

Spring Polls Bulletin 12: 21 April 2011

Dear Colleagues

I wanted to send round just a few final points and reminders in the final run up to polling day and the count.

Observers

The observers scheme established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 is applicable to the 5 May polls, and as you may well receive a visit from an accredited observer over the referendum and election period, I thought it might be helpful to summarise some of the key points of the scheme.

Individuals or organisations may apply to the Commission to be accredited to observe the proceedings at the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, the poll and the verification and counting of the votes. Once accredited, observers are entitled to attend these proceedings in any counting area in the UK without having to provide any advance notice. It is an important principle of electoral observation that observers do not have to let authorities know where they intend to observe and that they are given appropriate access to proceedings.

You and your staff will be able to clearly identify properly accredited observers as they will carry photographic identification issued by the Commission. You can find an example of an observer badge in the polling station handbook.

All accredited observers are listed on an observer register on the Commission's website. While there is no deadline for applying to become an observer, accreditation only comes into effect three days after issue, so a final register of observers listing all observers accredited in time for the polls on 5 May will be published by Tuesday 3 May, with an updated list containing all those observers entitled to attend any counts on 6 May published on Wednesday 4 May. The register of accredited observers can be downloaded from our website at:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/excel_doc/0009/57285/Accredited_observers.xls.

For further guidance on observers, please see our observer [Code of Practice](#).

Verification and count

I thought it would be helpful to highlight again the legislative requirements around completing the verification and declaring results. As I set out in module 4 of my instructions - 'Verification and count' - and highlighted in Spring Polls Bulletin 8, the verification of all contests must be completed before you can declare the local referendum total or any election results. This does not mean that the counting of votes cannot begin before the verification of all ballot papers in the voting area has been completed, only that the results of any

particular poll cannot be declared. The verification process will have been completed once the statement of verification for each poll has been prepared and signed.

Counting Agents

As you will be aware, the deadline for the notification of appointment of counting agents is Tuesday 26 April. We have produced [a form](#) that referendum agents can use for this purpose if they wish. However, there is no statutory requirement that the notification is made on a particular form, only that it is made in writing and gives the name and address of the counting agents who have been appointed. This means that referendum agents are able to give you the necessary notification by e-mail if they wish. Referendum agents are also able to designate one of their counting agents who will be entitled to request a re-count, and this designation needs to be made at the same time as that person is appointed as a counting agent.

Telephone Lines

BT has provided us with contact details for their teams, should you still need to arrange for additional phone lines to be installed in your count venues, or if you have run into difficulties with these installations.

BT Services may be ordered via contacting the Parliamentary Helpline 0800 200 789 (Option 1 Monday – Friday 8.00am – 6.00pm).

If you need further help, having already spoken to the Parliamentary Helpline, then please get in touch with one of the following BT staff members:

Michelle Burns, michelle.burns@bt.com 0141 220 8949
Colin Robinson, colin.2.robinson@bt.com 01691 666 411
Sean Donovan, sean.3.donovan@bt.com 07711 446 232

Press releases and interest from the media

A final [press release template](#) is available on our 'Do Politics' website, this time focusing on polling day information for voters. (The link is situated on the England local elections page, but is suitable for use by any local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales). This includes a reminder about the public information booklet and lets voters know that staff will not be able to provide this in the polling station.

You may also be interested to see our [briefing for regional media](#) on the 5 May polls. Please do feel free to send this link on to local media contacts if you feel that this would help increase their understanding of your work.

There have been a number of requests for interviews from the media to explain first-past-the-post and the alternative vote. Please pass these, and any other requests about the overall conduct or subject of the referendum, to the Electoral Commission Press Office on 020 7271 0704.

Out of hours support over the next two weeks

Just to remind you, if you need advice and guidance on any of the Bank Holidays, our offices in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and across the English regions will be open for business between 10am and 5pm on each of those days. You can also contact us for urgent assistance on our out-of-hours number (01392 314617) between 5.30pm and 10pm on weekdays and between 10am and 5pm on weekends.

Publications

Last Friday, we issued a revised version of the [count protocol](#), which is available on our website.

If you have any comments or suggestions to make about the content or format of these bulletins, please contact Barbara Lines (blines@electoralcommission.org.uk).