

electoral administration bulletin

The
Electoral
Commission



Issue 225 (England) – 15 August 2018

Consultation on the Electoral Commission's electoral observers' scheme and Code of Practice

On 9 August we launched a consultation on proposed changes to our statutory observers' scheme and Code of Practice for electoral observers.

Background

As you may know, the Commission is required to administer a scheme for the accreditation of electoral observers across the United Kingdom and produce a Code of Practice setting out how observers should apply and what they must do.

The current scheme has been running for over ten years. Following the elections in 2016 and 2017 we gave a commitment to review it and the Code of Practice for observers.

What are we proposing?

In the first half of this year, we have looked at our existing scheme and Code of Practice to see what lessons we could learn from their first ten years in operation.

Overall we found that our scheme works well and is one of the strongest schemes of its kind. However, during the review, we identified a range of potential improvements to the scheme. These include clarifying and modernising the application process, clarifying expectations about the role of observers, improving guidance on the practicalities of being an observer and establishing a voluntary feedback process for observers. We've also undertaken to update the language and presentation of the Code to make it more accessible.

How can I contribute?

The consultation paper, which seeks views on our proposed changes and the revised Code of Practice for electoral observers, is available on [our website](#).

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Information on and a link to the Commission's evaluation, which was published on 1 August.

EA Bulletins are issued on a regular basis. They are one of our key channels for communicating with Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their staff. Past issues of Bulletins for England, Scotland and Wales are available [here](#). You can also [subscribe to the EA Bulletins](#).

Please [keep us informed](#) of any staff changes within your team. This will help us to keep our mailing lists up-to-date.

We are sending you this newsletter as it contains important information about the Electoral Commission's work which is relevant to you. The newsletter forms part of the Electoral Commission's public task which has its basis in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We will manage your personal information and contact details

We want to hear from as many people as possible. Please send your response to:

EAConsultation@electoralcommission.org.uk. The consultation closes on **Wednesday 31 October**.

Electoral Commission evaluation of postal and proxy voting pilots

Last week, on 1 August, the Electoral Commission published its [statutory evaluation of the May 2018 postal and proxy voting pilots](#).

Pilots

The pilots were carried out during May's local elections in Peterborough, Slough and Tower Hamlets.

Each pilot consisted of a leaflet in postal ballot packs with additional information on postal voting and what voters should do if they were concerned about electoral fraud. Returning Officers also contacted a sample of voters to check they had applied for a postal vote. In Peterborough, people voting as proxies were required to show identification at polling stations.

As part of our evaluation, we collected data supplied by each local authority on the activities undertaken as part of the pilot, interviewed electoral administrators and analysed data from a survey of postal voters carried out by the Cabinet Office.

Findings and recommendations

The Commission found that the schemes were well-run; however we have not been able to draw firm conclusions on their impact.

Feedback from the pilot areas suggested that these processes were manageable for electoral staff. We also noted that well-designed and carefully worded information is likely to help encourage people to report evidence of electoral fraud.

The evaluation concludes that it is not clear that further pilot schemes of these postal voting measures would be helpful. Returning Officers can already choose to include leaflets in voting packs and carry out follow up activity without any change to legislation. Instead, the Commission recommends that the UK's governments should look at giving Returning Officers more flexibility to cancel or reissue postal votes where a voter reports that their postal vote has been taken or completed by someone else.

On the Peterborough pilot requiring proxy voters to show identification, the Commission recently made [recommendations for further testing of voter identification requirements in polling stations](#). These recommendations apply equally to any requirement for people who vote as a proxy on behalf of someone else to show identification. The Commission recommended that any further voter identification pilots should include participation from councils with a mixture of rural and urban areas, and different demographic profiles.

The Electoral Commission

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