017

For political parties that are contesting the UKPGE in Northern Ireland and did not contest the March 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly election, your party's spending limit is £30,000 x the number of seats your party is contesting in the UKPGE. There are 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

For example:

Your party is contesting 12 constituencies in Northern Ireland. Your spending limit will be:

$$\mathbf{£30,000 \times 12 = £360,000}$$

Parties standing candidates in the UKPGE in Northern Ireland who contested the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2017

If your party is contesting both the UKPGE in 2017 and also contested the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2017, then your spending limits for the two elections are combined.

The new spending limit is the sum of your limit in Northern Ireland for the UKPGE, and your limit in the Northern Ireland Assembly elections.

Parties can carry over any unused portion of their spending limit from the Northern Ireland Assembly election for use on spending at the UKPGE.

If there is another Northern Ireland Assembly election on or before 8 June 2017, your spending limit will change. Please call us for advice.

Calculating your combined limit

To calculate your combined limit you will need to know your spending limit for the Northern Ireland Assembly election and your spending limit for the UKPGE and add them together.

It is important that you are aware of the relevant limits before you conduct any campaign activity for the UKPGE to ensure that you comply with the spending limits. Please call us for advice if you are unsure about how the combined limits work.

For example

If your party contested 12 constituencies in the Northern Ireland Assembly election, your spending limit for that election will have been:

$$12 \times \text{£}17,000 = \text{£}204,000$$

If your party is contesting 15 constituencies in the UKPGE, your spending limit will be:

$$15 \times \text{£}30,000 = \text{£}450,000$$

Calculating your combined UKPGE spending limit

Using the limits calculated above, your combined spending limit will be:

$$12 \times \text{£}17,000 = \text{£}204,000$$

$$15 \times \text{£}30,000 = \text{£}450,000$$

$$\text{Total} = \text{£}654,000$$

This limit is for spending at all elections in Northern Ireland. Money that you spent campaigning at the Northern Ireland Assembly election or any by-elections counts towards your spending limit. If you have already reported your regulated spending in that election you will not have to report it again except as a total on your UKPGE spending return.

The campaign spending return for the UKPGE must provide a summary of what was previously reported for Northern Ireland. This is because parties must stay within the combined expenditure limits for the UKPGE.

If you spent over the limit for the Northern Ireland Assembly election you will still have committed an offence.

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Campaign spending

Campaign spending is what the party spends on certain activities to promote itself, or criticise other parties, during the regulated period.

Campaign spending includes:

- items or services bought before the regulated period begins, but used during it
- items or services given to the party free of charge or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% (see Notional spending on page 16)

All party spending must be reported to the Electoral Commission after the election.

Managing campaign spending

Who is responsible for party campaign spending?

A party's registered treasurer is usually responsible for making sure that the party follows the rules on campaign spending. However, if a party has registered a campaigns officer, this person is responsible for campaign spending instead.

In this guidance, we use 'you' or the term 'responsible person' to refer to the person who is responsible for campaign spending. This will be the campaigns officer if one has been appointed, or the registered treasurer if not.

You can appoint deputies to help with some of your responsibilities. You can do this using [Form RP5](#).

Authorising and paying campaign expenses

Only the 'responsible person' registered with us and people authorised in writing by the responsible person can incur party campaign spending.

For example, someone may be authorised to spend money on particular items, or up to a particular amount.

These rules are in place to make sure that spending can be controlled and accurately recorded and reported.

You should make sure that your volunteers and campaigners know who can and cannot incur costs.

For more information about party treasurers, see this document:

[Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)

By 'incur' we mean make a legal commitment to spend money, such as confirming an order.

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Types of election spending

There are different types of spending by or on behalf of political parties at elections. These are:

- spending on campaigning to promote the party and its policies generally

For example, national newspaper adverts for the party, or leaflets explaining party policy.

- candidate spending on campaigning to promote a particular candidate or candidates in their local area.

For example, leaflets or websites that focus on one or more candidates and their views.

Different rules apply to the two types of spending. For guidance on candidate spending, see our guidance page for [candidates and agents](#).

Spending promoting individual party candidates before the dissolution of Parliament will fall under the rules for party spending. It must therefore be authorised by the party treasurer, or campaigns officer if the party has one, and be reported in the party return.

Spending promoting individual candidates after the dissolution of Parliament is not party spending, and is subject to separate controls. You should always consider whether spending is promoting individual candidates before deciding it is party spending.



What activities count as spending?

Activities included in campaign spending are:

- party advertising of any kind. For example, street banners, websites or YouTube videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters about the party. For example, letters or leaflets you send that are not in response to specific queries
- the manifesto and other documents setting out your party's policies
- market research or other methods of finding out which party people intend to vote for (where the research involves identified candidates however, it may be candidate spending)
- Party press conferences or other dealings with the media
- Party rallies and events, including the cost of people's attendance, and any goods, services or facilities provided
- transport in connection with promoting or publicising your party

Which costs are included?

You must include all the costs associated with each activity. For example, if you are producing leaflets or advertising, you must include the design and distribution costs.

You must also include overheads or administrative costs which are associated with each activity. For example, this could include increased telephone bills for your office.

You must make an honest assessment on the facts of the amount you need to record.

Downloadable material

If you put material on a website for people to print off for their personal use, such as window posters or petition forms, the design and website costs count as campaign spending. You do

Important

All costs should include VAT even if you can recover VAT payments.

not need to count people's print costs against your spending limit, as the costs will be very low.

If the material could be printed and distributed to voters – for instance a leaflet – you will need to make it clear how you expect people to use it. If you authorise wider use of the material, the production costs may count as campaign spending whoever does the printing.

Party election broadcasts

If you are entitled to party election broadcasts, you must include the production costs as campaign spending. You do not need to include the value of the airtime.

What doesn't count as spending?

Activities **not** included in campaign spending are:

- permanent, fixed term or temporary staff costs where the staff member has a direct employment contract with the party
- volunteer time
- office running costs, except costs that are higher than usual because of campaigning, such as telephone bills
- people's travel, food and accommodation costs while they campaign, unless you reimburse them
- expenses met out of public funds. For example, security costs for VIP visits
- material sent only to your members
- party conferences
- local newsletters about elected representatives or prospective candidates
- anything which a candidate properly declares on their spending return

Volunteer time

Sometimes you may not be sure if someone is a volunteer or if their time should be treated as notional spending. For example, they may offer similar services professionally to the ones they are performing for you.

They will be a volunteer if:

- their employer is not paying them for the time they spend on your campaign, or
- they are using their annual leave, or
- where they are self-employed, you won't benefit from any professional insurances they hold

If they use specialist equipment or materials, you should consider whether their use is notional spending, using the principles in the next section.

Notional spending

Sometimes you may receive items or services free or at a non-commercial discount. This may occur if another person or organisation supports your campaign.

Notional spending is the difference in value between the commercial rate for an item or service and the price you pay.

If you use any items or services that are given to you free, or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10%, in undertaking your regulated campaign activities, the value of the notional spending may count towards your spending limit and be reportable in your spending return.

You must record the full commercial value of these items or activities if:

- you receive the item free of charge or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10%, **and**
- the difference in value between the commercial rate and what you pay is over £200

If you receive a discount of 10% or less, or the difference in value is £200 or less, you only need to record the amount you paid.

Valuing notional spending

If the supplier is a commercial provider, you should use the rates they charge other customers. If this information is not available, you should find out what similar providers charge for the same goods or services and use this as the commercial value.

Notional spending with a value of more than £500 is also treated as a donation. For more information see our guidance on [donations](#).

You should keep a record of how you reached your valuation and keep copies of any quotes you receive.

The value you declare in your spending return must be an honest and reasonable assessment of the commercial value.



Important

Commercial discounts are those available to other similar customers, such as discounts for bulk orders or seasonal reductions.

Non-commercial discounts are special discounts that you, specifically, are given by suppliers.

For example:

You are provided office accommodation from which to run your campaign free of charge, which you use for four months of the regulated period.

You would calculate and report the notional spending as set out below:

Commercial rate for monthly rent:	Commercial value of four month's rent:	Notional spending to be reported:
£1,200	$£1,200 \times 4 = £4,800$	£4,800

Seconded staff

If an employer second a member of staff to your campaign, you must record their gross salary and any additional allowances as the notional value.

You do not need to include the employer's national insurance or pension contributions.

Splitting spending

Why you may need to split spending

You may need to split your costs between activities and materials that count as campaign spending and those that don't.

Here are two common examples of where you need to split spending:

- if you use your office as a base for telephone canvassing, you will need to split the phone bill between canvassing calls, and calls made for non-campaign purposes
- if you use design work for campaigning before the regulated period begins, and continue to use it after it has begun, you will need to split the design costs between the two periods

For example:

You commission design work for a campaign logo for your party that you use on your website, other social media and on all your campaign material for a month before the regulated period starts and during the 12 month regulated period.

You should split the cost of the design equally across the entire time that you use it in this way.

The design work cost £19,500, and you used it over a 13 month period, the cost per month is $£19,500 \div 13 = £1,500$ a month.

The regulated period covered the final 12 months, so the cost of spending during the regulated period is:

$$12 \times £1,500 = £18,000$$

£18,000 must be recorded as party campaign spending

The honest assessment principle

In all cases you should make an honest assessment, based on the facts, of the proportion of spending that can fairly be attributed to your campaign.



Important

For more information on splitting spending, see this document:

- [Expert paper: Splitting spending](#)

You must sign to declare the return is complete and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief.

It is an offence to make a false declaration knowingly or recklessly.

Sometimes, it may be difficult to make an exact split. For example, your telephone bill may only provide a breakdown of the cost of calls over a certain value.

In these cases, you should consider the best way of making an honest assessment on the information you have. For example, you could compare the bill with one that does not cover a regulated period.

If you are still not sure, call or [email](#) us for advice.

Splitting candidate and party spending

Individual candidates also have spending limits for campaigning after Parliament is dissolved. These are separate from the party regulated period spending limit.

Deciding if an item is candidate spending or party spending

Spending does not need to be counted against both the candidate's and the party's spending limit. An item of spending will generally fall into one category or the other:

- spending on activity that promotes the candidate is likely to count towards the candidate's spending limit
- spending on activity that promotes the party and not the candidate is likely to be covered by the rules on party campaign expenditure.

In deciding whether an activity is promoting the candidate or the party you should consider what the principal purpose is. For example, a leaflet that prominently features a candidate, but also has a small section describing the party's national policies, is principally promoting the candidate and should be treated as candidate spending. A local newspaper advertisement that features the party's national policies and logo, but does not mention the local candidate or specifically targeted local issues, should be regarded as party spending.

Where spending is intended partly to promote the party and partly to promote the candidate, it may be reasonable to split the costs between party and candidate, and the relevant spending limits. For example, the costs of a two-sided leaflet that promotes the candidate on one side and the party on the

For more information on splitting spending, please see our guidance:

[Expert paper: Splitting Spending](#)

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other may be split with 50% to the candidate and 50% to the party.

If you are in any doubt as to whether spending is or will be candidate or party spending, you should contact us.

Pre-poll Reporting

At a UKPGE parties are required to do weekly pre-poll reporting of donations and loans from the date of dissolution of Parliament. You must still submit a return even if you have not received any donations and loans.

You must make these reports on a weekly basis starting with

Reporting period	Report is due by
3 May 2017 – 9 May 2017	16 May 2017
10 May 2017 – 16 May 2017	23 May 2017
17 May 2017 – 23 May 2017	30 May 2017
24 May 2017 – 30 May 2017	6 June 2017
31 May 2017 – 6 June 2017	13 June 2017
7 June 2017 – 8 June 2017 (shorter than 7 days)	15 June 2017

This is an additional requirement to the quarterly report of donations and loans, which parties must continue to provide throughout the regulated period.

Weekly reports - donations you have received

For each reportable donation, you must provide the following details in your weekly pre-poll reports:

- the donor's full name and address
- the amount (for a cash donation) or nature and value (for a non-cash donation)
- the date on which you received the donation

For more information about donations please see our guidance:

- [Overview of donations to parties \(GB\)](#)

Who is responsible for submitting pre-poll reports?

The responsible person must make sure that the party complies with the rules and submits the pre-poll reports on time. The responsible person must make a declaration in respect of each report to say that the reports are complete and correct.

You can report your donations and loans via [PEF Online](#).

We also produce [forms](#) you can use for this.

Reporting after the election

Political parties contesting the UKPGE 2017 election must report the details of their campaign spending to us after the election.

If you stood candidates in any of the elections held in March 2017 or May 2017 or any by-elections and spent money promoting your party in those elections, this spending will count towards your spending limit for the UKPGE.

If you have already reported your regulated spending in the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly to us you will not have to report it again. You must however tell us the total for this election.



Recording campaign spending

You must record all your campaign spending. You will need to send us this information in your spending return after the election.

You must also keep invoices or receipts for any payments over £200.

What you need to record

For each item of spending, you should record the following information to put into your spending return:

- what the spending was for – for example, leaflets or advertising
- the name and address of the supplier
- the amount or value
- the date that you spent the money

If an item has a value of more than £500, and it is given free of charge or at a non-commercial discount, it may also be a donation.

For more information see this document:

[Overview of donations to political parties \(GB\)](#)

Items given free of charge

If you receive items free of charge you must record the full market value of the item if it's more than £200 (see Notional spending, page 16).

Items given at a non-commercial discount

If you receive items at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% and the difference in value is more than £200, you must include the full market value of the item (see Notional spending page 16).

Time limits for receiving and paying invoices

There are time limits by which the responsible person **must** receive all invoices for your campaign spending.

Receiving invoices from suppliers

You must obtain all your invoices for your campaign spending from suppliers within 30 days of the election. The last day for receiving invoices from your suppliers is **10 July 2017**.

Invoices received after this deadline are called **unpaid claims** for the purposes of reporting. You must record unpaid claims in your spending return.

You must **not** pay unpaid claims unless there is a court order enabling you to do so. This is called **leave to pay** and may be obtained by you or the supplier applying to the relevant court in advance of payment.

Paying invoices from suppliers

You must pay all your invoices from suppliers within 60 days of the election. The last day for paying invoices is **7 August 2017**.

Invoices received in time but remaining unpaid after this deadline are called disputed claims. You must record disputed claims in section 4 of your spending return.

You must **not** pay disputed claims unless there is a court judgment or order enabling you to do so. This is called **leave to pay** and may be obtained by you applying to the relevant court in advance of payment. Suppliers may also apply to the relevant court to obtain a court judgement or order for payment.

It is an offence to make a payment outside of these dates without a **reasonable excuse** unless you have applied for and received leave from a court. In order for us to consider a **reasonable excuse** we would expect to see supporting evidence.

We may issue a civil sanction for a breach of these rules.

Reporting after the election

You must report your campaign spending to us after the election.

Your spending return must include the following:

- details of your spending
- invoices and receipts for any payment over £200
- a declaration from the 'responsible person' to say that the return is complete and correct

You can report your campaign spending via [PEF Online](#).

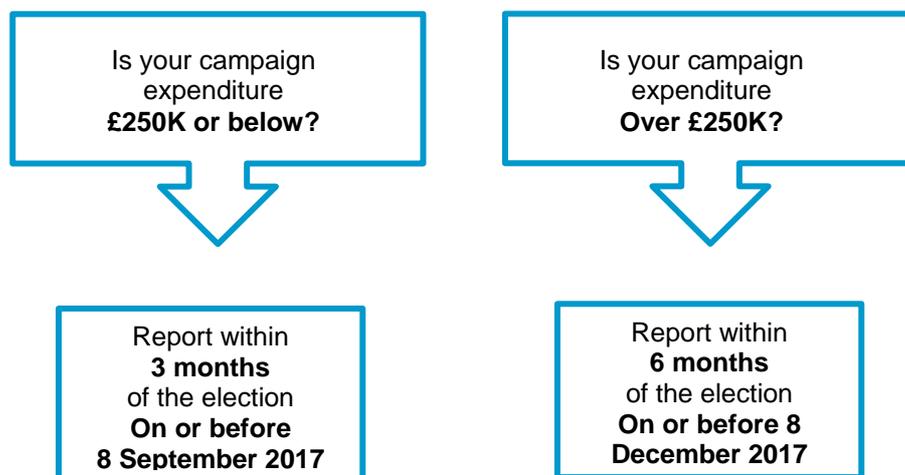
We also produce [forms](#) and [explanatory notes](#) you can use for this. They cover all the information you must include.

If you are a Northern Ireland party please use this [form](#).

It is a criminal offence to make a false declaration knowingly or recklessly.

Campaign reporting deadlines

The date by which you must report to us depends on how much you spent on your campaign. The deadlines are shown below.



If your campaign expenditure is over £250k you must include an independent auditor's report.

For more information see this document:

- [Auditor's report template](#)

You may be liable for a penalty if you don't submit your return on time.

Event	Date	Action
Regulated period begins	9 June 2016	Ensure you have systems in place to record all your spending.
Polling day and end of Regulated Period	8 June 2017	
Deadline to receive invoices	10 July 2017	You must receive all your invoices from your suppliers on or before this date. You or your supplier must apply for a court order to pay invoices received after this date.
Deadline to pay invoices	7 August 2017	You must pay all your invoices on or before this date. You or your supplier must apply for a court order to pay invoices after this date.
Deadline for submitting your spending return, if you spent £250,000 or less	8 September 2017	Submit your spending return to us on or before 8 September 2017
Deadline to submit your spending return, if you spent over £250,000	8 December 2017	Ensure your spending return is audited and submit it to us on or before 8 December 2017

How we can help

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website.

You can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Call us on:

- **England:** 0333 103 1928
pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Scotland:** 0333 103 1928
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Wales:** 0333 103 1929
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk
- **Northern Ireland:** 0333 103 1928
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Visit us at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:
pef@electoralcommission.org.uk