

Caitlin Lindenberg

From: FOI
Sent: 14 July 2016 15:15
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FOI 123/16 - EU Referendum Postal Votes

Dear [REDACTED],

Our Ref: FOI 123/16

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 dated 5th July 2016.

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

Your request is in bold below followed by our response.

You have requested:

I would like to make a formal freedom of information request relating to the recent EU referendum held in the UK on 23rd June 2016.

Can you please provide details on:

- **when were postal votes sent out to people eligible to vote who are currently abroad?**
- **How many postal votes were sent out by country?**
- **what return postage was put on the return envelope for postal voters living in the EU, and living in other foreign countries, by country?**
- **What was the size / weight / thickness of the return envelopes? Was that return postage sufficient?**
- **how many postal votes were returned to the UK by the deadline of the referendum, by country of dispatch?**
- **how many postal votes were returned to the UK after the deadline of the referendum, by country of dispatch?**
- **what was the result of the referendum vote for all valid postal votes received in time?**

Our response is as follows:

For the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, the chair of the Electoral Commission, Jenny Watson, was the Chief Counting Officer (CCO). The CCO was responsible for the management of the referendum and for certifying the overall result.

Counting Officers were responsible for the administration of the poll in their local area. There were 382 Counting Officers at the referendum – one for each local authority area in Great Britain, one for Northern Ireland and one for Gibraltar. Their duties included setting up and running polling stations, managing the postal voting process and counting the votes for their area.

The CCO issued directions to Counting Officers relating to the discharge of their functions. The CCO [consulted on her proposed directions](#) in August 2015, and published a [response to the consultation](#) and confirmed her directions in November 2015. She also provided guidance and resources to support Counting Officers with preparing for and delivering the poll, all of which can be accessed from [our website](#).

When were postal votes sent out to people eligible to vote who are currently abroad?

The CCO directed that Counting Officers despatch postal ballot packs being sent to overseas addresses between Monday 23 May and Friday 27 May.

However, we are aware of three voting areas –Durham, Kingston upon Hull and Castle Point - where there were issues with the initial despatch of postal votes to overseas addresses which affected a total of 709 electors, and we published a [statement](#) on this issue on our website. In order to promote transparency and confidence in the administration of the referendum, the Chief Counting Officer published a log to capture issues that, in her opinion, could have had a widespread or significant impact on the delivery of the referendum or have affected confidence in the result. This issue was also recorded in this log, which can be found at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum>.

Postal votes for those electors who registered to vote and/or applied for a postal vote close to the prescribed window for the first despatch of overseas postal votes will have been sent in subsequent issues of postal votes, the precise timing for which will have varied by voting area. The CCO did not direct on the timing of subsequent issues but made clear in guidance that Counting Officers should put arrangements in place for subsequent issues which ensure that postal votes are delivered to those electors who have applied to register to vote and/or to vote by post close to the deadlines as quickly as possible in each case.

How many postal votes were sent out by country?

We do not hold this information. As mentioned above, the 382 local Counting Officers were responsible for administering the postal voting process for those electors who were registered to vote in their voting area, including overseas electors.

What return postage was put on the return envelope for postal voters living in the EU, and living in other foreign countries, by country?

The CCO directed Counting Officers to put arrangements in place with Royal Mail for an international business response licence and ensure that this was used on all return envelopes included in postal ballot packs to be sent to overseas addresses. The intention of this was to help to ensure that all overseas electors could return their postal ballot pack free of charge from whatever country they were in.

The international business response licence applies in over 200 countries. A list of the countries it does not apply to or where service is known to be affected can be seen [here](#).

What was the size / weight / thickness of the return envelopes? Was that return postage sufficient?

The dimensions of the return envelopes were fixed by individual local Counting Officers, who were responsible for the production of postal voting stationery for their voting area.

The international business response licence will have covered the return of these envelopes from all countries apart from those in the list linked to above.

How many postal votes were returned to the UK by the deadline of the referendum, by country of dispatch?

Figures provided to us by Royal Mail indicate that 93,812 postal votes were returned to the UK and processed through their international business response mechanism. We do not hold a breakdown of this figure by country of despatch.

How many postal votes were returned to the UK after the deadline of the referendum, by country of dispatch?

Figures provided to us by Royal Mail indicate that 4,375 postal votes arrived in the UK through the international business response mechanism between 23 June and 30 June. We do not hold a breakdown of this figure by country of despatch.

What was the result of the referendum vote for all valid postal votes received in time?

This information is not available. Postal ballot papers must, by law, be mixed with ballot papers from polling stations before being counted and so it is not possible to determine separate totals for postal votes.

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

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at:
<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information-requests/how-do-i-make-an-foi-request>

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

Yours sincerely

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