



Handbook for polling station staff

Supporting local elections and combined
authority mayoral elections in England

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Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

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1 Introduction

This handbook is designed to assist polling station staff working at local elections and combined authority mayoral elections in England. It describes the procedures to be followed and how to deal with any issues that may arise.

As polling station staff, you play a central role in the elections. Your role is vital in ensuring that voters, political parties, candidates and agents have confidence in the election process.

You will receive training on your role, but you should still read this handbook carefully in advance of polling day to ensure that you are familiar with all the processes that are described in it.

References are made throughout this handbook to the Returning Officer. This is because most arrangements related to the conduct of the poll are the responsibility of the relevant Returning Officer. In practice, however, it is the electoral administrator who is responsible for the day-to-day running of elections. Polling station staff will be given local contact details prior to polling day and this will most likely be, in the first instance, the elections office.

2 The elections and the polling station team

Local elections

The first-past-the-post electoral system is used for local elections in England.

Voters have between one and three votes, depending on how many candidates are to be elected, and should place an 'X' in the box to the right of the name of the candidate(s) for whom they wish to vote. If they vote for more candidates than they are entitled to, their ballot paper will not be counted. The candidate(s) who receive the most votes will be elected.

Combined authority mayoral elections

At a combined authority mayoral election where there are more than two candidates, the supplementary vote electoral system is used. Under this system voters can vote for a first and second choice candidate they want to elect. The ballot paper will list all the candidates standing in the combined authority area and voters will vote for their first choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the first choice column and for their second choice by marking an 'X' in the second choice column.

As long as they put an 'X' in the first choice column, their vote will be counted. Voters can choose not to mark a second choice. If they only mark a second choice, their vote won't be counted.

If, however, there are only two candidates standing, the combined authority mayor will be elected under the first-past-the-post electoral system. In this case, voters will be asked to place an 'X' in the box next to the candidate of their choice on the ballot paper.

Roles and responsibilities of the polling station team

The role of polling station staff is to ensure that voters are able to cast their vote in secret, free from influence and in a calm atmosphere.

Both the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerks should be able to carry out each other's duties if required. However, Presiding Officers have an overall responsibility for the polling station and carry out an additional supervisory role. Also, in law, there are a number of duties that only Presiding Officers can carry out. These are:

- requesting that a police officer remove someone from a polling station (see Appendix 6)
- asking the prescribed questions (see Appendix 5a)
- limiting the number of accredited observers present at any one time (see Chapter 4)

Duties of the Presiding Officer

Presiding Officers are responsible for the conduct of the ballot in the polling station and they should have a sound knowledge of the voting procedures.

The Presiding Officer's main duties are to:

- comply with any instructions issued by the Returning Officer
- ensure the secrecy and security of the ballot
- organise the layout of the polling station and liaise, if required, with the key-holder of the building
- instruct and supervise the work of Poll Clerks
- open and close the polling station on time
- maintain order in the polling station

- be polite and professional in dealing with electors, candidates and agents, and others entitled to be present in the polling station
- act impartially at all times
- account and be responsible for all the ballot papers, paperwork and ballot box(es)
- ask the prescribed questions of voters when necessary, including when asked to do so by candidates or agents or before the issue of tendered ballot papers
- ensure that the proper procedure for voting is followed, ensuring that the corresponding number list(s) are marked correctly
- ensure that when either they or their Poll Clerk issues ballot papers, they bear the official mark and are issued correctly to eligible electors
- deal with special voting procedures as required
- receive any postal votes handed in by electors
- manage the attendance of those entitled to be present in the polling station, e.g. candidates and agents, representatives of the Electoral Commission and accredited observers, and ensure that they do not interfere with the voting process
- monitor the activities of tellers outside polling places and ensure that they do not interfere with the voting process
- keep the polling station neat and tidy
- ensure that all signs and notices are clear, visible and remain in place throughout the day

Where there is more than one polling station in a building, the Returning Officer or election staff may designate one of the Presiding Officers to take an overall responsibility for the polling place.

Duties of the Poll Clerk

Poll Clerks do not have the responsibilities of the Presiding Officer, but they should know all of the procedures for voting and how to deal with any problems.

The Poll Clerk's main duties are to:

- comply with the instructions of the Returning Officer and the Presiding Officer
- assist with the layout of the polling station and prepare for the opening of the poll
- be polite and professional in dealing with voters, candidates and agents, representatives of the Electoral Commission and accredited observers
- act impartially at all times
- check that electors are eligible to vote in the elections and at this polling station
- check and mark voters' elector numbers in the register of electors
- on the corresponding number list(s), write the voter's elector number against the numbers of the ballot papers issued
- issue ballot papers to voters when directed to do so by the Presiding Officer, ensuring that they bear the official mark
- ensure that voters cast their votes in secret
- maintain the secrecy of the ballot at all times
- answer voters' questions, where appropriate, in a friendly and professional way
- help with any other polling station duties on the instruction of the Presiding Officer
- assist the Presiding Officer to complete necessary procedures after the close of poll

3 Before polling day

Training for polling station staff

Polling station staff will need to be fully briefed about the elections and cannot rely solely on past experience. Neither should polling station staff rely only on this handbook. Returning Officers should have scheduled training or briefing sessions in advance of the elections and they will expect polling station staff to attend.

Locating the polling station

Returning Officers are appointed to conduct the elections within each local authority area. They decide how many polling stations are needed, where they should be situated and how many Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks are required to staff them.

Do not assume that a polling station will be in the same place as it has been for previous elections or referendums. The Returning Officer will provide information on the location of the polling station when appointments are made. All members of the polling station team should know the location of the polling station before polling day.

The Returning Officer may ask Presiding Officers to visit the polling station in advance of polling day. Where this is the case, they should arrange a mutually convenient time with the key-holder. At all times, access to a polling station prior to polling day should only be with the permission of the key-holder. Be aware of the sensitivities around visiting local authority premises during working hours (particularly educational and social care establishments). If possible, it may also be useful to meet up at the polling station with other members of the team before polling day to find out what facilities are available and to discuss what supplies and refreshments may be needed.

Some premises may contain two or more polling stations. If so, Presiding Officers, where instructed to do so by the elections team, should coordinate any visit to the premises prior to polling day with the other Presiding Officers. The key-holder will appreciate this and it will enable colleagues to discuss entrance, exit and layout for each of the polling stations.

The key-holder should open the building no later than 6.30am on polling day. If the appropriate person will not be available to open the building, the elections office may ask the Presiding Officer to make arrangements to collect the keys in advance of polling day. If this is the case, Presiding Officers should ensure that they have all the relevant keys, including any gate keys, and any alarm details, and make sure that the key-holder's telephone number and address are readily available in case anything should go wrong.

Polling station staff should consider how long it will take to get to the polling station on the morning of the elections and factor this into their plans for the day. Arriving in good time will enable staff to ensure that the polling station is set up in an appropriate manner before the polls open at 7am.

Polling station staff should ensure that they take sufficient food and drink to last for the whole of polling day, as they will not be able to leave the polling place while the polls are open.

Standards of appearance

The atmosphere in the polling station should be business-like and friendly, and polling station staff should dress accordingly. However, staff will be present at the polling station all day and should also consider their personal comfort.

Remember that polling station staff are representatives of the Returning Officer and should act impartially at all times. Any badges, slogans, or colours that might bring the impartiality of the polling station staff into question must not be worn.

Contacting other members of the team

Returning Officers may provide the Presiding Officer with the contact details for any Poll Clerk(s) on duty at the same polling station. If this is done, the Presiding Officer should contact the Poll Clerk(s) before polling day to ensure that they know the location of the polling station and what time to arrive.

Delivery or collection of the ballot box(es)

Unless the ballot box(es) are being delivered directly to the polling station, the Returning Officer will notify Presiding Officers of the arrangements for the collection of the ballot box(es) together with all relevant election materials. Where the ballot box(es) and other election materials are to be collected by the Presiding Officer and then kept at the Presiding Officer's home, **great care must be taken to ensure their security at all times**. In particular, no election materials should be left unattended in a car.

4 Polling day: before the poll opens

The polling station must open at 7am. Do not be late. You must inform the elections office as soon as possible if you encounter any problems that may prevent you from opening at 7am.

Arriving at the polling station

Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks must arrive at the polling station by 6.30am. Make sure sufficient time is allowed to get to the polling station – do not be late. Polling station staff unavoidably detained or unable to attend the polling station must contact the elections office immediately.

Presiding Officers should, where the Returning Officer has asked them to do so, collect the Poll Clerks' appointment notification.

Presiding Officers should also check that Poll Clerks are aware of the requirements of secrecy.

What happens if the key-holder does not attend?

First, try to make contact, either by telephone or by sending a member of the polling station team to their home. If access cannot be gained, contact the elections office to advise them of the situation and to ask for further instructions. If necessary, set up a temporary polling station. There may be sufficient space at the entrance to the building, or even outside it. In some cases, Presiding Officers have used the back of a car. Whatever the situation, voters must be able to vote in secret from 7am onwards.

Keep the elections office and any candidates, agents and observers in attendance informed of whatever arrangements you make.

Checking supplies and materials

Unless supplied by the Returning Officer directly to the polling station, the Presiding Officer will be responsible for the transportation of the ballot box(es) and election materials. The larger items, such as the polling booths, will normally have been delivered to the premises beforehand. The Returning Officer will advise Presiding Officers of the arrangements.

A checklist of polling station supplies will be provided with the ballot box(es) and other polling station materials. If, on checking the contents, any items of equipment or materials listed on the inventory are missing, contact the Returning Officer immediately. Materials should be checked on receipt. Take care when lifting the materials or equipment; they may be heavy (see Appendix 9 for information on health and safety).

The Presiding Officer should check that they have been provided with the correct register for their polling station and that it includes the expected number of electors allocated to it.

The Presiding Officer should also check that the ballot papers are in numerical order, and are the correct ones for the polling station and that there are no obvious errors in the numbering of the papers.

The numbers on the back of the ballot papers should be checked against the ballot paper numbers printed on the corresponding number list(s). This should be checked before polling begins. The ballot papers should be issued in the same order as printed on the corresponding number list(s). If the numbers do not match, contact the Returning Officer immediately.

The Presiding Officer should also check that the ballot papers bear the unique identifying mark on the back and that the pre-printed official mark is also present.

If the statements of persons nominated have been provided by the Returning Officer, the Presiding Officer should also check that the candidates' details on the ballot papers match those on the statements.

Do not issue ballot papers on which there are errors or where the printing is indistinct or unclear.

Polling station layout

The first job on arrival will be to set up the polling station, unless this has already been done for you. The layout of the room is important. Poor layout could cause unnecessary confusion and access difficulties. Appendix 11 provides a checklist covering polling station set-up and the display of notices. Even if the polling station has already been set up for you, you should still check that it has been set up properly using the checklist in Appendix 11.

Caretakers may already have arranged the room, particularly if the Returning Officer or Presiding Officer has given them instructions on the layout of the polling station in advance. However, it is possible that the polling station staff will have to set up the room or rearrange the furniture. Some polling booths are heavy; be careful when erecting or moving them (see Appendix 9 for advice on health and safety issues).

Examples of layouts for both – a room where there is one polling station and a room where there is more than one polling station – are set out on the next page. These are shown as a guide and may have to be adapted to meet local circumstances.

The layout must work for the voter and contribute to the smooth running of the polling station. In particular, the needs of voters with a range of disabilities must be considered.

For example:

- Are the ballot box(es) accessible for all voters?
- Can a wheelchair user easily get around the polling station and its surrounding areas?
- Are all of the polling booths set up in such a way that it maintains the privacy of voting for all voters?

- Is the low-level polling booth in the most appropriate position for wheelchair access, with sufficient space for a wheelchair to be manoeuvred comfortably?
- Are the notices positioned so that they can be read by all voters, including visually impaired people and those in wheelchairs?
- Are the polling booths positioned to make best use of the available light?
- Are the polling agents and observers positioned so that they do not interfere with the proceedings, but can still observe proceedings?
- Are there chairs available in the polling station for electors who cannot stand for long periods?

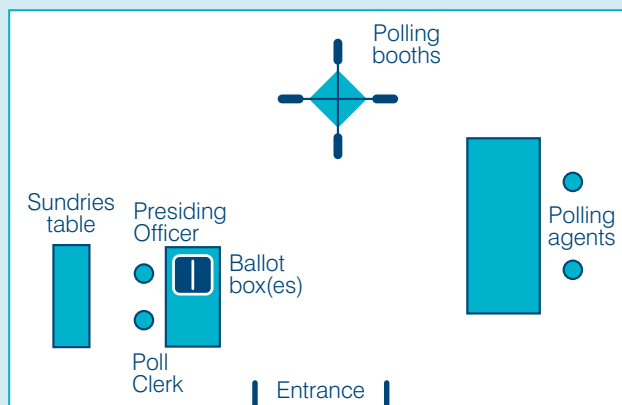
In all cases:

- Use the checklist in Appendix 11 when setting up the polling station or checking that it has been set up correctly.
- Make sure that the polling booths are not placed so that people outside can see how voters are marking their ballot papers.
- Arrange the ballot box(es) and polling booths to ensure that they are accessible to all voters, yet fully visible to polling station staff.
- Position the issuing table and the ballot box(es) in such a way that prevents any voter from leaving the polling station without passing you and the ballot box(es) and allows you to check that they are not leaving the polling station with their ballot papers.
- Consider what arrangements you would need to make to be able to accommodate and deal with voters during busy periods.
- Have at hand the elections office contact details and follow any escalation procedures as instructed by the Returning Officer should any issues arise during polling day.

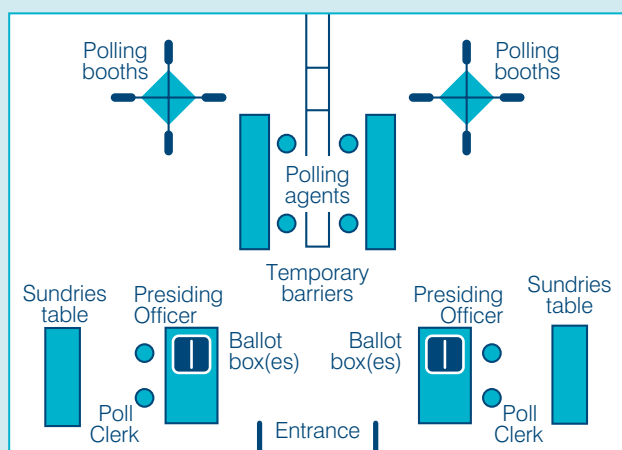
Remember that in a room where there is more than one polling station, the ballot boxes must be kept separate. Otherwise, voters from one polling station may mistakenly put their ballot paper in the wrong ballot box and the ballot paper accounts for each of the two polling stations will not tally.

Even with the ballot boxes kept separate, staff should remain vigilant as voters may still get confused as to which ballot box they should be using.

Example of a single polling station layout



Example of a double polling station layout



Signs and notices

Think about what each sign and notice is for when putting it up. Walk the route the voter is expected to follow, checking all signs and notices. Some signs and notices are directional whilst others provide information for voters. Ensure that they are positioned so that they can be read by all voters, including those in wheelchairs and people who may be visually impaired.

The notice entitled 'How to vote at these elections' is to be displayed both inside and outside the polling station. If the Returning Officer has provided such notices in Braille, in languages other than English, or in pictorial formats, these too should be displayed both inside and outside the polling station.

The **only** notice to be displayed within each polling booth is one that provides information on how to mark the ballot papers at these elections. If the Returning Officer has provided any such notices in alternative languages and formats, e.g. in Braille, in languages other than English, or in pictorial formats, these should also be displayed inside the polling booth. No other notices are to be displayed in the polling booth.

A large sample copy of each of the ballot papers must also be displayed inside the polling station, ideally in a well-lit location where voters can easily see them before being issued with their ballot papers.

An enlarged hand-held copy of each of the ballot papers, marked 'sample', will also be supplied by the Returning Officer. These can be given to voters who are partially sighted to take into the polling booth for reference when marking their ballot papers.

Make sure that there is no material that might be construed as supporting the views of any party or candidate involved in the elections displayed in or on the premises. If any such materials are found, they must be removed or covered up.

Who may be present in the polling station?

The law specifically provides for certain persons to be present in polling stations (in addition to elections staff and voters). These are:

- candidates
- election agents
- polling agents
- police officers and police community support officers on duty at the polling station
- representatives of the Electoral Commission
- accredited observers
- persons under the age of 18 who accompany voters
- companions of disabled voters

At the combined authority mayoral election, an election agent may appoint sub-agents to attend the polling station on their behalf. Throughout this handbook, any reference to the election agent includes any sub-agents acting on their behalf.

The Returning Officer and their staff

The Returning Officer and their staff may visit during the course of the day. This may be to carry out duties such as delivering additional equipment, carrying out an inspection of the polling station or to collect postal ballot papers that have been handed in at the polling station by voters.

Candidates, election agents and polling agents

All candidates contesting the elections and their election agents have the right to enter and to remain in a polling station but they must not disrupt voting or attempt to canvass voters.

Polling agents can be appointed to work on behalf of candidates on polling day. Polling agents have the right to enter and to remain in the polling station and to observe voting. The main purpose of their appointment is to detect personation – that is, people voting illegally in the name of another voter. Not more than one polling agent may be admitted at the same time to a polling station on behalf of the same candidate. The Returning Officer will have notified Presiding Officers in advance if any polling agents have been appointed to attend at the polling station.

Polling agents may wish to note on their own copy of the register of electors who has voted, but they cannot take this marked copy of the register out of the polling station until after the close of poll. They must not interfere with the voting process and must not campaign or canvass voters in the polling station. If they do wear a rosette or badge, it should be plain but may display the name of a candidate, party and/or emblem. They have the right to observe the preparation and opening of the polling station and its closure and may add their seal to the ballot box(es) at the close of poll (though not at poll opening). During polling hours, polling agents in attendance should be placed at a separate table that is close enough to observe and hear the proceedings, but not in a position that would compromise the secrecy of the ballot.

Police officers on duty at the polling station

Police officers and police community support officers on duty may be present in the polling station at any time, although it is the Presiding Officer's duty to maintain order in the polling station (see Appendix 6 for information on security at the polling station).

Representatives of the Electoral Commission and accredited observers

Representatives of the Electoral Commission and other individuals accredited through the Commission's official observer scheme are entitled to attend all polling station proceedings. They do not need to give advance notification of where they intend to observe, but every observer must carry photographic identification and should not be allowed to observe proceedings without this (see examples below).

Example of ID issued to Commission representatives (pink)



Example of ID issued to accredited observers (silver)



The status of individuals seeking to gain entry to polling stations as observers can always be checked with the elections office.

Both Commission representatives and accredited observers agree to abide by a Code of conduct, which includes an agreement that they will not interfere with any proceedings. Presiding Officers may ask observers (but not Commission representatives) to leave the polling station, but only if they are:

- breaching or attempting to breach the secrecy of the ballot
- knowingly obstructing the polling process
- asking voters about their voting preference

If an observer is removed from the polling station, the Presiding Officer must provide a note to the observer stating the reasons why they have been removed.

Presiding Officers should also record any such incidents and notify the Returning Officer as soon as possible.

Any observer removed in the circumstances above is not entitled to re-enter the polling station for the remainder of the poll.

In the case of overcrowding, Presiding Officers are entitled to limit the number of accredited observers (but not Commission representatives) present inside a polling station for a specified time – such as for 30 or 60 minutes. However, it is important to note that no officer is entitled to bar all observers from the entire process, only to limit the number of observers present at any one time. When such action is taken, this should be recorded in a polling station log.

Presiding Officers should record the details of any accredited observers or Commission representatives who attend at their polling station.

Electoral observation is a legitimate and valuable part of the electoral process, and care should be taken not to hinder or obstruct the conduct of the observation.

Persons under the age of 18 who accompany voters

Persons under the age of 18 may accompany voters into the polling station to observe the voting procedure. Presiding Officers can limit the number of those under 18 allowed in the polling station at any one time if they consider their attendance to be impeding the proceedings in any way.

Companions of voters with disabilities

Although many disabled voters will be able to vote without assistance, some will not, and those who cannot are entitled to bring someone with them to cast their vote. When dealing with disabled voters who need the assistance of a companion, make sure that you directly address and respond to the voter and not only the companion.

See Appendix 1 for further details, including what assistance the Presiding Officer may provide.

Sealing the ballot box(es)

The Presiding Officer must close and seal the ballot box(es) a few minutes before 7am, after having shown to all those entitled to be present that they are empty. In the event that more than one ballot box has been issued to the Presiding Officer, each ballot box must be sealed having shown to those entitled to be present that they are empty, before polling commences. The Returning Officer will tell you whether there will be one ballot box for all papers or whether separate ballot boxes for each poll will be used. If you are issued any additional boxes, these should be stored securely out of sight until they are required.

Ballot boxes vary in design, as does the method of sealing them. Whatever method is used, make sure that the ballot box(es) are properly secured. At this stage, candidates, election agents or polling agents must not be allowed to affix their seals to the ballot box(es): their seals may only be attached at the close of poll.

Some last-minute checks

Just before the polling station is opened, take a few moments to double-check that everything is ready. Make sure that the ballot papers, corresponding number list(s), tendered ballot papers and other official documentation are safely out of reach of voters. Tendered ballot papers should be kept separate to ensure that they are not issued in error. Tendered ballot papers are easily identified as they are a different colour to the ordinary ballot papers. The Returning Officer will advise you of the colour of the ballot papers being used for these elections.

Information on the circumstances in which tendered ballot papers should be issued can be found in Appendix 5b.

Ballot papers may be provided loose leaf but will most likely be supplied in books where they can be detached as they are issued. Check that the ballot papers are in the correct numerical sequence and that the numbers match those pre-printed on the corresponding number list(s). Make sure you are ready to issue ballot papers, starting with the ballot paper with the lowest number for each poll. This will save accounting problems at the close of poll.

Check that the ballot papers bear the unique identifying mark on the back and that the official mark is also present.

Check that pencils/pens are fixed securely to polling booths, and that pencils are sharpened.

5 Polling day: opening and conducting the poll

The hours of the poll are from 7am until 10pm.

Opening the polling station

There may be a number of electors waiting for the polling station to open. Greet them and invite them inside as soon as it is 7am. **Do not issue ballot papers before 7am.**

Summary of the voting procedure

For the majority of voters who come to the polling station, the process for voting will be straightforward. The following procedure should be followed in those circumstances:

Stage one – checking the voter

- Greet electors, ask them to confirm their name and address, and make sure that they are eligible to vote in the elections.
- Mark the register of electors against (but not through) the elector number by placing a straight line against the voter's entry on the register.
- Call out the number and name of the elector.

Stage two – issuing the ballot papers

- Write the elector number (including the polling district reference letter(s) if not pre-printed) on the corresponding number list(s) next to the numbers of the ballot papers to be issued.
- Ensure that the ballot papers include a pre-printed official mark. If they do not, follow the procedure set out under 'What happens if the ballot papers do not contain the official mark?' on page 14.
- Fold the ballot papers, and then hand them to the voter unfolded so that they can see all of the candidates on the papers.

Stage three – voting

- Make sure voters go to polling booths individually so that their right to a secret vote is protected. No other person is allowed to accompany a voter to a polling booth unless a voter who is disabled or unable to read has requested assistance to vote (see Appendix 1 for further information on voting with the assistance of a companion).
- The voter marks the ballot papers in the privacy of the polling booth.
- Prior to the voter placing the ballot papers in the ballot box(es), they should fold the ballot papers and should show the ballot paper number and unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot papers to the Presiding Officer.
- Say 'goodbye' and thank the voter as they leave the polling station.

The appendices in this handbook show what to do when something out of the ordinary occurs, e.g. establishing entitlement to vote, and dealing with anonymous voters, proxy voters and emergency proxy voters. Presiding Officers should read these sections prior to polling day in order to be prepared.

Remember to follow all stages of the process carefully or the voter may inadvertently be disenfranchised.

Stage one – checking the voter

In a polling station with a Presiding Officer and only one Poll Clerk, one person should be responsible for the register of electors and the ballot papers and the other should be responsible for ensuring that the elector number is entered correctly in the corresponding number list(s). The Returning Officer may give guidance on how this work should be allocated, which must then be followed.

If there are two Poll Clerks, the Presiding Officer may wish to oversee the process, dealing with electors and any special circumstances. In this case, the two Poll Clerks should share duties and could swap over every so often, on the instruction of the Presiding Officer.

Greet electors as they approach the table. If there are two polling stations in the room, make sure that electors attend the correct one. There should be signs displayed listing the streets or addresses for each station and polling station staff should be on hand to guide electors.

Most electors bring their poll card with them to show to the Poll Clerk even though this is not a requirement for most voters. Offer this poll card back to the elector: it will help them to give information to tellers outside if this is their wish. If the elector declines the poll card, the Poll Clerk should dispose of the card securely.

Unless an elector has an anonymous entry, the Poll Clerk must:

- confirm the elector's name and address and check that they are on the register of electors and eligible to vote in the elections
- draw a straight line against (but not through) their entry on the register of electors
- read out the elector's name, elector number and polling district reference from the register of electors (this is a safeguard against personation)

Only electors with anonymous entries on the register, and their proxies, must produce their poll card, or proxy poll card, in order to vote.

This is because electors with an anonymous entry are registered without a reference to their name or address in order to protect them from harm. Return the poll card to any such electors once you have marked their entry on the register. For an explanation of the voting procedure for anonymous electors, please see Appendix 4.

Whose names are on the register of electors?

In most cases, the register of electors will contain the names of all electors allocated to the polling station. A few electors may have registered anonymously and will appear without reference to their name or address. Their entry on the

register will consist of their elector number and the letter 'N', and will be found at the end of the register under the 'other electors' section.

Together with their name, most electors just have their elector number and address. These electors are eligible to vote at any election. Some electors will also have a letter or a date preceding their name. These letters indicate their eligibility to vote in certain elections and the date indicates when they will attain voting age.

Who can vote at local elections and combined authority mayoral elections?

- Electors with no letters or dates before their name.
- Electors with an anonymous entry who have no letter next to their entry other than the letter 'N'.
- Electors who are 18 years of age or over (unless they also have a letter next to their entry indicating they are not eligible) – the figures printed before an elector's entry indicate the date on which that elector becomes 18 years old.
- Electors with a 'G' before their name* – these are citizens of European Union (EU) member states (other than the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Cyprus and Malta) who can vote at local elections, combined authority mayoral elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and in elections to devolved institutions.
- Electors with a 'K' before their name* – these are citizens of European Union (EU) member states (other than the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Cyprus and Malta) who can vote at local elections, combined authority mayoral elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, European Parliamentary elections, as well as in elections to devolved institutions.
- Electors with an 'L' before their name* – these are electors who can sit in the House of Lords and who may vote at local elections, combined authority mayoral elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, European Parliamentary elections as well as in elections to devolved institutions.

* For an anonymously registered elector, any letters would appear before the letter 'N', as the names of such electors are not contained on the register of electors.

Who cannot vote at local and combined authority mayoral elections?

- Electors with a date of birth next to their name which shows that they will not be 18 years old until after polling day
- Electors with an 'A' before their name* – these are voters who have chosen to vote by post and are therefore not able to vote in person at the polling station.
- Electors with an 'E' before their name* – these are peers of the realm who are registered as overseas electors and who are eligible to vote only in European Parliamentary elections.
- Electors with an 'F' before their name* - these are overseas electors who can vote only in UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections.

Stage two – issuing the ballot papers

Ballot papers are numbered and should match the numbers pre-printed on the corresponding number list(s). Ballot papers must be issued in strict numerical order commencing with the lowest number in the batch. Otherwise, problems will be experienced at the close of poll when completing the ballot paper accounts.

If the elector is shown on the register of electors as being eligible to vote at the elections and has, if necessary, answered the prescribed questions satisfactorily (see Appendix 5a for the prescribed questions), then the voter must be issued with ballot papers.

The Poll Clerk (or Presiding Officer) with the ballot papers must:

- allocate the ballot papers
- read out the ballot paper numbers
- ensure that the ballot papers bear the unique identifying mark and official mark
- fold the ballot papers, then hand them to the voter unfolded so that they can see all of the candidates on the papers

The Poll Clerk (or Presiding Officer) with the corresponding number list(s) must write the voter's elector number against the number of the ballot papers being issued on the corresponding number list(s).

Always enter the elector number on the corresponding number list(s). **Do not write anything on the ballot papers themselves.**

What happens if the ballot paper does not bear the unique identifying mark?

All ballot papers must bear a unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper. This can take a number of forms, for example, a printed barcode or a sequence of letters and numbers. The Returning Officer, or their staff, should notify Presiding Officers at the training session as to what form the unique identifying mark will take.

If all the ballot papers are missing the unique identifying mark, the Presiding Officer should notify the elections office immediately. If only some papers are missing the mark, the Presiding Officer should only issue those ballot papers that contain the unique identifying mark, and should also notify the elections office of the situation.

What happens if the ballot paper does not contain the official mark?

The official mark will be pre-printed on the ballot papers. The Returning Officer will indicate what the official mark will be at the training session. Every ballot paper **must** bear an official mark. Any ballot paper that is lacking the official mark will be rejected at the count.

If the ballot papers do not contain a pre-printed official mark as indicated by the Returning Officer, the Presiding Officer should contact the Returning Officer. You may be able to improvise an official mark. For example, use a drawing pin to perforate the ballot paper a few times before it is issued. The Presiding Officer should record the improvised mark and note the numbers of the first and last ballot papers issued and stamped in this way. This should be handed in with the ballot paper accounts at the count.

* For an anonymously registered elector, any letters would appear before the letter 'N', as the names of such electors are not contained on the register of electors.

Stage three – voting

Voters must mark the ballot papers in the privacy of the polling booth and then re-fold the ballot papers so that no one may see the way they have voted. Voters should show the ballot paper number and the unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot papers to the Presiding Officer or Poll Clerk before placing them in the ballot box(es).

What is the procedure if a voter makes a mistake and spoils a ballot paper?

Do not issue tendered ballot papers.

Sometimes voters do make mistakes, e.g. by making a mark against the 'wrong' candidate. The Presiding Officer must take the spoilt ballot paper(s) and write 'cancelled' on it (them) before placing it (them) in the envelope provided. **Do not place the spoilt ballot paper(s) in the ballot box(es).** Once a spoilt ballot paper has been placed in the ballot box, a replacement ballot paper cannot be issued.

Issue the voter with a replacement ballot paper for each ballot paper that has been spoilt. Do not forget to write the elector number against the new ballot paper number(s) on the corresponding number list(s) and to write 'cancelled' by the elector number for the cancelled ballot paper(s). The Presiding Officer must also remember to ensure that any replacement ballot papers bear the official mark.

At the close of poll, the Presiding Officer must count and then record the number of spoilt ballot papers on the ballot paper accounts.

What if the elector refuses a particular ballot paper before it has been handed over?

If an elector refuses one of the ballot papers before it has been handed over, the Presiding Officer should issue the requested ballot paper and mark the register of electors accordingly, indicating which ballot paper has been issued. The elector's number should then be entered onto the corresponding number list(s).

The voter may return to the polling station later on polling day to request the vote previously refused, and so following this procedure is important. If the elector does return to the polling station later in

the day, the corresponding number list should be marked but only the ballot paper that was previously refused should be handed over to the voter. The Presiding Officer should mark the register of electors to show that both ballot papers have now been issued to that elector.

What if a ballot paper has already been handed over and the elector decides they do not want it?

Once a ballot paper has been handed over to the elector it cannot be cancelled (unless it has been spoilt). The Presiding Officer should therefore try to convince the elector to place the unmarked ballot paper in the appropriate ballot box.

If the voter refuses to do this, the Presiding Officer should take the ballot paper and keep it securely away from the other ballot papers and make a note on the appropriate ballot paper account that the paper was issued but not used. The Presiding Officer should not re-issue this ballot paper; however, they may give this ballot paper to the elector to whom it was originally issued if they return later and request it.

Providing general assistance to voters

Polling staff have a duty to assist voters in the voting process. Remember, voters are customers: greet them with a smile and take into account any special needs they may have.

Never be off-hand, prejudiced or patronising. Do not become angry or agitated, even when under pressure. Listen carefully if you are asked a question. If you are unable to answer a voter's questions or concerns, refer them to the Returning Officer.

When giving general assistance, polling station staff must be careful not to lead voters to cast their votes for a specific candidate, or offer an opinion about any candidate.

There are a number of written instructions available for voters in the polling station. First of all, there are the instructions on the ballot papers themselves. There are also the 'How to vote at these elections' posters and the notice displayed inside each polling booth. If any voter asks for assistance it may, in some circumstances, be helpful to read out these instructions to them.

Some voters may still find the instructions unclear. They may ask, for example, to have their favoured candidate pointed out to them, or ask where they should make their mark on the ballot papers. The Presiding Officer should read out instructions printed at the top of the ballot papers and the details of the candidates in the order that they appear on the ballot paper for each election.

There are special procedures to follow when assisting disabled voters and these are described in Appendix 1.

The language used to assist or give instructions to voters in the polling station should be English. The Returning Officer may, however, have provided instructions or guidance in alternative languages or formats depending on requirements within the community. The Presiding Officer should be familiar with what resources are available and provide these as and when appropriate.

In some exceptional cases the translated notices may not be sufficient or appropriate. For example, a voter may have low levels of literacy or may have a question that falls outside of what is covered by the notices. In those circumstances, if polling station staff are able to provide information in a language spoken by the voter, assistance in a language other than English may then be provided. Where assistance is given in another language, you should explain to other staff and any polling agents or observers present what question has been asked and the response given.

Certificates of employment

Some polling station staff may have been issued with a certificate of employment. Such certificates are signed by the Returning Officer, allowing staff to vote at another polling station within the electoral area rather than at their prescribed one. Similarly, a police officer may present such certificates, signed by an inspector (or higher rank). In such a case, the Presiding Officer will issue ballot papers and then cancel the certificates and place them in the envelope provided.

Postal votes

Presiding Officers are responsible for receiving any postal votes (or any part of a postal vote, i.e. postal ballot paper(s) or the postal voting statement) handed in at the polling station. For further details on the postal vote procedure, see Appendix 3.

Maintenance of the polling place

The Presiding Officer should check the polling place regularly, including for any build-up of electors waiting to vote, and ensure that voters have unimpeded access at all times:

- Check signs and notices and replace or repair any that have been defaced or damaged.
- Ensure that the entrance to the polling station, including any ramps, is not blocked.
- Where temporary ramps are being used, ensure that they are firmly in place and check to ensure that they have not become dislodged during the day.
- Instruct anyone who is campaigning in or around the polling station to stop.
- Remove any campaign literature that may have been left in the polling station.
- Make sure that there is sufficient light for voters in the polling booths.
- Make sure that the pens/pencils are still in the booths and sharpen pencils if necessary.
- Ensure that nothing has been left in the booths, including ballot papers or information on a particular party or candidate.
- Check the ballot box seals/lock.
- Give the ballot box a shake or use a ruler or ballot box compactor to push the ballot papers down if the box seems full.
- Keep the polling station, including any passageways leading into the polling station, clean, tidy and free from any hazards.
- If you notice any queues forming, take steps as instructed by the Returning Officer for dealing with them.

6 The close of poll

Polling must close at 10pm, but any eligible electors who at 10pm are in their polling station, or in a queue at their polling station for the purposes of voting (whether that queue is inside or continues on outside the polling station) must be allowed to vote.

If a person is in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station by 10pm for the purposes of returning a postal vote, they may do so after 10pm.

Procedures

- Check the polling place, not just immediately before the close of poll, but regularly in the lead-up to the close of poll and take steps to ensure that as far as possible all waiting electors will be able to be issued with ballot papers by 10pm. If that is not possible, take steps to ensure that they will all be inside the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station for the purposes of voting by that time. Inform the elections office immediately in the event of a queue existing or building up in the lead-up to the close of poll.
 - If there is more than one polling station in the building, check that anyone waiting to vote is at the correct polling station for their address.
 - Make sure nobody joins the queue after 10pm.
 - If there is a queue at 10pm and if the polling station can accommodate all the electors in the queue, ask electors to move inside the polling station and close the doors behind the last electors in the queue.
 - If the polling station is too small to accommodate all the electors in the queue, a member of the polling station team should mark the end of the queue, for example by positioning themselves behind the last elector in the queue.
- Explain to anyone who arrives after 10pm and tries to join the queue that the poll has closed and that, by law, they cannot be issued with ballot papers. There may be circumstances where a person marking the end of the queue or staff inside the polling station are challenged by an elector who wishes to vote even though they arrived after 10pm. Such electors cannot be issued with ballot papers in any circumstances. General guidance to support you in maintaining security in and around the polling station can be found in Appendix 6.
 - Anyone who at 10pm is not waiting to vote either inside the polling station, or in a queue outside the polling station, must not be issued with ballot papers or be allowed to hand in their postal vote.
 - Anyone who is issued with a ballot paper must be allowed to vote.
- In addition to elections staff, the following are permitted to be present at the close of poll:
- candidates
 - election agents
 - polling agents
 - police officers and police community support officers on duty at the polling station
 - representatives of the Electoral Commission
 - accredited observers
- After the close of poll and the last person has voted the Presiding Officer must seal the slot of the ballot box(es). Any candidate, election agent or polling agent present may also affix their seal to it.
- The Poll Clerk, in the meantime, should take down all the signs and tidy the room. If instructed to do so, polling station staff may also

be required to dismantle the polling station furniture and return the room to its original state. Take care when moving heavy items (see Appendix 9 for guidance on health and safety).

Candidates, election agents and polling agents are also entitled to be present when the paperwork is being completed and when the various packets of documents are sealed as described below. They are also entitled to affix their own seals to these packets at this time.

Completing the paperwork

The Presiding Officer must complete all official forms. **Take care when filling in the paperwork. It is far more important to be accurate than fast.**

It is quite possible that some of the official forms have not been needed during the day; no tendered ballot papers may have been issued and no ballot papers may have been spoilt. If this is the case, still complete the forms, entering a 'nil' return where necessary.

Checklist of official forms to be completed by the Presiding Officer

- the ballot paper account(s)
- the list of voters with disabilities assisted by companions
- the list of votes marked by the Presiding Officer
- the statement of the number of voters whose votes were marked by the Presiding Officer
- the statement of the number of postal votes delivered to the polling station
- the list of tendered votes

Completion of the paperwork is easier if all the official forms are laid out with their corresponding envelopes. The front of each of the official envelopes lists the contents. Complete as many of the forms and envelopes as possible during the day, well before the close of poll. Remember to complete all of the paperwork even if it seems that there is nothing to report.

There may be occasions when, for example, no tendered ballot papers have been issued or electors have not spoilt any ballot papers.

In those cases, the Presiding Officer should still fill in the relevant sections of the ballot paper accounts.

Checklist of official packets and envelopes and their contents

- the ballot paper accounts: one for the local election ballot papers and one for the combined authority mayoral election ballot papers - keep these with the ballot box(es)
- the packet containing the postal votes handed in at the polling station – keep this with the ballot box(es)
- unused and spoilt ballot papers (both ordinary and tendered) – if they do not fit, wrap the envelope around them and secure with string or elastic bands
- the tendered ballot papers
- the marked copy of the register of electors (including any marked notices as described in Appendix 2) and list of proxies
- the completed corresponding number list(s)
- the certificates of employment
- the tendered votes list, the list of voters with disabilities assisted by companions, the list of votes marked by the Presiding Officer, the statement of the number of voters whose votes are marked by the Presiding Officer and the declarations made by the companions of voters with disabilities.

The ballot paper accounts

The ballot paper accounts are the most important of all the paperwork and should be filled in first and completed with care. In many instances, the first section of the ballot paper accounts will have been completed in advance by the Returning Officer. It is the Presiding Officer's duty to complete the remainder of the form.

The ballot paper accounts reconcile the number of ballot papers dealt with by the Presiding Officer. Remember to count the number of ballot papers issued according to the corresponding number list(s) and include this on the ballot paper accounts. The form relies on the serial numbering of the ballot papers and this is why it is so important to issue ballot papers in numerical order as pre-printed on the corresponding number list(s).

The ballot paper accounts and the packet containing the postal votes must be delivered with the ballot box(es) and other documentation to the verification and count centre as directed by the Returning Officer – do not lose them or place them by mistake in another envelope or with other election materials as this may cause problems and delays at the count.

The rest of the paperwork

Presiding Officers should then attend to the rest of the paperwork. Complete and sign the other forms on the checklist (see above). Do not forget to fill in the forms with 'nil' returns if they have not been needed during the day.

Packing materials at the polling station

In order, pack the materials into their official envelopes and packets. The corresponding number list(s) and the unused ballot papers must be placed separately in the appropriate envelopes. Postal votes (or parts of postal votes) handed in at the polling station should also be kept separate as these will be needed quickly at the verification and count centre.

A number of sacks, bags or crates will have been supplied to transport the paperwork and other election materials back to the verification and count centre. Make sure that the items go in the appropriate container.

Transporting election materials to the verification count centre

The ballot box(es), ballot paper accounts, postal votes envelope, sacks or bags containing the official envelopes, and other election stationery and materials must be delivered to the verification and count centre.

The Returning Officer will have given instructions regarding the transportation of ballot box(es) and polling station materials.

If the items are to be delivered by the Presiding Officer, the Returning Officer will have given instructions on the location of the verification and count centre and the entrance to be used. One of the Poll Clerks may be asked to assist the Presiding Officer if there is too much for one person to carry. **Go to the verification and count**

centre directly and without delay. Presiding Officers should contact the Returning Officer immediately if any problems occur that may cause a delay in getting to the verification and count centre.

Sometimes, other arrangements may be made for the delivery of ballot box(es) and election materials to the verification and count centre. It may be that the Returning Officer arranges for the materials to be collected from the polling station and taken.

Do not leave the ballot box(es) unattended at any time and ensure that ballot box(es) are only handed to members of the Returning Officer's staff.

Finally, before leaving the polling station, make sure that any waste material is disposed of appropriately and the premises are left tidy. Ensure that any keys are returned to the appropriate person.

Appendix 1

Equality issues

Disabled electors and elections

The following guidance is designed to help to ensure that there is equal access to voting for all.

Legal duties under the Equality Act require that all disabled people, including those with sensory impairments and mobility impairments, are not offered a lower standard of service than other voters. Reasonable adjustments must be made so that disabled people are not disadvantaged in any way.

The Returning Officer will make arrangements to ensure that disabled voters have, as far as possible, the same access to the electoral process as anyone else. However, practices adopted by Presiding Officers on polling day can also help to make a difference:

- If car parking spaces are provided for disabled people, make sure that they are available for that purpose throughout the poll.
- In any event, if possible, keep parking spaces close to the polling station entrance free for disabled people.
- Ensure that there is good signage for any alternative disabled access and make sure that this is not obstructed throughout the day.
- Use a purpose-built ramp if available, but make sure that it is suitable. Ensure that ramps remain in place and secure throughout the day.
- Propping double doors open can help to ensure good access for all; however, make sure that these are not fire doors.
- Are doormats level with the floor? If not, can they be removed if potentially dangerous?
- Have a seat available for any elector who may need to rest – ideally there should be a mix of chairs with and without armrests.

Assistance to electors unable to gain access to the polling station

Ideally your polling station will be located in a fully accessible building. Unfortunately, in practice, this may not be the case as in some areas there may not be accessible buildings available for use as polling stations.

If a physically disabled elector is unable to enter the polling station, the Presiding Officer, after informing any agents present, may take the ballot papers to the elector. After the ballot papers have been marked, the Presiding Officer must place the folded papers into the ballot box(es) immediately. It is essential that the secrecy of the vote is maintained in all circumstances. The ballot box(es) must not be left unattended or removed from the polling station at any time.

Disabled voters

Some disabled voters may request the assistance of the Presiding Officer to mark the ballot papers for them. If the voter knows how they wish to vote, they must instruct the Presiding Officer, in the privacy of the polling booth, to mark the ballot papers on their behalf accordingly. Ensure that no other voter can overhear the choices expressed by the disabled voter you are assisting. If possible, choose a part of the polling station where a conversation in normal tones cannot be overheard.

On occasion, the voter may be unsure of how to vote. In that case, the Presiding Officer should read out instructions printed at the top of the ballot papers and the details of the candidates in the order that they appear on the ballot paper for each election.

Once the elector has made a decision, the Presiding Officer must mark the ballot papers accordingly. If candidates, election agents or polling agents are present, they should be invited to listen to and to observe the Presiding Officer, so that they can confirm that the ballot papers are marked in accordance with the wishes of the elector.

If the Presiding Officer has to mark ballot papers for an elector, the name of the voter must be noted on the official form 'List of votes marked by the Presiding Officer'. At the close of poll, the Presiding Officer must also fill out the 'Statement of the number of voters whose votes are marked by the Presiding Officer'.

Alternatively, a disabled voter may be assisted by a companion, with the permission of the Presiding Officer, who must be satisfied that the voter's disabilities would prevent them from voting unaided.

The disabled voter's companion can assist up to two people at the same election. The companion must be either a close relative (father, mother, brother, sister, spouse, civil partner, son or daughter – if they are aged 18 years or over) or a qualified elector. The voter should ask the permission of the Presiding Officer to be assisted by their companion.

The companion, not the voter, is required by law to complete a simple declaration, 'Declaration by the companion of a voter with disabilities'. It is helpful for the Presiding Officer to fill out the declaration on the companion's behalf and to ask them to check the information and sign the document.

The Presiding Officer must ensure that they explain the process clearly to both the elector and their companion.

The Presiding Officer must record the voter's name and elector number, as well as the companion's name and address, on the form 'List of voters with disabilities assisted by companions'.

Blind or partially sighted people

A blind or partially sighted elector can vote without assistance using the tactile voting template provided. All polling station staff must

know how to use this template and be able to explain its use to blind or partially sighted voters. Make sure that the template is appropriate to the ballot paper being used, is securely attached to the ballot paper and that the voter is confident about using it. Polling station staff must be familiar with the template(s) to be used at their polling station and how they work. The Returning Officer will explain how the template(s) work, but, in general, the voter should:

- lift the selected window(s)
- mark the ballot paper
- close the window(s)
- separate the template from the ballot paper
- fold and place the ballot paper in the ballot box
- return the template to the Presiding Officer

This process needs to be followed for each ballot paper that has been issued.

Ensure that the large-print versions of each of the ballot papers are displayed in a well-lit area where electors can easily see them before being issued with their ballot papers.

Ensure the enlarged hand-held copies of each of the ballot papers, marked 'sample', are made available to voters. The enlarged copies can be used by the voter in the polling booth as an aid for marking their ballot papers.

Blind or partially sighted voters may request assistance from the Presiding Officer or qualified companions.

Do:

- give precise instructions to help such voters find their way
- guide the voter on their instruction (most blind or partially sighted people prefer to take the arm of the helper)
- if asked, read out clearly the instructions at the top of each of the ballot papers and the candidates in the order that they appear on each ballot paper.

Do not:

- assume that help is needed – always ask first
- distract guide dogs by fussing or petting them and do not take hold of the lead
- touch the voter without first asking if they wish to be guided

Deaf-blind people

Red bands on a white cane or a red and white harness on a guide dog indicate that the person has both impaired sight and impaired hearing.

Deaf people

Hearing loss can range from mild to profound. Some people with hearing loss will use spoken English and may rely on lip-reading to communicate. Others may have British Sign Language as their first language, although they may also use lip-reading. A person with hearing loss may wear hearing aids, although these do not restore their full hearing.

Where a polling station has an induction loop installed, it should be used wherever possible to support the accessibility of the electoral process to voters with hearing loss.

Do:

- get the deaf person's attention before speaking
- tap them gently on the shoulder or wave at them
- face the person being spoken to
- speak clearly, not too slowly, and use normal lip movements – use natural facial expressions and gestures
- remain patient and repeat if necessary
- use plain language
- if someone does not understand what you have said, try saying it in a different way
- maintain eye contact
- be prepared to write something down if the person continues to not understand what you are saying
- find a suitable place to talk, with good lighting, and away from noise and distractions

Do not:

- shout – it distorts your face and voice and it looks aggressive
- place anything in your mouth
- cover your mouth
- speak too fast
- speak too slowly or exaggerate lip patterns
- turn away or look down
- speak with bright light behind – this will shadow your face
- have anything in your hand if gesturing
- give up if the deaf person does not understand immediately

Mental capacity, disability and voting

It is possible that a person who applies for ballot papers might appear to the Presiding Officer to have some form of mental health problem or to have a learning disability.

A person who is registered as an elector or entered on the list of proxies cannot be refused ballot papers, or in other words be excluded from voting, on the grounds of mental incapacity.

In all cases, the Presiding Officer should try to ensure that a person is given appropriate assistance in order to be able to cast their vote. For example, the elector may need the voting process explained to them by the Presiding Officer, or the elector may request the assistance of a companion.

Appendix 2

Dealing with problems on the register of electors

Age – entitlement to vote

It is an offence for persons under 18 years of age to vote in these elections, whether alone or accompanied. If someone is obviously under 18, they should be warned that they will be guilty of an offence if they vote in the elections. The Presiding Officer must ask the prescribed questions and the person must answer them unaided (see Appendix 5a for the prescribed questions). If the person answers the questions satisfactorily, they must be issued with ballot papers. No other questioning may be made. A note should be made of the voter's name, address and any other particulars, including the time of the incident and details of any person accompanying the voter. The Returning Officer should subsequently be informed.

Mis-spelt names and voters who have changed their name

Sometimes an elector's name has been mis-spelt or the name has legally changed since they applied to register, e.g. by marriage.

Ask the elector the prescribed questions (see Appendix 5a). If the voter answers satisfactorily, they must be allowed to vote, and the Presiding Officer should make a note of the inaccuracy and pass it on to the Electoral Registration Officer.

If the elector is insistent that they wish the error to be amended before they vote, the Presiding Officer should contact the elections office for advice or alternatively direct the voter to the Electoral Registration Officer.

Other electors

At the end of some registers is a heading 'Other electors'. Electors appearing here, which include service electors and those who have registered by declaration of local connection, no longer

have a residential qualification but are still able to vote (subject to entitlement). It is unlikely that service electors will have been issued with a poll card. However, poll cards will have been posted to all anonymous electors who, unlike ordinary electors, will need to produce their poll card in order to vote in the polling station (see Appendix 4).

A person who is not on the register of electors

Usually, the register of electors will contain all those entitled to vote at that polling station. If a person's name does not appear in the polling station register this may be because the person is not registered. However, it is possible that an error has occurred.

Clerical errors on the register

If the Electoral Registration Officer discovers that a correctly completed application has been received and the person was only omitted from the register as a result of a clerical error, the Electoral Registration Officer will correct this error up until 9pm on polling day and make provision for the person to be able to vote up until the close of poll at 10pm. The error may be discovered by the Electoral Registration Officer either before or on polling day or by a voter or a proxy in the polling station.

Clerical errors identified by the Electoral Registration Officer before polling day

If an error is identified before polling day but after the register has been produced for the polling station, the Electoral Registration Officer will have provided a separate 'notice', including any additions or amendments, in addition to the normal register. This notice must be marked instead of the register, but all other procedures are the same, including sealing up such a notice with the register at the close of poll.

Clerical errors identified by the Presiding Officer on polling day

If someone who presents themselves at the polling station is not on the register (or the notice) and is insistent that they made an application to register, the Presiding Officer should refer this immediately to the Electoral Registration Officer.

Clerical errors identified by the Electoral Registration Officer on polling day

If it is determined that a correctly completed application was received and the person was only omitted from the register as a result of a clerical error, the error must be corrected and the Electoral Registration Officer will give notice to the Presiding Officer (either in writing or orally, e.g. by telephone).

Procedure to allow a person to vote following the correction of a clerical error on polling day

Instructions as to how the information will be communicated to the Presiding Officer will be given at the training session.

If the notice is communicated verbally, the Presiding Officer must make a written record of the elector's name and number and mark this record when issuing ballot papers in the usual manner. Presiding Officers may have been provided with a special form for this purpose.

If the notice is communicated in writing, either that notice must be marked in the same way as if it were part of the register, or the Presiding Officer must write and mark the elector's name and number on a special form provided for this purpose. Presiding Officers will have received specific instructions at their briefing session. Once the elector's name and number have been marked, ballot papers must be issued in the usual manner.

The marked notice or marked written record must be sealed up with the register at the close of poll.

Any other person who is not on the register of electors

Anyone else who is not on the register of electors (or the notice) for that polling station must not be allowed to vote. The person may be registered to vote in a different polling district. If the elector requires more help, refer them to the elections office.

Appendix 3

Procedure for postal and proxy voters

Postal voters

Some electors will have applied to vote by post. To show that they are postal voters, those who have chosen to vote by post will have the letter 'A' against their names in the register of electors to be used at the polling station. The names and the addresses where the postal ballot papers have been sent will be shown on the list of postal voters. Such electors are not allowed to vote in person at the polling station, even if they state that they have not received their postal ballot papers.

However, completed postal votes may be handed in, by the voter or someone on their behalf, at any polling station within the electoral area. The Returning Officer will have given you instructions on which postal votes may be returned to your polling station. The postal vote should be in a sealed envelope and must be placed by the Presiding Officer, unopened, in the packet provided.

The packet must be kept secure at all times. It must be delivered to any staff appointed to collect postal votes handed in at the polling station in accordance with the Returning Officer's instructions, or be delivered to the count centre at the close of poll.

Postal votes must not be placed in the ballot box(es).

Collection of postal votes from polling stations

The Returning Officer may arrange for collection of postal votes from polling stations during polling day. If postal votes are collected from the polling station, they should be placed into a packet, which should be sealed. Polling agents, candidates and election agents can also add their seals to the packet if they wish.

What happens if someone is listed as a postal voter (or postal proxy voter) but claims not to have applied for a postal vote?

There are occasions when an elector or an appointed proxy asks for ballot papers only to find that they are marked on the register of electors as being a postal voter.

The Presiding Officer should check the entry on the register of electors to confirm that the elector or proxy is marked as a postal voter. The Presiding Officer should explain the circumstances to the elector or proxy and if they insist that they have not applied for a postal vote then the following procedures should be followed.

If the elector or proxy is in possession of their postal vote, they should be advised to return this in the normal manner, remembering that completed postal ballot papers can be handed in at the polling station.

Electors or proxies marked as having been issued with a postal vote cannot be given ordinary ballot papers in the polling station. However, an elector or proxy who claims never to have applied for a postal vote but is listed as a postal voter, is entitled to receive tendered ballot papers at the polling station at any time.

Alternatively, up until 5pm on polling day, they may be issued with a replacement postal ballot pack by the Returning Officer. The Presiding Officer should refer the elector or proxy to the elections office for advice on this procedure.

If it is before 5pm but the elector or proxy cannot or does not want to make arrangements for a replacement postal vote to be issued, the Presiding Officer should follow the procedure for issuing tendered ballot papers instead (see Appendix 5b).

After 5pm, the elector or proxy cannot be issued with a replacement postal ballot pack, so the Presiding Officer can only issue tendered ballot papers.

Before issuing tendered ballot papers, the Presiding Officer must ask the appropriate prescribed questions (see Appendix 5a).

If the elector or proxy answers the prescribed questions satisfactorily, the Presiding Officer must issue tendered ballot papers – the elector or proxy must not be given ordinary ballot papers.

In all instances, the Presiding Officer should make a record of the elector's details as instructed by the Returning Officer. They should also advise the elector to contact the Electoral Registration Officer, particularly if they wish to cancel their postal voting arrangements for future elections and referendums.

[What happens if an elector \(or postal proxy\) has not received, has lost or has spoilt their postal ballot papers?](#)

Postal ballot papers cannot be replaced at the polling station. If an elector (or postal proxy) states that they have applied to vote by post but have not received or have lost or spoilt their postal ballot papers, they should be advised to apply to the Returning Officer for a replacement, as long as this application is made before 5pm on polling day. Replacements can be issued up until that time and the Presiding Officer should refer the elector or proxy to the elections office for advice on this procedure.

Even if electors have only lost or spoilt one of their ballot papers, they should be advised to apply for a replacement of their entire postal ballot pack. Further instructions will be provided by the Returning Officer at the briefing session.

If an elector (or postal proxy) arrives after 5pm on polling day and states that they have lost, spoilt or not received their postal ballot papers, they can be issued with tendered ballot papers if they answer the prescribed questions satisfactorily (see Appendix 5a).

Tendered ballot papers cannot be issued to such an elector (or postal proxy) before 5pm.

Proxy voters

Some electors will have appointed a proxy to vote on their behalf. Even so, electors may vote in person provided that they do so before the proxy and that the proxy has not applied to vote by post. Check the register of electors to see if the elector has already voted before commencing with the following procedure. Electors who have applied to vote by proxy may have the letter 'P' against their name on the register of electors.

If the proxy is also voting themselves, they should do so before voting as a proxy.

Firstly, ask for the elector's name and address and see if they are included on the list of proxies. Ask for the proxy's name and address and draw a line on the list of proxies to indicate that the proxy has voted.

The elector's entry in the register must then be marked in the usual manner and the elector's name and number read aloud.

The Presiding Officer or Poll Clerk responsible for issuing ballot papers must write the elector's elector number (not the proxy's) on the corresponding number list(s) beside the appropriate ballot paper numbers to record that the ballot papers have been issued.

Remember that ballot papers may only be issued to electors who are eligible to vote in the elections. If the elector's entry in the register of electors is prefixed with a letter that does not entitle them to vote in the elections, the proxy is unable to cast a vote on their behalf.

[Procedure for issuing ballot papers to proxies voting on behalf of electors with anonymous register entries](#)

To protect them from harm, some electors will be registered without reference to their name or address – they will have an anonymous register entry (see Appendix 4). Electors who have an anonymous entry may have appointed a proxy to vote on their behalf. In that case, ask for their poll card: proxies wishing to vote on behalf of an anonymous elector must produce their official proxy poll card and will not be able to vote as a proxy without one. Instead of asking for the elector's name and address and calling out the

elector's name, only their elector number should be asked for and called out.

Remember that ballot papers may only be issued to electors who are eligible to vote in the elections. If the elector's entry in the register of electors is prefixed with a letter that does not entitle them to vote in the elections, the proxy is unable to cast a vote on their behalf.

Eligibility for voting as a proxy

A person is not entitled to vote as a proxy on behalf of more than two electors in any ward at the same local election. A person is also not entitled to vote as a proxy on behalf of more than two electors at the same combined authority mayoral election.

The only circumstances in which a person can act as a proxy for more than two electors is if they are immediate members of their family (i.e. father, mother, brother, sister, spouse, civil partner, son, daughter, grandparent or grandchild). Where a person who has been appointed to act as proxy for more than one elector applies to exercise the electors' votes, the proxy should only be given the ballot papers for one elector at a time.

Proxies may also be challenged in the same way that an ordinary voter may be if they are suspected of personation. If this happens, ask the relevant prescribed questions (see Appendix 5a).

What if the elector turns up to vote instead of their proxy?

An elector who has appointed a proxy is entitled to receive their ballot papers if they apply for them in person, but only if the request is made before ballot papers have been issued on their behalf to the proxy. The list of proxies must not be marked if this happens, but the elector's entry on the register of electors must be marked. If the proxy then turns up later, they should not be allowed to vote as a proxy for the voter, but, if they insist that the elector has not yet voted and the prescribed questions are asked, then tendered ballot papers may be issued.

If the proxy has requested to vote by post, the elector cannot be issued ballot papers. An 'A' marker will appear against the elector's name

in the register of electors and the name of the proxy and the address to which the postal vote has been sent will appear on the list of postal proxies.

What happens if someone else appears to have voted as a proxy?

The Presiding Officer should follow the procedure for issuing tendered ballot papers for proxies if a proxy's entry on the list of proxies and the entry of the elector on the register of electors have already been marked (see Appendix 5b).

The Presiding Officer should only issue tendered ballot papers after asking the prescribed questions for proxies (see Appendix 5b).

Emergency proxies

Electors can appoint a proxy up to 5pm on polling day in instances of a medical emergency or where they have been unexpectedly called away because of their employment or service. If anyone does apply on polling day, the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer will make sure that all polling station staff are informed of the appropriate procedure to follow.

If the Electoral Registration Officer grants an emergency proxy application on polling day, the decision will be communicated to the relevant Presiding Officer either in writing or by telephone.

The Presiding Officer should then make a note of the elector's name, address and elector number and attach this information to the list of proxies. There may have been a blank form included at the end of the list of proxies for that purpose.

Once the Electoral Registration Officer's decision to grant an emergency proxy application has been notified, the Presiding Officer must issue ballot papers in the usual manner. The Electoral Registration Officer's written record (if available) or the Presiding Officer's note should be marked to show that the proxy has voted on the elector's behalf.

Appendix 4

Electors with an anonymous register entry

To protect them from harm, some electors will be registered without reference to their name or address. They will have what is called an anonymous entry in the register, which will consist of their elector number and the letter 'N'. Some of these electors may also have further letters that qualify their eligibility to vote at certain elections (see Chapter 5 for details).

If a register contains anonymous entries, these will be found at the end of the register under the 'other electors' section. It is important to remember that in a split polling station their entry may appear on the register for the other polling station.

The procedure for issuing ballot papers to an anonymous elector is different from ordinary electors.

Procedure for issuing ballot papers to electors with an anonymous entry

Unlike ordinary electors, anonymous electors **must** have a poll card and will not be able to vote without one.

- ask for their poll card – it will not contain their name or address but will have their elector number
- check the register – the entry for that elector number should be an 'N', rather than a name and address
- place a straight line against the elector's entry in the register
- do not ask for the name or address of the elector – call out only their elector number
- enter the elector number in the corresponding number list(s)
- issue the ballot papers and return their poll card to them

The prescribed questions may also be put to a voter with an anonymous register entry, but their name and address will be omitted (see Appendix 5a).

What if an elector with an anonymous entry appears at the polling station without a poll card?

If they have simply forgotten to bring their poll card with them, ask them to come back to the polling station at a later time with their poll card. If they claim that they never received one or that they have lost it, ask them to contact the Returning Officer immediately. If a replacement poll card is issued and the elector later returns to the polling station with it, ballot papers must then be issued in the manner described above.

Appendix 5a

The prescribed questions

The prescribed questions can be asked of any elector or proxy. However, the Presiding Officer must put the prescribed questions precisely and calmly in the following circumstances:

- An elector (who has not appointed a proxy) applies for ballot papers but the register of electors shows that they have already voted. In this circumstance, even if the questions are answered satisfactorily, the elector is only entitled to tendered ballot papers.
- A proxy voter's entry on the list of proxies has already been marked and the entry of the elector on the register of electors has also been marked. Upon satisfactorily answering the questions, the elector or proxy is only entitled to tendered ballot papers.
- A proxy voter returns to the polling station after their application to cast a vote as a proxy has been rejected because the register of electors indicates that the voter has voted in person (the list of proxies in this case would not be marked), and insists that the elector has not voted. If they answer the questions satisfactorily, they will be entitled to tendered ballot papers.
- An elector's (or a proxy's) name appears on the list of postal voters (or on the list of postal proxy voters) but they state that they did not apply to vote by post. If the elector (or proxy) answers the questions satisfactorily, they must be issued with tendered ballot papers.
- An elector (or proxy) whose name appears on the list of postal voters (or on the list of postal proxy voters), arrives at the polling station after 5pm on polling day and claims to have lost, spoilt or not received their postal ballot papers. If the questions are answered satisfactorily, the elector (or proxy) will be entitled to tendered ballot papers only.

- A candidate, election agent or polling agent requires the questions to be asked. If the prescribed questions are answered satisfactorily, ordinary ballot papers must be issued.

The Presiding Officer should also ask the relevant prescribed questions where:

- An elector states that their name is not as shown in the register of electors. If, in response to the prescribed questions, the elector can confirm that the register entry refers to them, ordinary ballot papers must be issued.
- Polling station staff suspect an elector or a proxy of personation. If, in response to the prescribed questions, the elector can confirm that the register entry refers to them, ordinary ballot papers must be issued.
- The elector is registered as eligible to vote but is clearly under age. If the prescribed questions are answered satisfactorily, ordinary ballot papers must be issued.

No enquiry may be made as to the right of any person to vote, other than the prescribed questions shown below.

The Presiding Officer, regardless of any doubt they may have, must issue ordinary or tendered ballot papers, as appropriate, to anyone who has answered the questions correctly. If a person refuses to answer the questions, then ordinary or tendered ballot papers, as appropriate, cannot be issued. If that person returns later, then the Presiding Officer must again ask them the prescribed questions.

When asking the questions for both the local election and the combined authority mayoral election, the Presiding Officer should be clear which question relates to which contest.

The prescribed questions to be asked of a person applying to vote as an elector

For the local election: **‘Are you the person registered in the register of local government electors for this election as follows (you must then read out loud the whole entry from the register)?’**

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **‘Are you the person registered in the register of local government electors for this election for a combined authority mayor as follows (you must then read out loud the whole entry from the register)?’**

If the answer is ‘no’, do not issue ballot papers. If the answer is ‘yes’, then ask:

For the local election: **‘Have you already voted, here or elsewhere at this election for this *(district), *(county), *(London borough), *(county borough) otherwise than as proxy for some other person?’** (*read out whichever is applicable, adding, in the case of an election for several electoral areas ‘in this or any other electoral area’)

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **‘Have you already voted here or elsewhere at this election for a combined authority mayor, otherwise than as a proxy for some other person?’**

If the answer is ‘yes’ to these questions, do not issue ballot papers. If the person has answered ‘yes’ to the first questions and ‘no’ to the second questions, ordinary or tendered ballot papers must be issued as appropriate.

The prescribed questions to be asked of a person applying to vote as a proxy (but not on behalf of an elector with an anonymous entry)

The prescribed questions for proxies have different wording:

For the local election: **‘Are you the person whose name appears as (read out the name that appears in the list of proxies) in the list of proxies for this election as entitled to vote as proxy on behalf of (the name of the elector on the register)?’**

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **‘Are you the person whose name appears as (read out the name that appears in the list of proxies) in the list of proxies for this election for a combined authority mayor as entitled to vote as proxy on behalf of (read out the name of the elector on the register)?’**

If the answer is ‘no’, do not issue ballot papers. If the answer is ‘yes’, then ask:

For the local election: **‘Have you already voted here or elsewhere at this election for this *(district), *(county), *(London borough), *(county borough) (*read out whichever is applicable, adding, in the case of an election for several electoral areas ‘in this or any other electoral area’), as proxy on behalf of (read out the name of the elector on the register)?’**

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **‘Have you already voted here or elsewhere for a combined authority mayor, as the person entitled to vote as proxy on behalf of (read out the name of the elector on the register)?’**

If the answer is ‘yes’ to these questions ballot papers must not be issued. If the answer is ‘no’, then ask:

‘Are you the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother / sister, child or grandchild of (read out the name of the elector on the register)?’

If the answer to this question is 'yes' (and the questions above have been answered satisfactorily), ordinary or tendered ballot papers must be issued as appropriate.

If, however, the answer is 'no', then ask:

For the local election: **'Have you already voted at this election for this *(district), *(county), *(London borough), *(county borough), on behalf of two persons of whom you are not the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild?'** (*read out whichever is applicable, adding, in the case of an election for several areas 'in this or any other electoral area')

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **'Have you already voted at this election for a combined authority mayor, here or elsewhere, on behalf of two persons of whom you are not the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother/ sister, child or grandchild?'**

If the answer to these questions are 'yes', do not issue ballot papers. If the answer is 'no' (and the questions above have been answered satisfactorily), ordinary or tendered ballot papers must be issued as appropriate.

The prescribed questions to be asked of a person applying to vote as a proxy for an elector with an anonymous entry

For the local election: **'Are you the person entitled to vote as proxy on behalf of the elector whose number on the register of electors is (read out the number from the register)?'**

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **'Are you the person entitled to vote as proxy on behalf of the elector whose number on the register of electors is (read out the number from the register)?'**

If the answer is 'no', do not issue ballot papers. If the answer is 'yes', then ask:

For the local election: **'Have you already voted here or elsewhere as proxy on behalf of the**

elector whose number on the register of electors is (read out the number of the elector on the register)?'

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **'Have you already voted here or elsewhere as proxy on behalf of the elector whose number on the register of electors is (read out the number of the elector on the register)?'**

If the answer is 'yes' to these questions, ballot papers must not be issued. If the answer is 'no' you must also ask:

'Are you the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother/ sister, child or grandchild of the elector whose number on the register of electors is (read out the number of the elector on the register)?'

If the answer to this question is 'yes' (and the above questions have been answered satisfactorily), ordinary or tendered ballot papers must be issued as appropriate.

If, however, the answer is 'no' then ask:

For the local election: **'Have you already voted at this election for this *(district), *(county), *(London borough), *(county borough), on behalf of two persons of whom you are not the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild?'** (*read out whichever is applicable, adding, in the case of an election for several areas 'in this or any other electoral area')

AND

For the combined authority mayoral election: **'Have you already voted in this election of a combined authority mayor, here or elsewhere, on behalf of two persons of whom you are not the spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother / sister, child or grandchild?'**

If the answer to these questions is 'yes', do not issue ballot papers. If the answer to these questions is 'no' (and all of the above questions have been answered satisfactorily), ordinary or tendered ballot papers must be issued as appropriate.

The prescribed questions to be asked of a person applying to vote in person when they are shown on the register as a postal voter

The following prescribed questions are for electors shown on the register as postal voters, but who:

- claim either to have not applied to vote by post or
- present themselves at the polling station after 5pm on polling day and claim to have lost or not received their postal ballot papers

‘Did you apply to vote by post?’ (read out twice – once in respect of each contest)

If the answer is ‘no’, tendered ballot papers must be issued.

If the answer to these questions is ‘yes’, then ask:

‘Why have you not voted by post?’ (read out twice – once in respect of each contest)

If the question is answered satisfactorily, the Presiding Officer should record the reason and issue tendered ballot papers.

If, however, the elector says that they have not voted by post because they have lost or not received (all or any part of) their postal ballot pack, tendered ballot papers can only be issued after 5pm.

The prescribed questions to be asked of a person applying to vote as a proxy when they are shown as having been issued with postal proxy ballot papers

The prescribed questions for proxies named on the proxy postal voters list but who claim either to have not applied to vote by post or who present themselves at the polling station after 5pm on polling day and claim to have lost or not received their postal ballot papers are as follows:

‘Did you apply to vote by post as proxy?’ (read out twice – once in respect of each contest)

If the answer is ‘no’, tendered ballot papers must be issued.

If the answer is ‘yes’, then ask:

‘Why have you not voted by post as proxy?’ (read out twice – once in respect of each contest)

If the question is answered satisfactorily, the Presiding Officer should record the reason and issue tendered ballot papers.

If, however, the proxy says that they have not voted by post because they have lost or not received (all or any part of) their postal ballot pack, tendered ballot papers can only be issued after 5pm.

Appendix 5b

Tendered ballot papers

Circumstances in which to issue tendered ballot papers

Please read these instructions carefully before issuing any tendered ballot papers.

The Presiding Officer must make sure that tendered ballot papers are only issued in the prescribed circumstances.

Tendered ballot papers should only be issued if:

- an elector appears on the register of electors (or notice) as having already voted
- a proxy's entry on the list of proxies has already been marked and/or the entry of the elector who appointed them as a proxy has been marked
- an elector (or proxy) who appears on the list of postal voters claims not to have applied for a postal vote. They are entitled to request a replacement postal ballot pack from the Returning Officer up until 5pm, but can be issued with tendered ballot papers at any time if they so wish
- it is after 5pm and an elector (or proxy) who appears on the list of postal voters claims to have lost, spoilt or not received their postal vote

If tendered ballot papers are issued in error, the Presiding Officer must make a note of the serial numbers of the tendered ballots that have been issued by mistake and inform the Returning Officer as soon as possible.

Before issuing tendered ballot papers, the Presiding Officer should explain the circumstances to the elector (or proxy) and must then ask the prescribed questions relevant to their situation (see Appendix 5a).

If the prescribed questions are answered satisfactorily, then the Presiding Officer must issue tendered ballot papers. The Presiding Officer should then explain the tendered vote procedure to the elector (or proxy).

Procedure for issue

Following satisfactory answer of the prescribed questions, the elector's elector number (including the polling district reference) must be written against the numbers of the tendered ballot papers being issued on the tendered votes list.

Ensure that the tendered ballot papers bear the official mark, fold them and then hand them to the voter or proxy **unfolded** so that they can see all the candidates on the ballot papers. They must then vote in secret, fold the tendered ballot papers and return them to the Presiding Officer.

The tendered ballot papers must not be placed in the ballot box(es). To make sure this does not happen, the Presiding Officer should stand by the ballot box(es) and cover the slot(s).

The Presiding Officer must take the folded tendered ballot papers and endorse them with the name of the voter together with their elector number (including the polling district reference) and place them in the official envelope provided. They must then enter the voter's elector number and name on the 'List of tendered votes'.

If a proxy votes on behalf of an elector, endorse the tendered ballot papers with the proxy's name, but with the elector's elector number. Enter the elector number, together with the name of the proxy, on the 'List of tendered votes'.

Reasons for completing a tendered ballot papers

On occasion, voters may ask why they are being offered tendered ballot papers. Even though tendered ballot papers are not included in the count, a tendered ballot paper provides evidence that a voter was concerned about the conduct of the election at the time of voting, rather than after the result was declared. As such, tendered ballot papers are the first step in pursuing a complaint about the electoral process. If a voter does not take this step it could mean that there is no formal record that they tried, but were unable, to cast their vote.

In addition, whenever tendered ballot papers are issued, the name of the voter and their elector number is entered on the list of tendered votes. This list then enables election officials to establish whether there are any patterns of possible personation across their area.

Appendix 6

Security at the polling station

The Presiding Officer is responsible for the security of the polling station. Voters expect polling stations to be run in a calm and orderly manner.

Keeping order

Presiding Officers must maintain order in the polling station. They have the power to order a person's removal from the polling station. Eligible voters must nevertheless be allowed to vote before they are removed. A Presiding Officer who orders the removal of a person should record the details of the incident and pass them on to the Returning Officer.

A person who has been removed from the polling station and has not voted may only be re-admitted on the authority of the Presiding Officer. If the person returns and conducts themselves in an orderly manner, they must be given the opportunity to vote.

There is no legal definition of the extent of the polling station but, at a minimum, it is the room in which voting takes place.

The Returning Officer will have briefed you should there be a history of public order issues affecting your particular polling station and the surrounding area. In those circumstances in particular, you should carry out regular checks of the immediate surroundings of your polling station. This is to ensure that voters have unimpeded access to their polling station. Although it is important to carry out these checks, if the polling station is busy, wait until a quieter time before carrying out your next check.

Serious disturbances or incidents and the adjournment of the poll

The police will have been informed of the location of polling stations. Police officers and police community support officers may be assigned polling station duties and may visit them during the day. If there is disorder at the polling station during the day, contact the Returning Officer and inform them of the situation. If necessary, call the police to deal with the problem.

In the event of a serious disturbance or incident e.g. bomb scare, fire, flood, etc., the Presiding Officer may be asked to vacate the premises or may decide to do so. If the emergency services ask for the building to be evacuated, it must be done. Inform the Returning Officer immediately and seek guidance on further actions that should be taken.

Never put the personal safety of voters or the rest of the polling station team at risk, or risk any injury to any person. If it is possible to do so without putting personal safety at risk, then all the sensitive election materials (the ballot box(es), ballot papers, register of electors, etc.) may be removed from the building and kept under the care of the polling station staff. You should keep any agents or observers present informed of your actions.

If forced to leave the premises, establish a temporary polling station at a safe distance from the serious disturbance or incident. Regardless of whether there has been an interruption in polling, the polling station must still close at 10pm. However, a note should be made of the time during which the polling station was unable to operate.

In the most extreme case, the Returning Officer will permit the Presiding Officer to adjourn the poll until the following day. If the poll is adjourned, then the Returning Officer will arrange for the election materials to be collected.

Presiding Officers must not adjourn the poll without the Returning Officer's consent.

Dealing with difficult situations

It is possible that during the course of polling day polling station staff will encounter difficult situations or be faced with confrontational behaviour.

The following steps may assist polling station staff with potentially difficult or challenging situations:

- **Listen to the voter** – it is good practice to look at the person while they speak, demonstrating interest.
- **Understand** – let the person know that every effort is being made to understand the problem from their perspective. This emphasises that an informed decision is being considered.
- **Explore** – ask the person if there is any further relevant information that they can give that might help the process along.
- **Summarise** – give the response and the reason for it. Do not become engaged in an argument.

Appendix 7

Procedure for dealing with personation

What happens if polling station staff suspect a person of personating an elector or proxy?

There may be rare occasions when a member of the polling station team, another elector, an election agent, polling agent or candidate suspects that the person requesting ballot papers is not who they claim to be. This is called personation and it is a serious offence.

Remember that a person, other than a proxy, is not guilty of personation if they apply for ballot papers by a name which is not their own, as long as it is the name under which they have been registered.

Presiding Officers must not interrogate a person if they suspect personation. Only the prescribed questions may be asked. The questions must be put to the person before they are issued with ballot papers, and not afterwards (see Appendix 5a).

The prescribed questions determine whether the voter is the person who appears on the register of electors (or the list of proxies if they are voting as a proxy for someone else), and if they have voted before in the elections (or on behalf of that elector if they are the proxy).

If the person answers the questions satisfactorily, ordinary ballot papers must be issued. The Presiding Officer should, however, report their suspicions to the Returning Officer as soon as possible.

If there is a confrontation, or a reasonable expectation of confrontation, the Presiding Officer should consider their own safety and the safety of all other people present as a priority. Consideration may be given to other ways of supporting a future investigation, such as recording registration numbers of vehicles and

preserving items touched by a person involved in an incident, if it is safe to do so, until the arrival of a police officer.

If a person has been arrested on the grounds that they are suspected of committing or being about to commit personation, that person must not be prevented from voting as long as they answer the prescribed questions satisfactorily.

What happens if an election agent, polling agent or candidate challenges a voter?

If an election agent, polling agent or candidate challenges a voter, (through the Presiding Officer), the voter must not be prevented from voting as long as they answer the prescribed questions correctly.

What happens if someone else (apart from a proxy) appears to have voted on behalf of the voter?

There are rare occasions when a person asks for ballot papers only to find that their name on the register of electors is marked as already having voted. If it appears that someone other than their appointed proxy has voted on behalf of an elector, the tendered ballot process outlined in Appendix 5b should be followed.

Appendix 8

Guidance on tellers, the media and exit polls

Tellers

Tellers volunteer for parties and candidates. They stand outside polling stations or polling places and record the elector number of voters who have voted. By identifying electors who have not voted and relaying this information to the party, candidate or their supporters, tellers play a vital and important role in elections. The party, candidate or their supporters may then contact the voters who have not yet been to vote during polling day and encourage them to vote.

There should be no more than one teller at a polling station at any time for each candidate. Where a polling place contains more than one polling station with separate entrances, it may be appropriate for there to be tellers at each entrance, but no more than one per candidate.

Tellers have no legal status and voters have the right to refuse to give them any information. The Returning Officer or their staff may provide further guidance on the activities of tellers.

Tellers must:

- always remain outside the polling station
- only enter the polling station to cast their own vote, to vote as a proxy or to accompany a disabled voter
- always comply with the instructions of the Returning Officer and Presiding Officer

Tellers must not:

- be able to see or hear what is happening inside the polling station
- impede, obstruct or intimidate voters on their way in or out of the polling station
- demand any information relating to a voter's elector number, name or address
- ask voters to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their elector number

- have discussions with voters that may give rise to allegations of undue influence (e.g. voting intentions, party affiliations or party campaigns)
- display any campaign material in support of or against any particular political party or candidate other than a rosette or badge

Tellers may:

- approach voters for information as they enter or leave the polling station
- display a coloured rosette or badge displaying the name of the candidate or political party; the rosette/badge should not bear a slogan and must not be oversized

The Presiding Officer should check on tellers' activities from time to time and make sure that they do not block the entrance or hinder voters from entering the polling station.

The media

Representatives of the media have no right to enter a polling station except as voters or accredited observers. They must not be allowed to film or interview voters in the polling station. If a film crew is filming or interviews are taking place outside the polling station, make sure that voters are not hindered or harassed on their way to vote, that the cameras are not positioned in a way that may compromise the secrecy of the ballot and that the entrance to the polling station is not obstructed.

Exit polls

Public opinion poll companies may be commissioned to organise an exit poll for the elections. Presiding Officers may have been informed by the Returning Officer if a polling company intends to conduct an exit poll outside the polling station. If that is the case, make sure that the interviewers neither enter nor block the access to the polling station.

Appendix 9

Health and safety

Health and safety of polling station staff and electors

Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks must be aware of any potential risks to safety throughout polling day. This requires an inspection of the premises as a whole and of the immediate area outside. If hazards are encountered, some remedy needs to be considered. Liaise with the key-holder first, if appropriate and where possible.

If an accident occurs to any person at the polling station, a record must be made of the incident and the following information recorded:

- full name and address of person involved
- time of accident
- location of accident
- brief details of accident
- evidence of injury or damage
- name and address of any witnesses
- conditions prevailing at the time
- action taken by polling station staff
- name of doctor or paramedic called
- details of any hospital admission

The Returning Officer should be informed immediately.

Lifting heavy objects

Listed below are some points that, if observed, may help to reduce the risk of injury to those who are involved with manual handling operations:

- Before attempting to lift or move any object, test the weight by tilting to determine how heavy the load is and the position of its centre of gravity.
- Before commencing the lifting or moving of objects, ensure that the area in which you are working is clear and free from obstructions.
- Ensure that you have a firm, comfortable grip before lifting.
- Ensure that you have a firm footing before lifting.
- When lifting, keep your head up, your back straight, your feet slightly apart and, wherever possible, lift from the knees using your leg muscles.
- Keep the object you are lifting as close to your body as possible.
- Do not pile objects so high that you or your load might overbalance.
- Do not pile objects so high that you cannot see where you are going.
- If you cannot lift or move the load on your own, ask for assistance.
- Help others to lift or move a load if you are asked.

Appendix 10

Frequently asked questions for polling station staff on polling day

Q. Why do you need to write my elector number beside my ballot paper numbers? Does this mean my vote is not secret?

A. The requirement that the elector number is recorded on this list against the number of the ballot papers issued to you is included in the election rules. This system is essentially an updated version of a system that dates from the Ballot Act 1872, which was introduced to avoid the possibility of counterfeit ballot papers being used and to assist with the detection of alleged fraud.

Clearly, if the ballot papers are numbered, it is far more difficult for an unscrupulous person to introduce copies of official ballot papers into the ballot box(es). If a fraudulent act has occurred, it would be possible to detect the offence by reference to the corresponding number list(s).

There is a safeguard to prevent the ballot paper numbers on the corresponding number list(s) being linked with the marked ballot papers. At the close of poll, the corresponding number list(s) are placed in a sealed envelope by the Presiding Officer at the polling station. The sealed envelope is then taken to the Returning Officer. After the count has taken place, the used ballot papers are also sealed. The only occasion when the sealed packets can be opened is on the order of a judge as a result of an election petition or in furtherance of an investigation into an alleged election offence. Even then, it is very rare for the documents to be examined except in cases where fraud or personation (i.e. someone voting illegally on someone else's behalf) are being investigated.

Because of the above safeguards, it is virtually impossible for any person to be in a position to marry up the voter to a particular ballot paper.

For that reason, voters can be confident that the ballot remains secret. Voters have no grounds to fear that the way in which they voted could be detected, except under the very special circumstances outlined above.

Q. I've forgotten to post my postal vote. Can I vote in person here at the polling station?

A. We can't give you ordinary ballot papers here at the polling station. However, you don't need to post your postal vote in order to vote: you can deliver your postal vote by hand to your polling station (or any other polling station within the relevant electoral area) or you can get someone else to do this for you. Polling stations close at 10pm. Alternatively, you can take your postal vote to the elections office at the local council.

Q. My postal vote hasn't arrived yet – what can I do?

A. **Before 5pm:** A replacement can be issued if you can get to the elections office before 5pm today. You will need to bring along some form of identification. Staff in the elections office will be able to provide more information on this procedure and can tell you what sort of identification is acceptable.

After 5pm: You are entitled to receive tendered ballot papers. If you are on the register for this polling station and you answer the prescribed questions satisfactorily, we will be able to issue you with them.

Q. My postal vote has arrived, but now I've lost my ballot paper(s). What can I do?

A. **Before 5pm:** A replacement can be issued if you can get to the elections office before 5pm on polling day. You will need to bring along any pieces of your postal ballot pack that you still have and some form of identification. Staff in the

elections office will be able to provide more information on this procedure and can tell you what sort of identification is acceptable.

After 5pm: You are entitled to receive tendered ballot papers. If you are on the register for this polling station and you answer the prescribed questions satisfactorily, we will be able to issue you with them.

Q. I've received my postal vote but now I've changed my mind and want to vote in person at the polling station. Can I cancel my postal vote?

A. No – once you have been issued with a postal vote, you have to use it if you want to vote at these elections; you cannot be issued with ballot papers at a polling station. However, you can deliver your completed postal vote, sealed and in the envelopes provided, by hand to your polling station or any polling station in the relevant electoral area on polling day. If you want to cancel your postal vote for future elections and referendums, please contact the Electoral Registration Officer.

Q. What do you mean I'm not registered – I thought that everyone could vote?

A. You need to be on the electoral register to vote. In order to be included on the register and to be able to vote at future elections and referendums, you will need to apply to the Electoral Registration Officer.

If you are sure you applied to register, please contact the electoral registration office.

Q. My husband has had an accident at work and has been rushed to hospital. He's desperate to vote – is there anything that can be done?

A. He may be able to appoint a proxy to vote on his behalf. The deadline for this is 5pm today. Staff in the electoral registration office will be able to give you more details on this procedure.

Q. Do I have to use a pencil to mark my ballot papers?

A. You can vote using a pen or pencil. Pencils are typically what is provided inside polling stations, but you can choose to bring your own

pen into the polling station to vote. There is no legal requirement for ballot papers to be marked with a pencil.

Pencils are used for practical reasons: with ink pens there is always a risk that they may dry out or spill; ink may cause some transfer of the mark the voter has made on the ballot paper when they fold it, potentially leading to the vote being rejected if, for example, it looks like they have voted for more candidates than they are entitled to.

Legislation has built specific safeguards into the process to prevent and detect tampering with ballot papers: there is a requirement for seals to be attached to ballot boxes and candidates and agents are entitled to be present at the close of poll and can attach their own seals if they wish; at the count candidates and agents can then check their seals before the ballot boxes are opened.

Q. Do I have to mark a second choice on the combined authority mayoral ballot paper?

A. Under the supplementary vote system voters can vote for a first and second choice candidate.

Voters vote for their first choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the first choice column and for their second choice by marking an 'X' in the second choice column.

As long as the voter puts an 'X' in the first choice column, their vote will be counted.

Voters can choose not to mark a second choice.

If a voter **ONLY** marks a second choice, their vote won't be counted.

Appendix 11

Polling station set-up checklist

This checklist should be used prior to the poll opening to ensure that the polling station is set up correctly.

Outside the polling station

Checked

Entrance, exit and approaches

Is the approach signage clear and are electors able to easily identify where the polling station is?

Are there parking spaces reserved for disabled people?

Check there are no hazards between the car parking spaces and the entrance to the polling station

Signage

Have you ensured good signage for any alternative disabled access, and can it be read by someone in a wheelchair?

Is the 'How to vote at these elections' notice (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) displayed outside the polling station and positioned so it can be read by all voters?

Level access

Is there a suitable ramp clear of obstructions?

Is the ramp stable? If not, contact the elections office immediately.

Are doormats flush with the floor? If not, remove them

Entrances

Have double doors been checked to ensure good access for all?

Is the door for any separate disabled access properly signed?

Inside the polling station

Is the polling station set up to make best use of space?

Walk through the route the voter will be expected to follow, and check that the layout will work for voters, taking into account how they will move through the voting process from entering to exiting the polling station.

Would the layout work if there was a build-up of electors waiting to cast their ballots and does it prevent voters from leaving the polling station without placing their ballot papers in the ballot box(es)?

Is best use being made of the lights and natural light available?

Is there a seat available if an elector needs to sit down?

Official notices

Is the 'How to vote at these elections' notice (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) displayed inside the polling station and positioned so it can be read by all voters?

Is the notice that provides information on how to mark the ballot papers (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) posted inside all polling booths and positioned so it can be read by all voters?

As you walk through the route that the voter will be expected to follow, are the posters and notices clearly visible, including for wheelchair users and those who may have a visual impairment?

Have you ensured that the notices/posters are not displayed among other posters where electors would find it difficult to see them?

Polling booths/ballot box(es)

Are the ballot box(es) placed immediately adjacent to the Presiding Officer?

Are the ballot box(es) correctly sealed?

Can a wheelchair user gain easy access to the ballot box(es)?

Can a wheelchair user gain easy access to the polling booth?

Are polling booths correctly erected and in such a position so as to make best use of the lights and natural light?

Have you ensured that polling booths are positioned so that people outside cannot see how voters are marking their ballot papers?

Can the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk observe them clearly?

Are pens/pencils available in each booth and any pencils sharpened?

Is the string attached to the pens/pencils long enough for the size of ballot papers and to accommodate both right-handed and left-handed voters?

Large-print display and hand-held sample ballot papers

Are the large-print ballot papers displayed so they are clearly visible to all voters?

Are the large-print hand-held samples available and visible to all voters?

Tactile template(s)

Are the tactile template(s) available and in full view?

Do all staff know how to use them?

Ballot papers

Are the ballot papers the correct ones for the polling station and are they numbered correctly and stacked in order?

Corresponding number list(s)

Are the ballot paper numbers on the corresponding number list(s) printed in numerical order?

Do the ballot paper numbers printed on the corresponding number list(s) match those on the ballot papers?

Register

Do you have the correct register for your polling station and does it include the expected number of electors?

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
Tel 0333 103 1928
Fax 020 7271 0505
info@electoralcommission.org.uk
www.electoralcommission.org.uk

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. We work to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence.

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