

## Spring Polls Bulletin 2

Dear Colleagues

I hope you found last week's bulletin to be a useful way to keep track of current developments in the run up to the Spring Polls.

I'm particularly keen for these emails to provide you with clear answers to queries that are being raised separately in different parts of the UK. I'd therefore be grateful if you would approach the Commission directly about any concerns that you have, so that we can keep track of regional and national trends.

The Commission has staff based in offices across the UK who work with our teams in London to provide you with advice on any issues that you raise. Their [contact details](#) are available on our website and they are always happy to talk to you about any queries that you may have.

Live issues:

### **Bill progress**

You will no doubt have seen the media coverage this week of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies (PVSC) Bill's continued progress through Parliament. The Bill is currently completing its passage through the House of Lords and the Commission is continuing to brief Parliamentarians on key amendments and to monitor its progress closely.

Three key changes to note are the re-inclusion of the 5 May date for the referendum, the introduction of a 40% turnout threshold in order for the referendum to be binding and the amendments to grant a postal vote to any person who is on the postal voters list for any poll with which the referendum is combined, and who is entitled to vote in the referendum. Similar arrangements have been put in place for proxy and postal proxy voters.

While the Commission does not take a view on whether or not there should be a threshold applied to the referendum, we are raising concerns with the Government and Parliament about the need for more clarity (about the calculation of the threshold) in order for the provision to be workable.

### **Voting rights for prisoners**

You may also have been following the discussion in the UK Parliament and the media of the European Court of Human Rights ruling on the voting rights of prisoners.

The UK Government has not yet introduced any legislation on the voting rights of prisoners. The Government has stated that the right to vote will be restricted to UK Westminster Parliamentary and European Parliament elections only, and not to other elections or referendums.

### **Backs of ballot papers**

Following the publication on 4 February of the example template for the front of the referendum ballot paper (see [Alert 158](#)), we have received a number of queries about the ballot paper reverse. The PVSC Bill states that the back of the referendum ballot paper must contain the following information:

- the ballot paper number
- the other Unique Identifying Mark
- the words: 'Referendum on the voting system for United Kingdom parliamentary elections'
- the name of your voting area
- the date of the poll

In England, the voting area is the local authority and in Wales and Scotland, it is the National Assembly/Scottish Parliament constituency. The voting area in Northern Ireland encompasses the whole of Northern Ireland.

### **Publications and Materials**

#### 3 March Wales referendum

All Counting Officers in Wales should have received copies of the polling station handbook and quick guide by today. Please contact Jo Nelson ([jnelson@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:jnelson@electoralcommission.org.uk) / 0292 034 6803) if you are yet to receive yours.

#### 5 May elections and referendum

This week our Electoral Administration team have published [guidance for candidates and agents standing at elections on 5 May](#) in Great Britain with Welsh translations available on Monday. This means that all of the polling station training products, the nomination forms and the main candidates and agents guidance documents for 5 May that were highlighted in Circular EC02/2011 will be available on our website. I'm sorry that we were not able to publish the last of

these until this week. Our website also includes a [list of all our outstanding products and dates for publication](#), including the postal voting quick-start guide which will be available next Friday, 18 February.

We are currently consulting with the Working Group on our **draft polling station and polling booth notices** for use at referendum and combined polls on 5 May which will be available on our website on 25 February. I would like to highlight at this stage that these notices will need to be produced on either A3 or A2 paper, depending on the combination of polls in your local authority area (and therefore the length of text required).

You may also be interested to know that tomorrow our Party & Election Finance team will be publishing an expert paper for referendum campaigners on splitting campaign spending for reporting purposes (covering both the March and May referendums).

## **Meetings**

Last week Peter Wardle, Andrew Scallan and Tom Hawthorn spoke at the National Police SPOC Seminar in Birmingham to launch the joint Electoral Commission and Associations of Chief Police Officers guidance on [preventing and detecting electoral malpractice](#). If you would like an email copy of the day's proceedings which also included presentations from the Cabinet Office, Crown Prosecution Service and several senior police officers, then please contact your local SPOC.

The minutes from last week's RCO Communications Network will be available next week and I will include a link in next week's bulletin. The next RCO Communications Network Meeting will take place in March and will discuss lessons from the Welsh referendum, our public information resources and communication in the run up to and at the count.

The draft minutes of today's Steering Group will be available on our website shortly.

If you have any thoughts or suggestions to make on the format or content of these emails then please contact Barbara Lines ([blines@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:blines@electoralcommission.org.uk))