

The elections on 22 May 2014

This briefing note provides an update on the work that the Commission is currently planning to raise public awareness about the need for voters to register in advance of the European Parliamentary, English local government elections, mayoral elections and local government elections in Northern Ireland on Thursday 22 May 2014.

We are keen that parties, organisations and individuals who have an interest in encouraging participation have this information so they can use it to inform their planning ahead of the elections. Although some aspects of our plans may change we would expect the main elements to remain as they are described.

One of the particular challenges next May is finding ways ensure as many overseas electors are registered as possible. They will be able to vote in a UK poll for the first time since 2011 and cannot, for obvious reasons, be reached as easily as the domestic electorate. **Our plans are described in the note and we would welcome any additional help others can provide in reaching this particular audience by, for example, identifying networks or websites accessed by expatriates.** Contact details to do this are below and we are grateful for the help we have already received.

The note also provides information that may be useful when talking to constituents about the elections.

We are sending this to parliamentarians, parties and others who have expressed an interest in our public awareness plans for the elections. As in previous years, we have provided [a suite of guidance for candidates and agents](#) and guidance for Returning Officers (available 20 December), and will be monitoring the performance of ROs against our [performance standards](#).

We will also be producing a more detailed briefing in the second week of February to share some of the materials that we will be using during the campaign. **If you would find it helpful for this second briefing to cover any particular topics please let us know by Friday 17 January.**

To do this, or for any other questions you may have about this briefing, you can contact Rosemary Davenport on rdavenport@electoralcommission.org.uk or 0207 271 0530.

Background

On 22 May 2014 there will be European Parliamentary elections, English local government elections, mayoral elections, and likely local government elections in Northern Ireland. If the Minister signs the commencement order confirming the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) as expected, the elections on 22 May 2014 will be the last major elections before this transition begins in England and Wales. IER is due to commence in Scotland after the Referendum on Scottish Independence on 18 September 2014.

The European Parliamentary elections will take place UK-wide with a total electorate of around 46 million. In 2014 the cycle of local government elections in England includes the major population centres - all 32 London boroughs and all 36 Metropolitan boroughs in Tyne & Wear, Greater Manchester, South and West Yorkshire, Merseyside and the West Midlands. There are also five mayoral elections taking place in Hackney, Lewisham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Watford. Elections to the 11 new shadow councils in Northern Ireland are also likely to take place.

To vote in a **local government election** a person must be registered to vote and also be one of the following:

- a British citizen living in the UK
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen living in the UK
- a citizen of the Republic of Ireland living in the UK
- a European Union citizen living in the UK
- someone registered to vote as a Crown Servant
- someone registered to vote as a service voter

The same people are eligible to vote in the **European Parliamentary elections** with the addition of British citizens living overseas, provided they have registered as overseas electors. To register as an overseas elector, expatriates must have been registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years.

European Union citizen living in the UK can only vote in the European Parliamentary elections if they have declared that they intend to vote in the UK, as opposed to in their home member state.

People can find more information about the elections, and download a voter registration form, by visiting our website, www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. The deadline to register to vote in the elections is **midnight on Wednesday 6 May**.

The Commission's public awareness plans in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Our plans for public awareness for IER include a commitment to run a major **registration** campaign ahead of the May 2014 elections in order to ensure as many people as possible are on the GB electoral registers prior to the transition to IER in summer 2014.

We plan to run a two to three-week campaign encouraging people to register to vote by the deadline of 7 May. This will use media we know is particularly accessed by under-registered groups, which include young people, recent homemovers, people living in private rented accommodation and from BME communities. Due to the specific communication challenges in reaching overseas electors and service voters the campaigns that reach these groups are described separately below.

In terms of **voter information**, we expect the legislation for the European Parliament elections to specify, in line with our previous recommendations on how to minimise voter confusion, the use of designs for ballot papers and voter information notices which have been tested with the public to ensure that the instructions on how to complete ballot papers are clear. This should help avoid confusion for voters, particularly in areas with combined elections.

We will provide template resources and tools for EROs and ROs to use locally, and use as many 'earned' media opportunities as we can to boost the message nationally (e.g. articles in national and local media, interviews). In areas where there are mayoral elections we will provide particular help to Returning Officers and their communication teams to ensure they have the resources to explain the different ballot papers to voters.

We also plan to run a '**registration**' and '**voter information**' campaign in Northern Ireland similar to ones we have conducted for previous elections. The voter information campaign will remind voters of the need for photographic identification, how to vote and where to find further information on the elections.

Overseas voters campaign

There are few reliable statistics of the numbers of British citizens living overseas, however we do know that the potential electorate is far larger than the total number of UK citizens currently registered as overseas voters.¹ Our aim is to deliver a campaign that achieves at least 25,000 overseas voter registration form downloads from our website, www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. This would make our campaign three times as effective as that held prior to the 2009 European elections. This is a challenging objective, but it is vital to ensure as many expatriates as possible are registered to vote ahead of the elections in May.

To achieve this, we will be running an online registration campaign that predominantly, but not exclusively, targets British citizens living overseas in the top 10 countries with the highest number of British expats (Australia, USA, Spain, Canada, Ireland, France, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany, and the UAE²). We are also exploring options around how we can target countries with lower numbers of British expatriates.

Online advertising is a cost-efficient way of reaching British citizens living overseas. Based on this, we will advertise on specific websites that we know are commonly used by British citizens overseas, such as the BBC and the websites of British newspapers.

Our campaign will also include advertising that is triggered in response to people using Google search terms that indicate an interest in UK elections, and advertising aimed at people who originally set up email accounts in the UK but are now accessing them overseas.

We are also looking at creating radio adverts which have a long life span and can be played when required by overseas radio stations aimed at expats, such as Talk Radio Europe.

In addition, we will be carrying out overseas media relations activity beyond what we have attempted in previous campaigns. This will highlight both how to register and how to vote by post or proxy. We have been working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to establish a process for distributing a number of template press releases, tweets and articles amongst the expat media to achieve this. We will also be organising an overseas 'registration day' to encourage voters to take action before the registration deadline.

¹ Recent estimates put the number of UK citizens living overseas at between 4.7 million (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006) and 5.5 million (The World Bank, 2010). At 1 December 2012 there were 19,500 UK citizens registered as overseas voters.

² Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

Service voters campaign

We are working with the Ministry of Defence to target service voters as we have in previous years. Every year the MOD, with the support of the Electoral Commission, launches an information campaign to encourage Service personnel to register to vote, to keep their registration details up to date and to generally improve awareness of the need to register and the options which are available.

The campaign ahead of May's elections will launch in February and will include adverts in the three forces magazines; Navy News, Soldier and RAF News.

We will also carry out media relations work to encourage print and broadcast media with armed forces audiences to carry our registration message.

As part of the campaign, the MoD have agreed to ask Unit Registration Officers (UROs) to hold a Service Registration Day during February/March. The Commission will provide a pack of material, including a PowerPoint presentation, for UROs to use on the day in support of this. Campaign information packs for units will also be available to order direct from the Electoral Commission and will include promotional posters and registration leaflets.

What you can do to help people register to vote

You can help people to register to vote by sharing a link to our website, www.aboutmyvote.co.uk, where more information and printable voter registration forms are available.

We also have a number of downloadable resources on the '[participation resources](#)' section of our website. You can use these to promote voter registration. They include:

- A [information booklet and voter registration form](#) aimed at members of the armed forces.
- A registration [poster template](#).
- A [leaflet promoting voter registration](#) amongst students.

Further resources, such as email signatures, posters and web banners, are currently being developed and we will be able to provide links to these in our follow-up briefing in February.

We would also be happy to provide information directly to other organisations with an interest in encouraging participation and you can put people in touch with us using the contact details below.

For further information, please contact **Rosemary Davenport**, Senior Media Relations and Public Affairs Officer, on 0207 271 0530 or rdavenport@electoralcommission.org.uk