[redacted]

From: FOI
Sent: 07 June 2021 14:51
To: [redacted]
Subject: FOI 066-21 - Response

Dear [redacted],

Our Ref: FOI-066-21

Thank you for your email to the Electoral Commission dated 7 May 2021.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and has done so within the statutory timeframe of twenty working days.

Your request is shown below followed by our response.

Please can you disclose, preferably by PDF, the correspondence received from/sent to any Council/electoral registration office relating to counting for an election that took place on 6 May 2021, for example doing/not doing overnight counting in the light of the coronavirus or relating to the coronavirus measures; if this would exceed the costs limit, the correspondence received from/sent to Hartlepool Borough Council/electoral registration office relating to counting for the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election of 6 May 2021, for example doing overnight counting and/or the coronavirus measures that might be introduced or to have.

As a result of the way in which we record our engagement with Local Authorities we asked for clarification of your request and on 13 May 2021 you replied as follows:

Please disclose, preferably by PDF, the correspondence received from/sent to Hartlepool Borough Council/electoral registration office relating to counting for the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election of 6 May 2021, for example doing overnight counting and/or the coronavirus measures that might be introduced or to have.

Our response is as follows:

We hold some information that matches your request.

Below is an extract from an email sent to the electoral services team at Hartlepool council which is all we have that is relevant to your request:

Document Details	Date	From	To
Type: email Title/Subject: By-election guidance	19 March 2021	Support and Improvement Team, Electoral Commission	Electoral Services Manager, Hartlepool Borough Council
Extract:			
5. Are there any particular rules or guidance around the Count – they plan to do the verification in different bits. That is, Local, PCC, CAM			

and then parliamentary. They will then do the parliamentary count after this. The PCC/Cam will be done on Friday, locals on Saturday. Do the rules about starting the parliamentary count by 2am apply?

Yes - All (Acting) Returning Officers must take all reasonable steps to have completed verification and begun counting the votes as soon as practicable within four hours of the close of poll.

These reasonable steps need to be considered in line with the public health considerations and requirements.
If the (A)RO is are unable to start the counting of the UKP votes within 4 hours of the close of poll, then there is a precedent for how this is managed which includes the (A)RO publishing and delivering a statement to the Electoral Commission setting out the time that counting did begin, the steps taken to comply with the duty and the reasons why the counting did not commence by 2am.

There is more advice on the timing of the count in our guidance below and specifically the rules about starting the UKP count within 4 hours in para 6.40 onwards.

https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/UKPGE-LGE%20Part%20E%20-%20Verifying%20and%20counting%20the%20votes_0.pdf

As previously noted in correspondence with you, any conversations relating to plans or preparation for the count and related coronavirus measures, will have been based on the information contained in our supplementary guidance available on our website here:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/Verification%20and%20Count%20considerations%20for%202021%20polls%20-E%20version%20with%20March%20updates.docx

The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority and I trust that this information satisfies your request.

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at: https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/freedom-information/make-a-freedom-information-request.

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: https://ico.org.uk/.

Yours sincerely

Information Officer
FOI@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

electoralcommission.org.uk