

The Electoral Commission

Media briefing

EU Referendum count processes and results

23 June 2016

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1. How the count works

Although the way in which ballot papers are verified and counted are the same as at other polls, the management structure for the referendum differs from that used at elections. Instead of Returning Officers, Counting Officers (COs) are responsible for the voting process in their area. There are 382 COs for the referendum, one for each local government area in Great Britain, plus one each for Northern Ireland and Gibraltar. The Chief Electoral Officer is the CO for Northern Ireland. In most cases, the same polling stations and count venues that are used by local authorities in other polls will be used in the referendum.

Unlike at elections, Regional Counting Officers (RCOs) will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the referendum in their electoral region, and will collate the local totals into a regional total. In addition to the Northern Ireland counting area, there are 11 electoral regions across Great Britain.

A final significant difference to elections is that the Chair of the Electoral Commission, is the Chief Counting Officer (CCO) for the referendum and responsible for certifying the outcome of the referendum.

You can see how this management structure operates in the four principal stages of the count process, which are:

1) Receipt of ballot boxes

- At the close of poll, sealed ballot boxes and any postal votes handed in to polling stations are collected and transported to the count venue for each of the 382 local counting areas.

2) Verification

- Ballot papers are verified by counting the number of ballot papers (but not the actual votes at this stage) in each ballot box and the number of unused and spoiled ballot papers. This is reconciled with the ballot paper account from the polling station to ensure all ballot papers are accounted for. A local turnout figure can now be announced.

3) Counting of the votes

- Count staff can now begin to sort and count the ballot papers. Some 'doubtful' ballot papers will require to be adjudicated and may be rejected if the voter's intention cannot be determined. The Commission has provided [guidance](#) to all Counting Officers on how to deal with 'doubtful' ballot papers so that there is a consistent approach to these types of ballots.
- Once all the votes have been counted and doubtful ballot papers adjudicated, the Counting Officer will relay the local total to their respective Regional Counting Officer who, if satisfied that they are accurate, will approve the figures, authorising the declaration of the local total. This aspect of the

process and those that follow from this point are different from those that apply at elections.

4) Declaration of local totals, regional totals and the result

- Once this authorisation is given, the local Counting Officer will make their local declaration.



- The Regional Counting Officer will collate all the local totals in their electoral region into a regional total and submit this to the Chief Counting Officer) for approval. Once the Chief Counting Officer approves the regional total, the Regional Counting Officer will make a declaration of the regional total.



- The Chief Counting Officer will collate the regional totals. Once all the 11 regional totals and the total for Northern Ireland have been received, approved and declared, the Chief Counting Officer will declare the referendum result. These different declaration levels are unique to referendums.

2. How and when results will be announced

Count processes will be carried out overnight, starting at the close of poll, at 10pm. Announcements should be made by Counting Officers (COs) on the local turnout once the verification process has been completed. COs will submit local totals to their respective Regional Counting Officer (RCO) for approval. Once this approval has been given the CO will declare the total for their voting area. COs must declare the total number of ballot papers counted, the number of votes cast for either outcome, and the number of ballot papers rejected, giving the reasons for each rejection category.

You can find a spreadsheet outlining the estimated declaration times for each local counting area [here](#).

The RCO will collate and submit the regional total to the Chief Counting Officer (CCO) who will approve them. Once this approval has been given the RCO will declare the total for their region.

The CCO will be based in Manchester Town Hall and will only declare the national referendum result from there once all regional totals and the total for Northern Ireland have been approved and declared. In addition, once polls have closed at 10pm, the CCO will introduce the event. Announcements will also be provided on the national turnout figure, the regional total for the North West by the RCO for the region, and we are in discussions with the lead campaign groups as to whether they would like to make any speeches on the night, including whether there will be an

announcement at the point when the total number of ballots cast for either outcome exceeds fifty per cent.

The estimated time for the national declaration is around breakfast time on Friday 24 June, although there is considerable uncertainty about when this will be given that it is dependent on all 382 local totals being declared. See Section 3 for information on attending the national result event.

3. How to find out the results

Counting Officers will declare their local result at their respective count events, meaning that attending these events will ensure you hear the local results first. We also advise Counting Officers to make announcements throughout the verification and count processes to keep count attendees informed.

Each regional count collation event will be organised by the respective Regional Counting Officer for that area in Great Britain, and the Chief Electoral Office in Northern Ireland. These events will be combined with the local counts for the local counting area where the regional count collation is being hosted, so you may be able to report on the counting of ballot papers at these events. Regional Counting Officers will make their respective regional declarations at these events once all Counting Officers within their region have made their respective declarations.

The Commission will not have a live results feed on our website. Broadcasters running live count event programmes and newswires have been given access to a feed of data from the referendum result collation system that we will be using, so will be able to get information in real-time throughout the night.

Please note that local and regional totals will only be sent to broadcasters on the data feed once we receive confirmation they have been announced locally, which means there will be a slight delay between local / regional declarations and the information broadcasters / newswires receive from us. Local authorities will also publish results on their respective websites once Counting Officers have declared their local result and we are encouraging everyone to use #EURefResults when tweeting totals.

Once the Chief Counting Officer has declared the final result all the totals at local, regional and national level will be on the Commission's website [here](#).

We will also publish a full data set of the results for download.

Attending a local count event in Great Britain

If you would like to attend a local count in one of the 382 local counting areas then you should contact the relevant local authority to get permission from the respective Counting Officer. If you want to report on actual counting of ballot papers then these are the events where this activity will take place.

Attending a regional count collation event in Great Britain

The details for each Regional Counting Officer and the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland press team are on page 5 and can be used to register interest in attending a regional count collation event.

Members of the press who would have liked to attend the national result event in Manchester Town Hall needed to obtain accreditation. The deadline for gaining accreditation has now passed and it is no longer possible to apply.

Please also note that there will be no physical counting of ballot papers at the result event in Manchester Town Hall. The count for Manchester will take place in Manchester Central Convention Centre and separate admittance arrangements apply. Contact the Manchester City Council for more details on attending that count.

4. Count provisions in Northern Ireland

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the Counting Officer for Northern Ireland and will declare the overall total for Northern Ireland at the Titanic Exhibition Centre, Belfast.

Counting in Northern Ireland will take place across eight count venues and will be counted by each UK Parliamentary constituency. Announcements will be made at each count venue giving the provisional total for each constituency. However the Chief Electoral Officer will make the overall declaration for Northern Ireland.

Members of the media who wish to attend any of the counts should apply for accreditation on the Electoral Office website: <http://www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-Centre>

5. Recount provisions

The referendum rules do not provide for a national recount to be carried out in any circumstances. Any request for a recount of votes will be at local count level and is for the Counting Officer to determine. We expect local recounts to be granted if a specific issue has been identified with the process in that counting area, rather than simply when the local totals are close.

The national referendum result is only subject to challenge by way of judicial review.

An application for judicial review would need to be lodged within six weeks of the certification that is being challenged being made.

6. Contact details

Region	Local Authority	Contact	Email
East	Chelmsford	01245 606900	publicity@chelmsford.gov.uk
East Midlands	Kettering	01536 534 206	Mediaenquiries@kettering.gov.uk
London	London Councils	020 7934 9970	LCpress@londoncouncils.gov.uk
North East	Sunderland	0191 561 1137	media@sunderland.gov.uk
North West	Manchester	0161 234 1010	press.office@manchester.gov.uk
Northern Ireland	Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI)	028 9044 6660	media@eoni.org.uk
Scotland	Falkirk	01324 506055	pressoffice@falkirk.gov.uk
South East	Southampton	02380 83 2000	communications@southampton.gov.uk
South West & Gibraltar	Poole Gibraltar Parliament	01202 633295 (+350) 20074186	communications@poole.gov.uk
Wales	Flintshire	01352 702112	corporate_communications@flintshire.gov.uk
West Midlands	Birmingham	0121 303 3287	Press.office@birmingham.gov.uk
Yorkshire and the Humber	Leeds	0113 395 0244	communicationsteam@leeds.gov.uk