

Spring Polls Bulletin 7 – 17 March 2011

Dear Colleagues

I was in Cardiff earlier this week for a post-3 March referendum/pre-5 May elections and referendum seminar. It was a really good opportunity for everyone present to share their experiences of the Welsh referendum and to look forward to the 5 May elections and referendum.

Live Issues

Lead campaigners

Two campaign groups have applied to the Electoral Commission to become the official 'lead campaigners' for the referendum on the UK voting system on Thursday 5 May. The Commission will now consider these applications thoroughly. While the Commission has until 29 March to make its decision, it is our intention to let you know the outcome as soon as we can. Campaigners who have been given lead status are, among other things, entitled to the free use of public rooms and to the free distribution of one campaign communication to electors.

Campaigners' access to referendum processes

I thought it would be useful to clarify who can access referendum processes and, in particular, the count, on behalf of campaigners. Any campaigner seeking to spend more £10,000 must register with the Commission as a permitted participant. Each permitted participant, including any 'lead campaigner', is entitled to appoint a referendum agent for each voting area. The deadline for notifying Counting Officers of the appointment of referendum agents is midday on Thursday 7 April. Forms for campaigners to use to notify Counting Officers of the appointment of referendum agents are available on the Commission's website.

Under referendum law, it is the referendum agent for each voting area who is entitled to appoint agents to attend referendum processes. If a permitted participant has not appointed a referendum agent by noon on 7 April 2011, they will not be able to have agents attend referendum processes in that voting area. Forms for referendum agents to use to notify Counting Officers of the appointment of polling, counting and postal voting agents are available on the Commission's website.

As mentioned in my instructions, you are permitted by law to limit the number of counting agents but the number that each referendum agent is allowed to appoint must be the same. Also, unless there are special circumstances, the number must not be less than the number obtained by dividing the number of counting assistants by the number of referendum agents for the voting area. You must also ensure that, as far as possible, each referendum agent is

permitted to appoint sufficient numbers of counting agents to enable full and proper scrutiny of the verification and count processes. On the afternoon of 7 April, once you know how many referendum agents have been appointed, you will be able to calculate the number of counting agents that referendum agents will be able to appoint.

Allocating staff to polling stations and resulting costs

Following a number of queries, I would like to confirm that your polling station staffing ratios and subsequent claims against the referendum budget should be based on the number of voters entitled to vote in person at each station and should not include postal voters.

Provision of bank details to Election Claims Unit

The Election Claims Unit (ECU) are collecting bank details information from Counting Officers to enable them to make advance payments into those accounts by the end of the first week in April. However, by the deadline of 11 March only 269 out of 452 counting areas had provided information to ECU. This week we have contacted all those who have not yet supplied the information to remind them that they need to return it (on the ECU's Form C) by 23 March if they want to ensure they receive money in the first tranche of payments.

Circulars and publications

This week we have published online our [booklet](#) giving impartial information on the elections and referendum taking place on 5 May. Copies of this booklet will be distributed in Northern Ireland at the end of March and in the rest of the UK in the first week in April.

Since I sent out last week's bulletin, we have also issued the following circulars:

- EC09/2011: Postal voting at the elections and referendum on the voting system for UK Parliamentary elections on 5 May 2011
- EC10/2011: Public awareness work by Counting Officers and their staff
- EC11/2011: Reporting on the administration of scheduled elections and the referendum on the voting system for UK Parliamentary elections on 5 May 2011– data collection and feedback
- EC12/2011: Accessing the registers of political parties and permitted participants; and the use of emblems by candidates standing under a joint description at local government elections in England and Wales

[Three new template press releases](#) are now available on the Do Politics website for use in the run up to the registration deadline. We will also be issuing a further template on 25 March aimed at people voting by post, which will remind them of the need to read the instructions carefully to reduce the risk of votes being rejected.

Meetings

On Tuesday 22 March a pre-referendum briefing for Counting Officers in the South West of England will be held at the Sandy Park Conference Centre in Exeter, and a joint Electoral Commission and ACPOS briefing for Scotland will be taking place in Edinburgh.

If you have any comments or suggestions to make about the content or format of these bulletins then please contact Barbara Lines
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