

Planning for an effective verification and count

A toolkit for Returning Officers in England
and Wales

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1 Introduction

Background and purpose

1.1 This resource is intended to help Returning Officers (ROs) make decisions about some of the key aspects of preparing for and delivering the verification and the counting of the votes, such as timing, resourcing and how best to manage the processes involved. These decisions are a crucial part of an RO's preparations for the polls and should be taken as early as possible.

1.2 This document is based on the toolkit originally produced for the May 2015, polls, but has been updated to apply to all polls apart from GLA elections, which are counted electronically. The 2015 version on which this resource is based was developed in consultation with members of the Elections, Registration and Referendums Working Group (ERRWG) and the UK Electoral Advisory Board (EAB) and reflects what we, the ERRWG and the EAB believe will support ROs in planning for and delivering an accurate and timely verification and count.

Coronavirus may present particular challenges for Returning Officers (ROs), Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and their teams in preparing for and delivering the 2022 polls. To support you, the Commission has previously issued supplementary guidance documents that focus on specific key parts of the electoral process which should be read in line with this guidance.

[Planning considerations for 2021 polls – England](#)

[Planning considerations for the 2021 polls – Wales](#)

[Verification and count considerations for the 2021 polls – England](#)

[Verification and count considerations for the 2021 polls – Wales](#)

There are general public health principles that everyone should follow in all aspects of daily life to help mitigate the risk of the spread of coronavirus and these should underpin all aspects of your preparations for the elections.



This resource supplements the Commission's guidance for Returning Officers. Detailed guidance on the key stages of the verification and count process can be found in 'Part E – Verifying and counting the votes' of the Commission's guidance for Returning Officers.

1.3 The administration of elections presents significant challenges to many ROs and their staff, and this is particularly true of the verification and count:

- Many ROs, particularly in geographically large rural areas, face significant logistical hurdles in transporting all the ballot boxes to the verification and count venue, which will impact on the time within which the verification and count can be completed and results declared.
- There will be considerable scrutiny of election counts at the polls, with the potential for closely fought contests in some electoral areas.
- There could be media focus on the count and declaration of results and it will be important to manage expectations, not only for the media but of all with an interest in the results.
- For some polls, the requirement to transmit local results to the CARO for the purposes of collating and calculating the result.

1.4 We recognise the importance of local knowledge and experience and that there is no 'one size fits all' approach which can be applied to running a verification and count. Every electoral area has its own set of local circumstances that will influence the decisions ROs need to make. Whatever the arrangements for the verification and count, ROs should ensure they deliver the key principles for an effective verification and count, as set out in chapter 1 of the relevant [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

1.5 This resource is intended to support ROs and their staff in meeting these key principles whilst recognising varying local circumstances.

1.6 ROs should always have regard to the following when taking any **decision** affecting the verification and count:

- Are all the processes transparent? For example:
 - Is everything carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend?
 - Is sufficient information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed?
 - Is there consistent and open communication of information?
- Is there a clear and unambiguous audit trail?
- Will the verification and count process produce accurate results which are accepted?
- Will the verification and count be timely?
- Will the secrecy of the vote be maintained at all times?
- Will the security of the ballot papers (and other stationery) be maintained at all times including at times where the ballot papers are being transported or stored between processes?

- Are you following public health principles and putting measures in place to ensure the safety of those present at the venue?

1.7 In all cases, ROs should keep a record of their decisions. ROs should keep their verification and count plans under regular review as circumstances may change.

1.8 It is widely accepted that breaking down the verification and count into areas smaller than the relevant electoral area, is particularly effective in achieving an accurate, timely result with clear audit trails. The results from those 'areas' are then aggregated to achieve an overall result for the relevant electoral area. Any counting issues that may arise will be limited to a more manageable area and any re-counts that may happen as a result, may be limited.

1.9 Consequently, ROs should consider utilising this approach when planning their verification and count.

1.10 ROs will also need to manage the expectations of stakeholders. ROs should consult and engage stakeholders throughout their planning process and be prepared to explain the reasons for the decisions they are taking. For key decisions, written reasons for the decision taken should be provided to stakeholders. Communication with stakeholders during the planning process and during the verification and count itself can be an effective tool in ensuring that stakeholders have confidence in the process. .

1.11 We also recognise that at some polls the discretion of some ROs to make decisions may be limited as they may be subject to directions or guidance from another RO.

How to use this toolkit

1.12 This toolkit covers the verification and counting of votes. It does not cover the collation of local results at elections with a regional structure. It includes guidance on the following six areas:

- assumptions and testing to assist with planning
- the timing of the count
- preparing for the verification and count
- communicating with stakeholders during the verification and count
- receipt of polling station materials and sealed boxes of postal papers
- the verification and count process

1.13 Each of these areas covers:

- the key decisions ROs will need to make
- recommended practice to assist ROs in understanding and discharging their duties

1.14 Throughout this document we use 'must' to refer to a specific legal requirement and 'should' for recommended practice. We use the term 'you' or 'RO' to mean the Returning Officer with responsibility for the relevant element of the verification and/or count at the polls. At some contests, one RO will be responsible for the verification, count and declaration of the result, while at other contests, one RO might be responsible for the verification while a different RO is responsible for counting the ballot papers.



For more detailed guidance on roles and responsibilities at the polls see the Commission's guidance in [Part A – Roles and responsibilities](#) for the relevant election.

Combination

Throughout this resource, combination boxes are included which highlight specific considerations for those administering combined polls.



The **key decisions** ROs are required to take in relation to the verification and count are highlighted in boxes with an exclamation mark.

Links are provided to the relevant parts of each section which provide more information relating to those decisions. The main body of the section sets the decisions in context and provides further guidance, as well as sign-posts to where further information may be found.

You will need to ensure you have processes appropriate to the risk in place to ensure a level of security of personal data at the verification and count. You will also need to ensure personal data is destroyed at the appropriate time, in accordance with your document retention policy.

Where there is a requirement for data to be transferred, you will need to ensure there is an agreement in place between you and the person receiving data for secure data transfer and destruction of data. Our [data protection resource](#) contains more detailed advice on storing personal data securely and maintaining your document retention policy, including what it should contain.

Assumptions and testing to assist with planning

1.15 Establishing realistic and robust assumptions can assist you in planning for the verification and count. Sound assumptions can provide useful evidence in explaining your decisions and these should therefore be documented. Sharing the assumptions with stakeholders at an early stage will also allow the assumptions to be tested by others for robustness before the detailed planning has been completed.

1.16 All assumptions should be kept under regular review to allow you to respond appropriately and in good time should any circumstances or factors informing those assumptions change.

Timings for delivery of ballot boxes to the verification venue

1.17 Assumptions on the timings for the delivery of ballot boxes are useful for a number of purposes:

- staff receiving ballot boxes from polling stations will be able to alert ROs if any box(es) are overdue as this may indicate a problem either for an individual Presiding Officer or a wider problem affecting a number of Presiding Officers
- you will be able to make an informed estimate of when the last ballot boxes for the poll are likely to arrive, which will help to indicate when the verification will be completed

1.18 It is possible to estimate when each ballot box is expected to arrive at the verification venue, while recognising the potential for delays as a result of, for example, queues at the polling station at the close of poll, adverse weather etc. Analysis of previous polls will provide valuable information. There are also many applications on the internet that will calculate the time it takes to travel between a polling station and the verification venue.

1.19 You can also establish the average time it takes for a Presiding Officer to complete the relevant forms and package up materials following the close of poll by referring to experience at previous polls or by conducting a small exercise to measure the time it would take someone trained at Presiding Officer level to complete the required paperwork and package all materials.

The number of parties and/or candidates

1.20 The number of parties and/or candidates can have a significant impact on the verification and count. For example, a large number of parties and/or candidates standing for election could mean that:

- ballot papers will be large and staff may be slower handling them
- more space will be required to accommodate the large ballot papers
- the process for separating the votes into bundles for particular parties and/or candidates may be slower and take up more space
- more space for candidates and agents may be required at the verification and count venue

1.21 In order to establish the likely number of parties and/or candidates you should:

- make early contact with the political parties
- monitor expressions of interest
- monitor requests for nomination packs

1.22 This information can then be taken into account when taking decisions on venue, count layout, equipment and staffing resources.

Turnout

1.23 ROs need to decide what resources are appropriate at the verification and count. The expected turnout is a crucial factor in determining what these resources should be. ROs should decide what the expected turnout is likely to be - taking into account the potential for late engagement and interest in the elections by which point scope for adjusting plans will be limited. It is always safest to err on the side of caution when it comes to turnout as national and local developments can result in rapid changes to the actual turnout. As a minimum, you should assume that the turnout will be not less than the turnout at the most recent scheduled elections.

1.24 You will need to distinguish between turnout of postal voters and polling station voters to ensure that, in addition to the resources aimed at counting ballot papers, the resources aimed at opening and verifying postal votes are adequate. ROs should keep assumptions on turnout under review and be prepared to amend plans if the situation appears to change.

Calculating the likely number of ballot papers which will need to be processed

1.25 ROs will need to decide what resources are appropriate, and understanding the numbers of ballot papers that may need to be dealt with is a crucial factor in determining what these resources should be.

1.26 You will be able to develop an estimate of the number of ballot papers you may have to process at the verification and count by multiplying the estimated electorate by the expected turnout as set out below:

Ballot papers to be verified and counted

Eligible electorate	X	expected turnout	=	no. of ballot papers
68,175		69.1%		47,108

Unused ballot papers to be verified

Eligible electorate – number of papers to be verified and counted = unused

68,175	47,108	21,067
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Tendered ballot papers

You should also take into account that you will need to verify the tendered ballot papers. While this number will be relatively small, you should ensure this is built into your planning.

1.27 While the above calculation will give you a robust estimate of the number of papers you will need to manage at the verification and count, you should build in some contingency to ensure you are prepared to deal with a greater than expected turnout and/or electorate.

1.28 You will be able to estimate what the eligible electorate is likely to be by using the figure after publication of the revised register as a baseline, but accounting for likely increases in registration ahead of the polls. An analysis of the increases in the electorate ahead of the last scheduled polls can provide you with an idea of the percentage increase in electorate you can expect at the polls. You should also factor in any increases that may result from registration activity that EROs will be carrying out ahead of the polls. By monitoring the monthly updates to the register, accounting for any increases in registration rates as a result of public engagement activities and taking account of any late additions to the register, you should be able to keep that estimate under review and ensure it continues to be robust.

1.29 ROs who are not also the ERO will need to liaise with the relevant ERO to obtain the registration data. Similarly, ROs in cross-boundary electoral areas will need to liaise with the EROs across the electoral area to obtain the relevant data.

1.30 ROs will also be able to estimate, at an early stage, what the number of postal voters in their area is likely to be. Again the publication of the revised register will provide a baseline for the number of postal voters, which should include an analysis of the percentage increase ahead of previous similar polls. ROs should also factor in any registration activity being carried out by EROs ahead of the poll. All of these things combined will provide an indication of potential increases ahead of the poll. Regular monitoring of the absent voting list will allow ROs to keep their estimate under review and test its robustness. ROs in cross-boundary electoral areas will

need to liaise with the ROs across the electoral area to ensure their estimates for the whole of the electoral area are robust.

1.31 Using the assumption on postal voter turnout for the electoral area, ROs can then calculate the total number of postal ballot papers they might have to process. They can then keep this under review by monitoring the progress of postal vote returns in the period leading up to polling day. An analysis of the pattern of postal vote returns at previous elections will enable informed decisions as to how many collections from polling stations may be required during polling day and how many staff may be needed to deal with postal votes received on polling day. You will need to be flexible and be able to react to national and local events which could impact on your assumptions regarding turnout or alter the traditional pattern of when completed postal votes are returned.

1.32 ROs will need to keep their estimates under review to ensure that they remain robust, taking account of factors such as:

- The impact of registration activity and public engagement work in the build-up to the polls and how this will impact on the size of the electorate and the number of absent voters.
- Changes to the electorate and absent vote numbers each month.
- Any last-minute increase in applications close to the relevant registration and absent vote deadlines.
- The evolving situation in relation to coronavirus and public health advice

1.33 You should review assumptions on the numbers of ballot papers to be dealt with after the registration deadline (i.e. after midnight on the 12th working day before the poll) and the deadline for postal vote applications (i.e. after 5pm on 11th working day before the poll for elections in England and Wales). ROs, who are not also the ERO, will need to liaise with the relevant ERO to obtain this data. Similarly, ROs in cross-boundary electoral areas will need to liaise with the EROs across the electoral area to obtain the relevant data.

1.34 The number of doubtful ballot papers that may require adjudication because the voter has not marked the ballot paper in accordance with the instructions will also affect the resources that might be required. By analysing the results of previous comparable elections ROs should be able to estimate how many doubtful ballot papers they may need to process at the count.

Establishing resourcing requirements and testing processes

1.35 In order to be satisfied that the verification and count will be timely, ROs will need to decide what staffing resources are required to deal with the number of ballot papers expected, bearing in mind the count methodology that has been chosen.

1.36 There are several things ROs can do at an early stage to assist in decisions about staffing resources and to test verification and count methodology.

1.37 ROs should look at the number of staff and the processes used at previous elections and the number of ballot papers that were processed. An evaluation of the processes and staffing ratios and when the various stages of the verification and count were completed can then be used to inform decisions for these elections.

2 Timing of the count



ROs will need to make decisions about how to manage the verification and count in a way that ensures they have taken reasonable steps to start the count as soon as practicable following the close of poll or in accordance with any direction or guidance issued by another RO, where applicable.

Verification / count methodology and management arrangements

- What methodology will you use and how will you manage the verification and count? For example, will you break up the verification and count into smaller, more manageable parts?
- If you have standalone elections, will you start counting votes before the verification is completed?
- If you have combined elections, will you hold your counts at different times and days? Will you decide the sequencing of events by liaising with other relevant ROs to ensure that your plans fit in with overarching plans, and will you take into account the legislative requirements for when candidates take up office?
- How will you manage different processes, for example adjudication of doubtful ballot papers, sharing results with candidates and agents?
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Staffing

- How many staff will you need to complete the verification and start the count as soon as practicable after the close of poll or to comply with any direction or guidance from another RO, where applicable?
- How many staff and other attendees can you safely accommodate at the count venue, and how will this impact on how quickly you can verify ballot papers and move onto the count?

Choice of venue

- Is the venue conducive to you being able to complete the verification and start the count as soon as practicable after the close of poll or in accordance with any direction or guidance from another RO, where applicable? For example, will it accommodate the number of staff that you will need, and will it work with your count layout and processes? Is the venue accessible from all parts of the electoral area?

Transportation of ballot boxes

- Could the use of collection points to deliver ballot boxes and other materials to the verification venue speed up the overall receipt of materials from polling

stations? If using collection points, how will you check that materials have been delivered from all polling stations?

- How will you ensure an efficient process at drop off? Will you use a one-way system into and out of the drop-off area for example?
- What will your communication protocol be for drivers to alert you to any delays?
- What contingency measures will you put in place, e.g. how will you ensure the impact of adverse weather, vehicle breakdown or road closures is minimised?

Queues at the close of poll

- What mechanisms will you put in place to minimise the potential for queues in polling stations at the close of poll? Will you consider having additional staff roles at polling stations, for example to manage queues? What will your communication protocol be for polling station staff to alert you to queues and any other delays?

Postal votes

- How will you manage the volume of postal votes that have been received on polling day to limit the number of postal votes you still need to process at the verification and count? For example, how often should postal votes be collected from polling stations and when?
- Will the verification of identifiers on returned postal votes take place at the verification venue or elsewhere?
- What will be the appropriate staffing levels for the postal vote opening processes?
- If the verification of identifiers on returned postal votes is to take place at the verification venue, what equipment do you need?
- In cross-boundary electoral areas or where you are not the ERO, how will you decide on the most efficient way of managing the process of verifying identifiers on returned postal votes?

How will you communicate with candidates, agents and others?

- How will you consult with candidates, agents and others regarding the timing of the count? If you have the discretion to take a decision on the timing of the count how will you communicate your decision?
- Will you provide clear and specific information about anticipated timings and processes involved in different parts of the count?
- Will you outline your approach to your processes in advance, and ensure that all candidates, agents and political parties receive the same information?

Decisions specific to combination

- Subject to the relevant election rules, will you use a single ballot box or a separate ballot box for each poll / contest?
- Where applicable, how will you ensure the security of ballot papers for one contest while the ballot papers for another contest are being counted?

2.1 The election rules place a duty on all ROs to make arrangements for counting the votes 'as soon as practicable after the close of poll'. Or if you are responsible for a UK Parliamentary election you must have taken reasonable steps to begin counting the votes as soon as practicable within four hours of the close of poll. You will therefore need to make a decision as to the timing of all counts you are responsible for.

2.2 You will need to consider factors such as the number of staff and other attendees that you can safely accommodate at the count venue, and how this will impact on the duration of the verification and count.

2.3 In some cases the scope of any decision may be limited in that you may be subject to a direction or guidance issued by another RO as to the time the verification and/or count must start or be completed by.

2.4 You should keep a record of all steps taken in order to be able to provide an audit trail demonstrating your decision making process. You should be able to explain your decisions, and you should be prepared to do so in response to enquiries.

Consultation with stakeholders as to timing and communication of decision

2.5 Despite these challenges, there will be an expectation among voters, candidates, parties and the media that the results will be declared as soon as possible after the close of polls at 10pm on polling day. ROs should have a dialogue with politicians, political party representatives, broadcasters and news organisations about the timing of the verification and count.

2.6 You should make the decisions feeding in to the timing of all counts you are responsible for as early as possible following extensive consultation, and communicate these.

2.7 You should communicate with candidates and agents, political party representatives and the media about the timing of the verification and count as early as possible to gain their support for your plans and to manage their expectations

2.8 Using the assumptions and testing outlined in this toolkit you should be able to estimate the timings for the completion of all stages of the verification and count. You should share these timings with stakeholders together with the assumptions that underpin them. However, stakeholders should also be warned that these timings are indicative only and may change on the night - for example if turnout was significantly higher or lower than expected.

2.9 Some stakeholders may hold expectations as to how quickly the processes can be completed which cannot be met in practice and this can lead to tension and

frustration at the verification and count. To manage expectations, you should explain in some detail the processes involved and how long each stage is likely to take.

2.10 ROs should be able to explain the resources committed to the verification and count as set out in **section 1 above**.

Combination

Stakeholders should be made aware that the verification for all polls needs to be completed before the count for any of the polls can commence.¹ If ROs are responsible for more than one count, they should also explain to stakeholders the order in which the counts for the various elections will take place and the arrangements that are in place should there be a break in proceedings.

Factors influencing the timing of the count

2.11 It is for each RO to decide what steps to take so as to comply with their duty to commence the counting of votes as soon as practicable after the close of poll, taking into account the particular circumstances of their area. In some instances, ROs may also be subject to guidance and directions issued by another RO in relation to the timing of the verification and/or count.

2.12 There are a number of factors that will have an impact on timing and the sub-headings below contain information on key factors. However, this list is not exhaustive and there may be additional factors that ROs will also need to take into account depending on local circumstances.

Verification and count methodology and management arrangements

2.13 The way in which the verification and count is organised and managed will have an impact on timing. There is a balance between speed and accuracy – you should have specific regard to whether your verification and count processes can deliver a timely and accurate result.

2.14 It is widely accepted that the use of ‘mini’ verification and counts is particularly effective in achieving an accurate, timely result with clear audit trails. This approach means breaking down the verification and count into ‘areas’ smaller than the whole electoral area. The results from those ‘areas’ are then aggregated to achieve an

¹ In the case of a UK Parliamentary election only, ROs do not have to wait until they have completed the verification for all polls for which you are the RO taking on the combined functions, before they can start counting the votes for the UK Parliamentary election.

overall result. For practical considerations relating to the verification and count processes, see **section 6 below**.

Staffing resources

2.15 The level of staffing resources available will have a direct impact on the timing of the verification and count. For suggestions on how to establish the level of resources needed see **section 1 above**. The different types of staff ROs will need to conduct the verification and count are covered in **section 3 below**.

Choice of venue

2.16 The size of the venue will affect how many staff and other attendees you can accommodate. In choosing a venue, ROs should have specific regard to whether the venue will be large enough to accommodate the number of staff needed and those entitled to attend. For guidance on who can attend, see the relevant [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#) of the Commission’s guidance for Returning Officers.

2.17 For general guidance on the selection of venues and the layout of the verification and count see **section 3** of this resource.

2.18 The verification and count may take place at different venues and in these circumstances you will need to take steps to package up the ballot papers in accordance with the relevant election rules and securely transport them to the count venue. You should produce a record of all the packets of verified ballot papers that you are transporting to the count venue and the content of each of these. You should deliver this record, the ballot paper accounts, and a copy of the final statement as to the result of the verification to the count venue along with the packets of verified ballot papers.

2.19 You will also need to consider the security of the ballot papers if there is a break between the verification and count.

2.20 For further information on the security of ballot papers see **section 5 below**.

Geography and factors affecting the transportation of ballot boxes

2.21 ROs will need to ensure that Presiding Officers can get ballot boxes securely and efficiently to the verification venue so that the verification and counting processes can be commenced as quickly as possible. ROs will need to consider the geography and transport links of the electoral area and the particular characteristics of the chosen venue (for example, car parking, access roads, etc.).

2.22 For suggestions on how you can gather evidence about transportation timings to inform your decisions see **section 1** of this resource.

2.23 One option may be to receive polling station materials from Presiding Officers at one or more locations (‘collection points’) and then transport the materials in bulk

to the verification venue. ROs will need to decide if the use of collection points may speed up overall receipt of the polling station materials at the verification venue.

2.24 If this approach is adopted, ROs will need to put in place robust arrangements to ensure the correct and orderly receipt of ballot boxes and materials from polling stations at the collection points and their subsequent secure transportation to the verification venue. ROs would need to put in place similar arrangements to those detailed in **section 5** of this resource to ensure that every ballot box, the postal votes handed in at the polling station and all the other materials / paperwork have been received at the collection point. If possible, staff receiving the ballot boxes should also undertake a cursory check of the ballot paper accounts, including the basic arithmetic, before the Presiding Officers are allowed to depart. The ballot boxes and other materials from polling stations would then need to be securely transported to the verification venue. See **section 5 below** for further guidance on maintaining the security of ballot boxes and other materials.

2.25 If ROs decide to use collection points a further check that everything delivered to the collection points by Presiding Officers has also been received at the verification and count venue would be advisable. ROs will need to include the time it would take to complete these checks when calculating the potential efficiencies of using collection points and weigh up these factors in reaching any decision.

2.26 ROs should also be aware of any factors which may affect the transportation of ballot boxes to the verification venue, for example severe weather or road closures, and will need to decide what contingency measures are appropriate. ROs will need to monitor the situation on polling day and be able to take operational decisions to deal with situations as they may arise, such as vehicle breakdown.

Queues at close of poll

2.27 The provision to allow those in queues at the close of poll to cast a vote could potentially cause delays if polling stations are operating beyond 10pm. You need to decide what mechanisms you are going to put in place to minimise any delays should this situation occur. You should also have in place robust communication protocols so that you can be immediately alerted in the event of queues arising. This will enable you to make an early assessment of the likely delay and adjust the verification as necessary, for example by re-allocating resources.

Number of ballot boxes

2.28 ROs will need to establish how many ballot papers a ballot box can hold depending on the size of the ballot paper or ballot papers. This information will be crucial in determining how many ballot boxes should be issued to each polling station and how many boxes will be received at the verification and count.

Combined polls

If permitted by the relevant election rules, ROs need to decide whether to use a single ballot box at the polling station or separate ballot boxes for each of the polls. The use of a single box means that the various ballot papers for the different elections will need to be separated at the verification. In the case of separate boxes the ballot papers will arrive at the verification already separated, save for any papers mistakenly posted in the 'wrong' box at polling stations. There is nothing to suggest that either approach results in a significantly quicker verification, but ROs may wish to undertake a practical exercise to test this locally in order to provide an evidence base for any decision.

There are, however, some other advantages to using a single box:

- it may be more straightforward for the voter in the polling station
- it requires less management by staff in the polling station
- it can mean fewer ballot boxes to be transported to the verification venue

Volume and management of returned postal votes

2.29 One of the most common reasons cited for delays at the verification and count is the time it takes to verify the postal votes handed in at polling stations. You will need to consider how you will ensure that the verification and count processes are not delayed awaiting the arrival and processing of the last postal votes.

2.30 In particular, you will need to decide on the arrangements for collecting postal votes from polling stations throughout polling day to limit any delays. You will need to decide how often postal votes should be collected and when these collections should take place in order to minimise the number of postal votes that need to be dealt with after the close of poll.

2.31 You need to decide on the arrangements to enable the efficient verification of returned postal voting statements after the close of poll.

2.32 In particular:

- Will postal vote identifier checks take place at the verification venue or elsewhere? If the process takes place at the verification venue this is likely to be more convenient for candidates and agents to observe and it will be more straightforward from a transportation point of view, but there are risks involved in moving an established operation and equipment to a different venue.
- Does equipment need to be moved / additional equipment put in place? If so, ROs should ensure that it is tested in advance

- Are staffing levels appropriate to ensure any delay in verifying these postal votes is minimised?

2.33 ROs will need to decide how to manage the verification of identifiers on returned postal votes where a RO is not also the ERO or where as a result of the relevant electoral area crossing boundaries, more than one ERO will hold the personal identifiers record containing the specimen signatures and dates of birth for some of the electorate. One important consideration will be how to ensure that the checking of personal identifiers on returned postal voting statements received on polling day across the electoral area does not lead to a delay at the verification and count.

3 Preparing for the verification and count

Staffing and training



ROs will need to make decisions about how many staff they need to appoint to conduct the verification and count and how to train them.

What are your deputy arrangements?

Numbers of staff required - how many of the following will you need to conduct a timely and accurate verification and count?

- Senior staff to assist with the overall operation and co-ordination of processes and the calculation of the result.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the secure transportation of the sealed boxes of postal ballot papers to the verification venue.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the receipt of polling station materials and postal votes.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the final opening of postal votes.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the verification of used and unused ballot papers, spoiled ballot papers and the tendered votes list.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the sorting and counting of votes.
- Experienced media liaison staff.
- Porters, security staff and door attendants to deal with the security of the site.
- Person(s) with knowledge of the site to deal with the management of the facilities within and around the site.
- Responsible officer(s) to oversee the security of ballot boxes and relevant stationery where there is a break in proceedings or where ballot papers need to be packaged up and delivered to another venue at the end of verification.
- Any other members of staff the RO considers necessary.

What will you do to ensure that everyone knows what their role is and knows how to carry it out?

- What training will you provide to verification and count staff and how will you deliver it?
- Will you conduct a mock verification and/or count exercise?
- How will you carry out any final briefings at the verification and count venue ahead of the start of the processes?

3.1 In order to ensure that voters can have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended, ROs need to put in place appropriate resources to ensure that the verification and count is timely and that the processes to be followed are designed and managed in such a way as to secure an accurate result. See **section 1** for guidance on establishing resourcing requirements.

3.2 You will need to decide on appropriate deputy arrangements in case you are unable to act personally. Deputies are often senior officers within the local authority but, crucially, they should have the skills, knowledge and experience to carry out the functions they have been assigned.

3.3 One or more deputy ROs should be formally appointed to assist with the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers and any other issues that might arise during the count.

3.4 Your project plan should include identification of staffing requirements for the verification and count (as appropriate). You need to decide on the number and type of staff you will require to run your verification and count, and make the necessary appointments as soon as possible. ROs will need to ensure the availability of an adequate number of well-trained staff who are able to work immediately following the close of poll and through the night. ROs should wherever possible not use staff who have been on polling duty all day.

3.5 You will need (as appropriate to your RO role):

- Sufficient senior staff to assist you with the overall operation of the verification and/or count, the co-ordination of the verification and count processes, and the calculation of the result.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the secure transportation of the sealed boxes of postal ballot papers to the verification venue and experienced and efficient staff to competently and quickly deal with the final opening of postal votes.
- Staff and supervisors to deal with the receipt of ballot boxes, postal votes and other materials at the verification venue.
- Numerate staff and supervisors to deal with the verification of the used ballot papers and to deal with the verification of the unused / spoilt ballot papers and tendered votes list.
- Methodical staff and supervisors to deal with the sorting and counting of votes.
- Staff to help ensure that social distancing is maintained at key pinch points in the process where queues could develop, such as during the delivery of ballot boxes or at the entrance to the venue.
- Experienced media liaison staff.
- Porters, security staff and door attendants to deal with the security of the site and a person(s) with knowledge of the site to deal with the management of the facilities within and around the site.

- A responsible officer(s) to oversee the security of ballot boxes and relevant stationery where there is a break in proceedings or where ballot papers are required to be delivered to another venue at the end of the verification process.

3.6 You will need to decide how best to train your staff. Your project plan should include plans for training all verification and count staff and planning for that training activity should start at the earliest opportunity.

3.7 Running a timely and accurate verification and count relies on everyone involved being clear on what their role and responsibilities are and understanding their part in the process thoroughly, even though they may not understand the whole process. All staff should be issued with a clear set of written instructions and a description of their role and responsibilities.

3.8 You should make arrangements for the briefing of all verification and count staff so that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them. All briefings should, as a minimum, cover the procedures relevant to the roles.

3.9 The processes involved at the verification and count can be complicated and many ROs find that the best way of training senior staff is to prepare a small scale 'mock' verification and count with a few hundred ballot papers. Staff will have the opportunity to physically work through the processes involved, completing the necessary paperwork and adjudicating on the sample ballot papers. Even though some resource is required to hold training sessions of this nature, it can be a valuable tool in ensuring the verification and count runs smoothly and is timely on the night.

3.10 Prior to the start of the verification and count proceedings, ROs or their senior count staff should undertake a walk-through of the procedures they are expecting everyone to follow so that everyone is aware of what is expected of them at each stage, and how the different roles relate to each other.



Further guidance on staffing the verification and count and the training of verification and count staff is contained in [Part B - Planning and organisation](#) of the Commission's Guidance for Returning Officers.

Venue and layout



ROs will need to make decisions about which venue or venues to choose and the most appropriate layout for the workflows they decide to follow.

Have you chosen a suitable venue or venues?

- Will the venue help to ensure you can deliver a timely verification and count (as appropriate)?
- What does an evaluation of venues used at previous polls tell you about the suitability of venues generally?
- Have you assessed your chosen venue(s) for suitability?
- Have you identified a contingency venue you could use in the event your original venue becomes unusable?

What will your layout look like?

- Does it reflect your verification and count methodology (as appropriate)?
- Will it support the workflows you have decided to follow?
- Will the layout work with the space you have available and can it safely accommodate everyone?

Venue

3.11 Your project plan should cover the identification of a suitable venue(s) for the verification and count (as appropriate). See paragraphs **2.16** to **2.17** for how the choice of venue may impact on the timing of the verification and count processes.

3.12 Evaluation of previous elections should highlight any general issues about the suitability of venues.

3.13 We recognise that some ROs do not have a huge choice of suitable, available venues at their disposal. To assist you in assessing the suitability of the venue or venues for your verification and count (as appropriate) we have produced a checklist at Appendix 1.

3.14 Consideration should be given to contingency arrangements. In the event that your primary venue becomes unusable these contingency arrangements should include the identification of an alternative venue.

Layout

3.15 Layout plans for the verification and count venue should be prepared at an early stage.

3.16 The layout will be informed by:

- the methodology you decide to adopt, which means you will need to make a decision at an early stage as to how you wish to organise your verification and count e.g. by ward (if appropriate) or other electoral area sub-division - see **section 6**.
- consideration of the workflows you decide to follow
- the space available

3.17 To ensure that parties, candidates and agents can have confidence in the results, you will need to ensure that all your processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend.

3.18 To avoid any issues at the verification and count it is worth putting yourself in the position of a candidate or agent when planning the layout to test whether the arrangements deliver the necessary transparency.

3.19 However, you also need to ensure that the work of your staff is not disrupted by those observing the process.

3.20 In considering the layout and organisation of the verification and count, you should consider the following:

- Are there appropriate security arrangements in place to ensure that only those eligible to attend actually do so?
- Are there sufficient tables to accommodate the number of verification and counting staff you have appointed and adequate space for the processes to be carried out efficiently?
- Does the layout of the tables:
 - take into account the number of counting agents that are likely to be appointed to oversee the verification and count, as well as others entitled to be present?
 - allow easy viewing by all of those entitled to be present?
 - take into account the number and size of the ballot papers?
 - allow a safe distance between members of staff and between staff and those attending?
- Has the space around the tables and circulation areas been maximised and any obstructions removed?
- Is there sufficient seating for those entitled to attend proceedings?
- Is the venue laid out in a way that ensures that all of the proceedings are accessible to anyone entitled to attend, including disabled people?

- Are the public address systems in working order and what is the effective range? Once this is established attendees can be informed where in the venue they will be able to clearly hear announcements.
- Have the requirements of the media been considered, e.g. by the provision of a separate media area, as they are likely to require space for their specialist (sometimes bulky) equipment?
- Have you had regard to the health and safety of all persons? For example:
 - any cabling from equipment or media cameras should not present a trip hazard to anyone at the proceedings
 - free access to emergency exits should not be obstructed in any way
 - maximum venue capacity should not be exceeded

3.21 Areas should be designated for different functions and then appropriately furnished and equipped. You should consider designating the following areas:

3.22 Car parking and vehicle access – The organisation of vehicle access around the verification and count venue should be considered carefully. It is advisable to designate different parking areas for candidates, agents and observers, and for staff. It can also be helpful to have a designated entrance and exit to the car park, which may help to avoid congestion, such as when ballot boxes are arriving from the polling stations. It may be useful to have staff supervising the car park at this time. Any staff working in the car parking area should be equipped with appropriate safety wear such as high-visibility jackets, and should be trained to deal with a large volume of traffic including, for example, counting agents arriving at the proceedings and polling station staff arriving with ballot boxes.

3.23 Entrance – Staff should be positioned at the entrance(s) to check whether people seeking to enter the verification and count are entitled to do so. Guidance on managing attendance at the verification and count is contained in the relevant [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#) of the Commission’s guidance for Returning Officers. It can be helpful to have different entrances for staff and for other attendees. Additionally you should ensure that your entrance arrangements are such that they avoid the creation of a bottleneck which could delay the start of the verification and count.

3.24 Receiving area – This is where ballot boxes, ballot paper accounts and other polling station stationery and equipment will arrive for checking in and sorting. Ideally, this area should have an entrance separate from that used by other staff, candidates, agents and observers, with direct access from the car park or loading area.

3.25 Verification, reconciliation and results tables – This is where the verification staff will verify the contents of the ballot boxes and reconcile the total number of votes. If laptops are to be used, cabling arrangements should be taken into account and contingency arrangements should be considered in the event of equipment failure. If local count totals need to be communicated to an RO responsible for collating the results you will also require an area for this communication to take place.

3.26 RO's table – This is where law textbooks, Electoral Commission guidance, procedure notes, spare staff instructions, staff lists, stationery and other guidance materials should be available for reference.

3.27 Count tables – These should provide proper separation for the staff and counting agents. Where space permits, chairs could be provided close to these tables for counting agents and observers.

3.28 Postal voting – Where postal votes are to be opened and the personal identifiers checked at the verification venue, a separate area should be allocated for processing unopened postal votes received from polling stations. The opening of postal votes must, by law, be carried out in full view of the candidates, agents and observers present. Adequate space should be allocated to receive, open and verify the identifiers on these postal votes, and to allow observation of these processes. Where the personal identifier verification is to be undertaken using verification software, network and cabling arrangements will need to be considered.

3.29 Tables for counted ballot papers – Once ballot papers have been sorted and counted into votes for individual parties and/or candidates, as appropriate, they should be placed in bundles (e.g. 100 ballot papers) and put on a separate table, so that all of the votes for each party or candidate are kept together. Candidates and agents are likely to expect all the bundles for all the parties and/ or candidates (as appropriate) to be placed in one central location so they can see the comparative numbers of votes for each party and/or candidate. This needs to be considered particularly when the verification and count has been sub-divided into areas smaller than the electoral area.

3.30 Area for candidates, agents, observers and guests – If possible, consider setting aside a separate area for candidates, agents, observers and guests with access to television coverage of the elections.

3.31 Area for refreshments – Consider providing an area where counting assistants and other staff can have a drink and a snack – they may be advised to bring some drink and food along or this could be provided for them. The verification and count can be a lengthy process and it is important to have adequate refreshments available to help to maintain staff energy and concentration levels. To avoid the possibility of any spillages you should not allow counting assistants to eat or drink at the counting tables. However, you could consider allowing the consumption of bottled water (with non-spill tops) at the count tables. Many ROs also provide facilities for candidates, agents, observers and other attendees to purchase refreshments on site.

3.32 Media area – The requirements for the media area will depend upon the types of media represented and their respective needs. For example, if television cameras are present, any lighting should not cause undue heat or glare which might impair the efficiency of the count, and cameras must not be allowed to film close-ups of the ballot papers. In addition, it is important that there are no trailing cables for count attendees to trip over, and that any equipment installed is safely positioned.

3.33 Declaration area – a raised platform on which the local totals/results can be declared. You should ensure that you are able to communicate the results of the

polls in line with legislative requirements and that all stakeholders, including media representatives, are aware of your planned arrangements in advance.

Equipment and set up



ROs will need to make decisions about what equipment they will need to have available at the verification and count.

[What equipment will you need to administer the verification and count?](#)

[What equipment will you need to communicate with the candidates and agents and anybody else attending the count?](#)

If applicable, [what equipment will you need to communicate with ROs collating the result?](#)

3.34 You will need to decide what equipment you will need to administer the verification and count safely (as appropriate) and to communicate with the candidates and agents and anybody else attending the count.

3.35 If you are responsible for the communication local count totals to another RO with responsibility for the collation of a regional or sub-regional result you will also need appropriate equipment to enable the necessary communication to take place.

3.36 You should ensure that all equipment is tested in advance of the verification and count (as appropriate), including:

- public announcement systems
- telephone lines
- mobile phones and mobile signals
- general IT equipment and spreadsheets for recording verification and count figures
- equipment for verifying the personal identifiers on returned postal votes (if the final opening of postal votes is to take place at the verification venue)
- screens for displaying any relevant information throughout the count

3.37 Contingency plans should be in place in case of an equipment or power malfunction.

3.38 In order to ensure that all materials, including stationery and equipment required at the verification and count venue are present relevant staff should be provided with a checklist. An example checklist is included at [Appendix 2](#).

Ensuring the security of ballot papers and other materials at all times



ROs must ensure the security of ballot papers and other polling station materials at all times. You will need to ensure you have processes appropriate to the risk in place to ensure a level of security of personal data included on the ballot papers and other paperwork from the polling station. You will also need to ensure any personal data is destroyed at the appropriate time, in accordance with your document retention policy.

What decisions will you take to comply with that duty?

How will you decide on your arrangements for liaising with your police Single Point of Contact (SPOC)?

Does your risk assessment reveal a need to take a more active approach to security in particular areas? If so, what will your arrangements be in those areas?

How will you maintain the security of ballot boxes and other materials being delivered to the verification venue?

- What are your arrangements for transporting ballot boxes and other materials securely from the polling station to the verification and count venue? For example, is the transportation of any particular ballot boxes high risk, and will you need, for example, a police escort, security van or extra security personnel?
- How will you ensure the correct and orderly receipt of ballot boxes and other materials?

How will you maintain the security of postal ballot papers and materials whilst these are being delivered?

- Is the transportation of the sealed postal ballot boxes high risk, and will you need, for example, a police escort, security van or extra security personnel?

How will you maintain security at the verification venue?

- How will you ensure that ballot papers are never left unattended?
- How will you ensure that sealed materials are kept secure?

How will you ensure ballot papers are kept secure during any break in proceedings?

- How will you ensure ballot papers are kept secure during any break in proceedings? For example, will you have someone in place to guard the ballot papers or do you have access to a secure storage facility?

- How will you ensure ballot papers are kept secure should you need to evacuate the venue?

If applicable, [how will you ensure the secure transportation of ballot boxes to another venue following verification?](#)

3.39 You should decide what steps you will need to take to ensure the security of ballot papers and other materials / stationery from the close of poll through to the declaration of the local totals / result.

3.40 ROs should consider security risks as part of their contingency planning and include them on their risk register. Security risks may vary within the electoral area and ROs may need to take a different approach in particular instances.

3.41 You should liaise with your Police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) on the security of ballot papers at all stages in the process. ROs should also brief parties, candidates and agents about the security arrangements, so that they can have confidence in the integrity of the verification and count.

Security of ballot boxes and other materials

3.42 In conjunction with their police SPOC, ROs should decide how they will ensure that ballot boxes and other materials are transported securely. As part of this, ROs will need to assess if they have any areas of high risk which may, for example, require a police escort, security van or additional personnel to transfer the ballot boxes from the polling station to the verification venue / collection point following the close of poll. ROs should keep this under review as circumstances may change right up until close of poll.

3.43 ROs should ensure that Presiding Officers are clear about the rules and processes following the close of poll, including in relation to sealing the ballot boxes. Guidance on this is contained in the Commission's polling station handbook. It should be made clear to Presiding Officers that they should never leave the ballot boxes or other materials unattended and that, if they themselves are delivering the ballot boxes and materials to a collection point or the verification venue, that they should take steps to ensure their security throughout the journey, for example by locking their car doors and following any specific police advice.

3.44 Planning for the orderly receipt of ballot boxes and other materials at the verification venue is crucial to security, so that anything that is missing can be quickly identified and immediate action taken to locate the missing items.

3.45 Staff receiving ballot boxes should be provided with a 'checklist' to ensure that all ballot boxes and ballot paper accounts, including postal ones, are accurately accounted for. An example checklist for the receipt of polling station materials is provided at [Appendix 3](#). See **section 5** for guidance on the receipt of ballot boxes and other materials at the verification venue.

3.46 Sometimes the venue for counting the votes will be different from the verification venue. In these cases, ROs must seal the relevant ballot papers into ballot boxes or another suitable container, and allow agents to attach their seals. ROs must comply with any requirements in the election rules such as endorsing a description of the area to which the ballot papers relate on the ballot boxes and ensuring that all the required materials and paperwork are delivered to the count venue along with the ballot papers.

3.47 ROs need to decide how they will ensure the security of the ballot papers in transit. In that case, a police escort, security van or additional security personnel may be needed. At the count venue, the RO should have robust arrangements in place to check in all the materials and paperwork delivered to ensure that nothing is missing.

3.48 ROs need to decide how the ballot papers and other materials will be kept secure once they arrive at the verification and count venue(s), for example, by ensuring they are never left unattended.

3.49 ROs should also plan for the security of those materials that they must keep sealed (such as the corresponding numbers list), either by staff watching the materials or by securing them in a locked room.

Ensuring ballot papers are kept secure during any break in proceedings

3.50 Where there is a break in proceedings, ROs will need to seal ballot papers in ballot boxes or another suitable container and store them securely. ROs will need to decide how best they can ensure the security of ballot papers during any break in proceedings.

3.51 As part of your preparations for the verification and count you should identify any scheduled break in proceedings and plan how you will secure the ballot boxes / other suitable containers holding the ballot papers during that break. On completion of the verification, the ballot papers for any contests which are not being counted immediately after verification should be placed into ballot boxes which are then sealed. Any agents present must be allowed to attach their seals.

3.52 In order to ensure the security of the ballot papers you could consider:

- storing them in sealed ballot boxes in a locked room, ensuring that the RO has control of all the keys to that facility
- arranging for security staff to 'guard' the ballot boxes at all times until the verification/count resumes

3.53 You should liaise with your police SPOC when deciding on the most appropriate method for ensuring secure storage.

3.54 Once the verification/count has resumed, you should plan to open the sealed ballot boxes in clear view of any candidates and agents present, so they can satisfy themselves that nobody has interfered with the ballot boxes or ballot papers.

Combination

Where polls are combined it is likely that there will be a break in proceedings between the conclusion of the verification and the commencement of the count for one or more of the elections / contests. During that break, the ballot papers will need to be stored securely.

Ensuring ballot papers are kept secure in the event of evacuation from the venue

3.55 Occasionally incidents occur during verification and count which may require the evacuation of the venue, either permanently or until the situation has been resolved. Obviously, in these circumstances, the safety of attendees is paramount but certain situations may not pose an immediate risk to the safety of staff. Having pre-prepared evacuation plans in place can help to maintain the integrity of the verification and count processes and the security of the ballot papers.

3.56 In the case of an urgent evacuation it may be possible to secure the ballot papers which are still on the tables by locking up the venue or storing them within a locked room in the venue. In that case, you will need to have control of all the keys to that room or to the venue. If you have more time it may be possible to place the ballot papers in ballot boxes and then seal the ballot boxes (inviting agents to affix their seals if possible) and then securing the sealed boxes within the venue.

3.57 Sometimes the situation will mean that if the ballot papers are left in the venue they are likely to be damaged. In these situations it may be possible for the ballot papers to be secured within ballot boxes and removed from the venue by staff and taken to a place of safety until the verification and count can resume. In these circumstances, having a clear protocol for sealing the ballot papers within ballot boxes and clear labelling of those boxes will be helpful. You should also consider how you would ensure the secure transportation of ballot boxes and their subsequent storage in these circumstances.

4 Communicating with attendees during the verification and count



ROs will need to decide how they will communicate with attendees at the verification and count (as appropriate).

[Will you provide an information pack for attendees? What will it include?](#)

[How and when will you use the public address system?](#)

- What will you use the public address system for?
- How will you reach those who may be somewhere where the public address system cannot be heard?
- Have you considered pre-recording messages to be made through the public address system?
- How will you keep attendees informed of any delays as the count is underway?

[Will you have a dedicated member of staff to brief any attendees who arrive after the verification or count has commenced?](#)

[How will you communicate the outcome of the verification and the result?](#)

[How will you communicate with the media? Will you have a dedicated team to liaise with them?](#)

4.1 Everyone attending the verification and count should be provided with key information about the verification and count processes. This information can be provided in an information pack available at the verification and count venue or could be provided to attendees in advance. A checklist of information that should be provided is included at [Appendix 5](#).

4.2 At standalone elections, if an RO has decided to start counting the votes while the verification is still taking place, they should ensure those attending have been informed of the fact that the counting of the votes will take place alongside the verification. This information could be provided at party / candidate briefings or included in any count information packs distributed to attendees. It should also be provided via public announcement messages throughout the count.

4.3 The venue should be adequately signed so that attendees can find their way to the various areas. In particular, if the public address system can only be heard in certain parts of the venue, you should let attendees know where announcements can

be heard through clear signage and by including this information in packs for attendees.

4.4 In addition to providing a layout plan of the venue, indicating the key areas of interest for counting agents and observers you should consider displaying copies of the layout plan at various locations throughout the venue. You could also provide a description of the roles of counting agents and an explanation of what other guests are permitted to do.

4.5 You should use a public address system to make announcements about what is happening where and when throughout the verification and count processes. You should also ensure that there are timely and co-ordinated communications throughout the verification and count to ensure that information is communicated in a way that allows candidates, agents and observers to fully understand the progress of the count.

4.6 Before the start of the verification and the count, you should address candidates, agents and all others in attendance to explain how the process will be managed. This will include information on:

- the key roles of those conducting the verification and count
- the local verification and count processes
- the security arrangements for the ballot papers and boxes
- where applicable, the relationship between the count in your electoral area and the election as a whole. For example, where relevant, you may need to explain that each local count total feeds into a regional result that is calculated by another RO
- how agents can observe and participate in the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers
- that smoking is not allowed within the building, and any policy regarding drinking, use of mobile phones and taking photographs
- any health and safety issues e.g. evacuation procedures and fire drills
- where attendees can get further information
- any other relevant information

4.7 If facilities allow, some ROs have found it useful to pre-record these addresses to reduce pressure on the night.

4.8 You should make further announcements throughout the verification and count, setting out what parts of the process are being carried out and at what stage the proceedings are. Keeping attendees informed throughout the process will help manage expectations and reduce queries. Announcements could be made:

- when all the ballot boxes from polling stations have been received

- when all the boxes of postal votes have been received
- when verification has been completed
- to confirm the turnout figure and how many ballot papers are going through to the count
- when the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers is about to start, setting out where this will take place
- when the results or local count totals are ready to be announced so attendees can make their way to the declaration area
- to notify attendees of any delays

4.9 It may be helpful to appoint a member of staff to brief any candidates and agents who arrive after the verification or count has commenced, to respond to queries and to act as liaison between candidates, agents, observers and key staff. Senior staff should also be briefed on how to respond to queries from attendees.

4.10 Any agent may make a copy of the completed verification statement and copies should be made available for the agents once verification has been completed. Provision of the verification statement will help to ensure that candidates and agents are confident that the verification and count are transparent and the result is accurate.

4.11 After the counting of votes is complete you may be required to communicate the local count totals to another RO who will collate those local count totals with others from across a region to establish the regional result which they will declare. In these circumstances you will declare the local count totals with the candidates and agents present in accordance with the rules at that particular election or contest.

4.12 If you are responsible for declaring the final results, these will need to be announced verbally. You are also required to give public notice of the results and the relevant election rules will set out what should be included in that notice. You should provide copies of the results for candidates, agents and the media. Additionally, arrangements should be made for the results to be published on the local authority's web site as soon as possible. The results link can also be shared through your council's social media accounts.

The media

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

4.14 In preparation for representatives of the media attending your verification and count you should consider:

- Contacting principal broadcast organisations in advance.
- Outlining the press facilities available.

- Providing an opportunity for media representatives to inspect the verification and count venue to see what space and facilities are available, if practicable, and give them the opportunity to raise any issues or requirements with you. If you are able to, you could encourage the broadcast media to visit the venue to identify their technical requirements to avoid problems on the night and allow provision to be made in the layout of the venue.
- Discussing with the media arrangements for the declaration of results or declaration of local totals, such as alerting them shortly before the results are to be declared so they can move into position and providing them with written copies of the results.
- Arranging for sound systems to be used for the announcements and for any live feeds.
- Making accreditation arrangements for journalists, technicians and photographers attending and providing media passes.
- Designating an area of the venue for media use.
- Ensuring that there is a nominated media spokesperson in place for the count, and that everyone is aware who this is and that all media questions should be directed to that person.
- Making sure that the media are aware of any restricted areas and procedures e.g. that camera operators are aware they must not overstep sensitive information (such as close-ups of ballot papers) or obstruct count staff.

4.15 You should ensure that the council's public relations team are present to deal with media enquiries. You should make sure that they know who to approach if they are asked any technical electoral questions.

4.16 In addition to making practical arrangements for their attendance, any early contact with the media should also include an explanation of the processes to be followed and the expected finish and declaration times.

4.17 Where you are counting the votes for more than one contest, it should include the expected finish/declaration times for each poll.

4.18 The Commission will produce a [media handbook](#) that you can include with any information pack you are producing for the media attending the verification and count.

5 Receipt of ballot boxes and other materials



ROs will need to decide on the most effective arrangements for receiving ballot boxes and other materials. You will also need to ensure that processes are put in place to ensure the security of any personal data included on the ballot papers and other paperwork from the polling station.

[How will you manage the receipt of ballot boxes, etc.? For example, what will you ask staff to check for when receiving ballot boxes?](#)

- 5.1 The correct and orderly receipt of ballot boxes and materials from polling stations is a key component of an accurate verification process.
- 5.2 You should plan to have a team of trained staff responsible for registering receipt of every ballot box, the postal votes and the other materials that have been delivered from polling stations.
- 5.3 To enable an efficient process you could utilise a one-way system into and out of the drop-off area, or adopt a 'drive through' arrangement, where count staff collect ballot boxes from vehicles.
- 5.4 Staff (whether at the verification venue or collection points) should be provided with a checklist for each polling station in order to 'tick off' and record the receipt of all the items that the Presiding Officer should deliver. The completion of this checklist provides evidence that all ballot boxes and other materials have been received and provides a clear and unambiguous audit trail. An example checklist is provided at [Appendix 3](#).
- 5.5 Anything that is missing should be quickly identified and immediate action taken to locate the missing items.
- 5.6 The details of all the polling stations together with the names and mobile phone numbers of each Presiding Officer should be collated in advance of polling day, so that you can easily contact Presiding Officers in the event of any problems.
- 5.7 If possible, staff receiving the ballot boxes should also undertake a check of the ballot paper accounts, including the basic arithmetic, before the Presiding Officer departs. Any issues should be recorded for you to consider at the verification and count.
- 5.8 If Presiding Officers are bringing multiple ballot boxes to the verification venue / collection point, staff should be provided to assist the Presiding Officer in transporting

all ballot boxes and accompanying materials into the verification venue or collection point in one trip.

5.9 You should also record the time of arrival of each ballot box, so you can use this information for future reference.

Combination

Where polls have been combined and separate ballot boxes have been used for each poll, further checklists will need to be produced to track the boxes and their accompanying paperwork for the other poll(s).

Receipt of sealed boxes of postal ballot papers



ROs will need to decide on the most effective arrangements for the delivery and receipt of sealed boxes of postal ballot papers.

[How will you manage the delivery of postal ballot boxes from the postal vote opening sessions?](#)

5.10 The sealed postal ballot boxes from the various opening sessions should also be securely transported to the verification venue. Each sealed postal ballot box should be accompanied by a postal ballot paper account.

5.11 Staff receiving the postal ballot boxes should be provided with a checklist to ensure that all postal ballot boxes and postal ballot paper accounts are accurately accounted for. The completion of this checklist provides evidence that all postal ballot boxes and the accompanying ballot paper accounts have been received and provides a clear and unambiguous audit trail.

After the receipt of ballot boxes and other materials

5.12 Following receipt of the ballot boxes and other materials from polling stations and the receipt of the sealed boxes of postal ballot papers:

- The packets and parcels from polling stations should be organised in such a way as to enable easy location of any packet.
- The ballot paper accounts and corresponding ballot boxes will need to be verified and the relevant information entered on the 'statement as to result of verification' (the verification statement). See **section 6** for further guidance on the verification statement.
- The unused ballot papers, the tendered ballot papers and the spoilt ballot papers will also need to be verified. This is a legal requirement and involves the opening of the appropriate sealed packets. As each packet of unused ballot

papers, spoiled ballot papers and the tendered votes list is opened the figures should be calculated and will need to be recorded on the verification statement. Note that the packet of used tendered ballot papers is not to be opened for the purposes of the verification. The verification of tendered ballot papers is conducted with reference to the tendered votes list and the unused tendered ballot papers. Each packet will then need to be resealed. One option for carrying this out is to have a separate team dealing with this process or, alternatively, this could be done alongside the verification of the ballot boxes from polling stations.

- The sealed postal ballot boxes and corresponding postal ballot paper accounts need to be verified and the results entered onto the verification statement. Postal ballot papers must be subject to verification in the same way as any ballot box from a polling station. As these will often be some of the first boxes being verified, they present an opportunity to create confidence in the process and in the verification and count as a whole.

5.13 You should take steps to ensure that staff are aware that they are not permitted to open some of the sealed packets during the verification and count, including those containing:

- completed tendered ballot papers
- the corresponding number lists
- certificates of employment
- the marked copies of the register
- the lists of proxies

5.14 In line with your document retention policy, you should ensure:

- that the materials that you must keep sealed are placed in a designated and secure area for the duration of the verification and count
- any personal data is destroyed at the appropriate time

5.15 The final opening of postal votes handed in at polling stations will need to be undertaken. This may be carried out at the verification venue or at some other premises. In either case, a mechanism to record the number of postal votes received needs to be in place.

6 Verification and count process



Detailed guidance on the process for verifying and counting the votes based on the legislative framework is provided in the relevant [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#) of the Commission’s guidance for Returning Officers.

6.1 Using the legal framework and the Commission’s guidance as a starting point you will need to take decisions as to how the verification and count is to be managed and organised locally.

6.2 If applicable, you will also need to take into account any directions or guidance issued by another RO on the management and organisation of the verification and count.

6.3 The verification and count is a complex logistical exercise, particularly in the case of combined polls, and decisions on how the verification and count should be organised should be taken as early as possible.

6.4 This section is intended to highlight some of the factors ROs should have regard to when deciding how to organise and manage their verification and count.



Once ROs have decided on their count methodology and have made decisions affecting their overall plans, ROs will need to make a number of decisions covering the practicalities of administering the verification and count processes.

Considerations and decisions affecting the [verification](#) and [count](#) processes are set out in the tables below.

General considerations

6.5 Ensuring accuracy at the verification stage is crucial to ensuring a timely count. If the verification figures are wrong there will be a variance against the count figures which will need to be resolved and which risks significantly slowing the overall process.

6.6 As already mentioned, it is widely accepted that breaking down the verification and count into smaller areas than the whole electoral area, is particularly effective in achieving an accurate result. The results from those areas are then aggregated to achieve an overall result for the whole electoral area. The main advantage of this method is that it can avoid the need to potentially recount all the ballot papers as any variances can be resolved within each part.

6.7 However you sub-divide the electoral area you will need to ensure that a similar number of ballot papers are allocated to each of the smaller parts so that all the parts into which the electoral area has been sub-divided finish at approximately the same time. This will avoid any delays in obtaining overall figures for the electoral area.

6.8 While it may not be realistic to expect all verification and count staff to be fully utilised at every stage of the verification and count process, a responsive management plan which monitors activity levels and allows for reallocation of resources could reduce the length of time taken to complete key stages of the process.

6.9 When dealing with ballot papers you need to ensure transparency at all times. This could include:

- making sure that ballot papers are always visible. Place them in a tray (or similar) and ensure the bundles of counted ballot papers are stored in full sight of the agents at all times.
- if separate ballot boxes have been used for different contests/elections and a voter has placed their vote in the 'wrong' box, ensuring that the procedure for moving that ballot paper to the 'correct' box is open and transparent. Similarly, any tendered ballot papers that have been mistakenly placed in a ballot box during polling day should be removed from the box in full view of agents present.

6.10 There is likely to be substantial documentation at both the verification and count which will provide an audit trail detailing how the results were arrived at. Careful management of the documentation is crucial. Templates for all the documents to be used at the verification and count should be produced in advance and staff should be familiar with the completion of the templates. Colour coding the documentation can be an effective way of quickly locating the relevant documents.

6.11 It is easy for simple arithmetic or transposition errors to be made, particularly when people become tired. You therefore need to put in place processes to mitigate against this risk, such as ensuring that the recording of figures and every calculation is checked by more than one person.

6.12 The ballot papers are placed into bundles at various stages of the verification and count and it is important that procedures are put in place to double-check that the bundles have the correct number of ballot papers in them and, at the count stage, that they contain no more votes than the maximum allowed. This will be crucial to the accuracy of the verification and count.

6.13 You need to ensure that the secrecy of the vote is maintained at all times. Ballot papers must be kept face up during the verification and count process. Staff should be made aware of this during briefings/training and senior staff should be alert to this at all times and intervene immediately if this is not being done.

6.14 The verification statement must contain all the information required by law. As a minimum, the verification statement should include:

- Details of the verification of each polling station ballot paper account and the results of comparing that ballot paper account with the number of ballot papers counted at verification, and the results of the verification of the unused and spoiled ballot papers and the tendered ballot papers. Any variances should be detailed on a box by box basis.
- Details of the verification of each postal ballot paper account and the results of comparing that with the number of postal ballot papers counted at verification in the relevant postal ballot box. Any variances should be detailed on a box by box basis.
- The total number of ballot papers verified for the poll.

6.15 Agents may make copies of the verification statement and you should provide copies to them on request. The verification statement is a key communication tool that will help to ensure that candidates and agents are confident that the processes at the verification and count are transparent and that they will produce an accurate result.

6.16 You are also under a duty to give agents reasonable facilities for overseeing the proceedings, provided that is consistent with the orderly conduct of the proceedings and the discharge of your duties. You should also provide them with relevant information throughout the verification and count.

6.17 Where agents have added their seals (either at close of poll or where there is a break in the proceedings between verification and count) particular care should be taken to show any agents or observers present that these seals are still in place prior to the ballot box being opened. However, if candidates and agents are not present you do not have to wait for them to arrive in order to remove the seals. Agents should be encouraged to add their seals whenever they are entitled to do so. These steps will help to ensure confidence in the process.

6.18 In designing each stage of the verification and count process you need to be clear who is doing what, where and how.

Practical considerations and decisions in relation to the verification process

Considerations	Decision
<p>What time do your various staff need to arrive?</p>	
<p>What should they do on arrival? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - check the verification stationery and equipment is present using a checklist - check-in the verification staff - brief the verification staff - 	
<p>How are the various materials and boxes being moved around the verification venue to those staff who need them?</p>	
<p>How will you verify the used ballot papers and deal with any discrepancies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You may find it helpful to have an experienced 'trouble shooting' team who can investigate any discrepancies / variances which might occur. Staff who are used to dealing with ballot paper accounts and handling ballot books can often be quick to locate the reason for any variance. - You might also consider using a variance checklist to ensure that the necessary steps are complied with in respect of each discrepancy. An example checklist is provided at Appendix 4. 	
<p>How will you verify the unused and</p>	

Considerations	Decision
<p>spoilt ballot papers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One option is to have this done by a separate dedicated team; alternatively the process could be integrated with the verification of the used ballot papers. 	
<p>How will you manage the verification of the sealed postal ballot boxes and deal with any discrepancies?</p>	
<p>How will you manage the verification of the personal identifiers on the last postal votes delivered to polling stations?</p>	
<p>If you have sub divided the electoral area how will you aggregate the results from the individual areas to provide overall results for the whole electoral area? How will agents be able to track progress?</p>	
<p>How will the verification statement be completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You need to bring together the necessary information from the verification of the used, unused and spoilt ballot papers and postal votes in order to produce the verification statement and calculate the total number of ballot papers verified for the poll. - 	
<p>How will the processes and documentation provide a clear audit trail, and have checks and balances been built in to ensure accuracy?</p>	
<p>How will you manage the announcement as to turnout and provide agents with copies of the verification statement?</p>	

Considerations	Decision
If there is to be a break in proceedings, how will you manage this?	
At combined polls, how will you ensure that the verification statements for all the polls are completed before the counting of any votes commences?	
If the count takes place somewhere other than at the verification venue, how will you arrange the secure delivery of those ballot papers in accordance with the legal requirements?	

Practical considerations and decisions in relation to the count

Considerations	Decision
(Where relevant) What time do your various staff need to arrive?	
(Where relevant) What should they do on arrival? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - check the count stationery and equipment is present using checklist - check-in the count staff - brief the count staff - 	
How will you ensure that ballot papers from one box will always be	

Considerations	Decision
<p>mixed with ballot papers from another box before the sorting into votes for individual parties and/or candidates commences?</p>	
<p>If you are counting more than one poll, what steps will you need to take to ensure that the ballot papers for each poll are kept separate from one another?</p>	
<p>What will the process be for the sorting and counting of the ballot papers into votes for separate parties and/or candidates?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If there are a large number of parties and/or candidates, the process for separating the votes into bundles for individual parties and/or candidates may be slower and take up more space. Some ROs find it more efficient in these situations to firstly 'pull out' the votes in relation to the main political parties or candidates for the main political parties and then deal with the votes for the other parties or candidates separately. Others have counting assistants dealing with, for example, parties/candidates 1 to 5 on the ballot paper and separate counting assistants dealing with, say, parties/candidates 6 – 10 on the ballot paper; with a process for swapping those ballot papers they are not dealing with. 	
<p>How will the processes and documentation provide a clear audit trail, and have checks and balances been built in to ensure accuracy?</p>	
<p>How will the designated area for each party's/candidate's votes be identified?</p>	
<p>What is the process for adjudicating on doubtful ballot papers?</p>	

Considerations	Decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who will do this? - To ensure all decisions are consistent you should have regard to the Commission's guidance. - What process will be put in place to provide appropriate opportunities for those who are entitled to observe and object? - 	
How will you draw up the statement showing the number of ballot papers that have been rejected and for what reason?	
What will the procedure be if there is any discrepancy with the verification figure?	
How will the total number of votes for each party/candidate be calculated/aggregated?	

Where you are the RO responsible for calculating and declaring the result of the election:

Considerations	Decision
What will the procedure be to advise candidates and agents of the provisional result and to seek their agreement on the announcement of the result?	
<p>How will you deal with any recount requests?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you agree to a recount, new paperwork should be completed so that a clear audit trail is maintained. 	
<p>What will the process be for declaring the final result?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where in the count venue will the declaration be made? 	

Considerations	Decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What equipment is needed? - You should prepare a script to be used at the declaration - Will candidates be invited to make speeches? - Written copies of the declaration should be available – how will this be achieved? 	
What is the procedure in the event of an equality of votes?	

Where you are the RO responsible for calculating the local count totals and submitting these to another RO for a result to be collated:

Considerations	Decision
What will be the procedure be to advise agents of the provisional local count totals?	
How will you deal with any recount requests?	
How will you complete the statement of the local totals?	
How will you ensure that you inform the relevant RO of the contents of the statement in accordance with the election rules and any guidance or directions?	
If applicable, how will you ensure no local total is declared until you have received authorisation from the relevant RO?	
<p>What will the process be for declaring the local totals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where in the count venue will the declaration be made? 	

Considerations	Decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What equipment is needed?- You should prepare a script to be used at the declaration - Written copies of the local totals should be available – how will you manage this?	

Appendix 1 - Checklist to assist ROs in determining the suitability of verification and count venues

	Considerations	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the venue been used before? If so, was it adequate, and what lessons can be learnt from previous electoral events?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the location of the venue practicable and convenient, in particular for those delivering materials from polling stations?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the parking arrangements adequate?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there separate entrances for those entitled to attend and staff, and for the delivery of the ballot boxes?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there disabled access, both to and within the venue?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the venue large enough to comfortably accommodate all of the verification and count processes?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the venue allow for the secure storage of ballot boxes, parcels of unused ballot papers, etc. and other equipment?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the lighting within and outside the venue adequate?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there sufficient heating?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a platform or stage for announcing the results, and for making regular announcements throughout the proceedings?	

	Considerations	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	What are the acoustics like within the venue?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there suitable IT and communication systems?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	What are the facilities like for those attending the verification and count?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Will the venue be able to satisfy the requirements of the media?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	What furniture is provided at the venue, e.g. are there sufficient tables and chairs (and if not these will need to be hired or acquired from another location)?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the venue satisfy your security and storage requirements?	

Appendix 2 - Example checklist of materials required at the verification and count

	Materials	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	List of all staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Signing-in sheets for staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spare copies of instructions for staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sample entrance passes for reference, including samples of the identification badges held by Commission representatives and accredited observers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Verification sheets – if a laptop or PC is to be used, the spreadsheets should be prepared in advance. Have available paper copies of the spreadsheets in case of equipment failure.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Results sheets	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Postal ballot boxes and related envelopes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PC/laptop, printer and photocopier	
<input type="checkbox"/>	‘Rejected’ stamp and ink pad	
<input type="checkbox"/>	‘Provisionally rejected’ stamp and ink pad for any final postal vote opening	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sorting trays (which could be marked with the names of the candidates)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cover sheets or cards dividers to identify bundles of counted ballot papers	

	Materials	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electoral law reference books and other guidance, including Electoral Commission guidance	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Letter openers and scissors	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sacks and ties for counted ballot papers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packets or envelopes for rejected ballot papers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assorted stationery items, including marker pens, pencils, rulers, adhesive tape, notepaper, string, rubber thimbles, paper clips and rubber bands	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calculators	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Large box or other receptacle for the mixing and storage of verified ballot papers if empty ballot boxes are not to be used for that purpose	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Materials to be used in the event of an equality of votes (e.g. an unused pack of cards, slips of paper, etc.)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Anything else</i>	

Appendix 3 - Checklist of items that the Presiding Officer should hand in at the verification venue (or collection point)

	Materials	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ballot box(es)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing ballot paper account	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing postal votes handed in at the polling station but not previously collected	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing unused and spoilt ballot papers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing tendered votes list	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing tendered ballot papers marked by voters	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing the marked register	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing the corresponding numbers list	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet containing certificates of employment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Packet or packets containing other lists and declarations	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sundries / stationery etc.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Anything else</i>	

Appendix 4 - Steps for dealing with ballot box variances

Ballot box reference	What is the variance? (i.e. the number of ballot papers more or less than expected)

Undertake the following checks to try and identify any reason for missing or additional ballot papers		
	Steps taken	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check arithmetic on the ballot paper account	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check the other packets of returned materials (e.g. unused ballot papers)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the Presiding Officer provided any information which may explain the variance?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check that returned postal ballots have not been added to the ones cast in the polling station.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	In cases where more than one ballot box was issued to the polling station check that all boxes allocated to the station have been opened and accounted for.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If separate ballot boxes have been used for separate contests, check for a compensating error in the other ballot box.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	In cases where the ballot box has come from a multiple polling station location	

Undertake the following checks to try and identify any reason for missing or additional ballot papers

	Steps taken	Comments
	check the verification of the ballot paper account(s) for the other polling station(s) within that location to see if there is a compensating error.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider contacting the Presiding Officer to ask them to try to explain any discrepancies.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If the reason is known for the variance, add an explanation of why that variance has occurred, and discuss this with any agents and observers present.	
If there is still a variance having carried out the above steps		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recount the ballot papers in the box until the same figure is achieved on two consecutive occasions - this figure becomes the verified total. Make a note on the ballot paper account and the verification statement	

Combination

Check the ballot boxes for all election types for all polling stations within the same polling place. The verification of the ballot paper accounts for the other polling stations within that location may indicate a compensating error due to electors placing their ballot paper in the 'wrong' box or in a box from the wrong polling station. If the compensating errors all balance, the verification can be deemed to have been successful. Wherever possible you should verify all of the boxes from the same polling place location simultaneously at adjacent tables, or one immediately after the other.

Appendix 5 - Checklist of key information to be provided to attendees at the verification and count

	Information	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Estimated timings for the completion of all stages of the verification and count	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Verification and count venue address and map	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details of disabled access	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Access and identification requirements, e.g. accreditation/photo ID/letters, etc. to support admission	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A layout plan of the venue, indicating the key areas of interest for counting agents and observers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A list of all ballot box numbers and the names of the polling stations they relate to	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do's and don'ts, e.g. reminding attendees that smoking is not allowed within the building; advice on any policy regarding drinking and use of mobile phones	
<input type="checkbox"/>	A copy of the relevant secrecy requirements	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details of what refreshments are available and whether there is a charge	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details of any media area / press room	
<input type="checkbox"/>	For the media – a copy of the Commission's media handbook	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details of any designated space for candidates, agents and others	
<input type="checkbox"/>	How and when a public announcement system will be used (and where it can be heard if it can only be heard in certain parts of the venue)	

	Information	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	A copy of the template verification and count paperwork that will be used to communicate the outcome of the verification and count, with an indication of the level at which the information will be provided, e.g. ward level / polling district level	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify the Returning Officer and other key members of staff (pictures of yourself and your key staff to help attendees identify you at the count may be useful)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explain the role of the Returning Officer or Returning Officers, as appropriate, and other key members of staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide details of who will be available to respond to queries and to act as liaison between candidates, agents, observers and key staff	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process for the final opening of postal votes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Outline the process of the verification and count and what those in attendance can expect to see	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process for consultation with election agents on the verification statement and the result	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process and principles for adjudicating doubtful ballots, e.g. providing copies of examples of doubtful ballot papers (Commission's placemat)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process for re-counts, e.g. who can ask for a re-count, when this can happen, etc.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If applicable - procedure for the result declaration, e.g. including if the candidates will be able to give a speech	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If applicable – the procedure for transmitting the local results to another RO and the certification and declaration of the local totals	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information about how and where declared results will be displayed.	

Appendix 6 - Checklist of verification and count process

	Stage	Comments
Verification		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Receipt of ballot boxes-: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all ballot boxes and ballot paper accounts accurately accounted for. • there is a ballot paper account for every ballot box • polling station materials have been received correctly • packets containing postal votes are handed over 	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take the ballot paper accounts to the staff managing the ballot box verification process	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Separate the sacks containing the documents to be stored from sacks with items to be reused. Ensure all packets are organised and can be easily located.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that sealed packets containing CNLs, certificate of employments, marked register and list of proxies are NOT opened. Keep all sealed packets in a designated safe and secure location for the duration of the verification and count.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bring previously processed postal ballot papers to the venue in a sealed ballot box with a completed ballot paper account for each box.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open and check the packet containing the list of tendered votes against the ballot paper accounts and then reseal. The packet of tendered ballots must NOT be opened.	

	Stage	Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open, count and reseal the packets of unused and spoiled ballot papers in view of those present. Supply the numbers to the verification staff.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Break the seals and open the ballot boxes in the presence of any counting agents and observers present.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Empty the ballot boxes ensuring that no ballot papers fall onto the floor or remain in the box. Show the empty box to any observers present	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep ballot papers face up at all times during verification and count.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unfold and count the ballots into predetermined bundles.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Once bundled, double check number for accuracy	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Remove any tendered ballot that has been mistakenly placed in a ballot box at this stage.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Verify each ballot paper account and draw up a statement as to the result of verification including the total number of postal ballot papers and total number of ballot papers verified at the count	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Allow any agent present to make a copy of the statement and make copies available for agents on request once verification is complete.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Compare the totals given on the ballot paper account to the total number of ballots counted in the box. Also compare the unused and spoiled papers and tendered votes list to the ballot paper account.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The total ballot papers counted in the box should agree with the ballot paper account and reconcile with the total number of unused ballot papers. Fully investigate any	

	Stage	Comments
	discrepancies.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Confirm that verification is completed, once all ballot papers including postal ballot papers have been through the verification process	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If you are not proceeding immediately to the count after verification, place all ballot papers and documents in secure packets under your own seal and that of any agents present who wish to affix their own, and ensure they are securely located until verification and count process continues.	
Count		
<input type="checkbox"/>	If the count is not immediately after verification, all sealed boxes and packets must be opened in full view of candidates and agents.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin the counting of the votes as soon as practicable after the close of poll	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mix the ballot papers with at least one other box including postal ballots before sorting and counting.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sort the ballot papers into votes for each candidate.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Separate and place aside any doubtful ballots	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Count the number of votes for each candidate and place into predetermined bundles	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attach a counting card to the front of each bundle and have each bundle recounted for accuracy	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Before removing the bundles from the table, flick through them to ensure all votes are marked in the same way	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If the final bundle does not contain the predetermined number of votes, attach the	

	Stage	Comments
	actual number of votes to a card on the front of the bundle	
<input type="checkbox"/>	If counting a multi member vacancy, follow the appropriate process for your chosen method such as 'grass skirt' or counting sheets	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Regularly adjudicate on doubtful ballot papers during the count	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Categorise any rejected ballot appropriately and complete a statement of rejected ballot papers.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Once ballot papers have been sorted, and doubtful ballots have been adjudicated, begin reconciliation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfy yourself that results reflect the ballots received	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Count all bundles of valid votes for each candidate, add this total to the total of rejected ballot papers to match the total number of ballot papers obtained.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfy yourself that the number of votes for each candidate is correct	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Advise candidates and agents of the provisional result	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recount if reasonable request received, and advise candidates on revised provisional result as necessary	
<input type="checkbox"/>	In the case of equality of votes, decide between the candidates by lot, and ensure this is communicated	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare the statement for the declaration of the result and once prepared declare the result	
<input type="checkbox"/>	As soon as practicable provide the notice of result to the Proper Officer	

Appendix 7 – Performance standards



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to put in place **appropriate resources to ensure the verification and count are timely**.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be met you will need to set out how the verification and count is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to **maintain the secure storage of ballot papers** at all times.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place arrangements for securely storing ballot papers.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 2](#), you will need to **ensure that the count processes are transparent**, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all of those entitled to attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have a layout plan of the count and have in place information to be provided to attendees at the count and arrangements to communicate progress at the count.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standards 1 and 2](#), you will need to ensure count processes are designed and managed to **secure an accurate result with a clear audit trail**.

To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place arrangements to maintain a clear audit trail of the count processes.