

## Spring Polls Bulletin 6 – 10 March 2011

Dear Colleagues

In this week's bulletin I'm providing further information on polling station notices, lost postal votes and ballot paper allocation, alongside details of our forthcoming circulars and planned meetings.

### Live Issues

#### **Polling station notices**

On 25 February we sent out EA Alert 160 to let you know we had published the polling station and polling booth notices for 5 May. The alert said that, other than notices relating to access etc., these were the only notices that polling staff should display. Some of you have queried this and I am happy to confirm that these are the only **voter instruction/guidance notices** that should be displayed. You should not display the versions of the guidance and instructions for voters notices contained in the PVSC Act or any notices about election offences that may be supplied as part of sundries packs provided by stationery suppliers. These include notices such as 'Warning to Voters', 'Offences at Elections', and 'Corrupt and Illegal Practices at Elections' which are not statutory notices and which we do not consider to be beneficial or useful to voters. Similarly the 'Notice of Poll' and 'Notice of Election Agents' are not required to be displayed at polling stations.

However, this restriction does not apply to any other statutory notice or information that is required to be displayed inside or outside polling stations, or made available to voters (for example, large-print copies of ballot papers).

#### **Lost postal votes**

We recently received a query on the interpretation of 'lost' ballot papers, and I thought it might be helpful to highlight our guidance on this point.

The legislation does not provide a definition of a 'lost' ballot paper, and we therefore think that this should be interpreted broadly in order to prevent voters from being disenfranchised through no fault of their own.

Postal voters may ask for confirmation that their postal voting statement has been marked as returned at any time after the issue of postal ballot packs and before the close of poll. If an elector is advised that their postal voting statement has not been received, then they are entitled to request a replacement postal ballot pack.

Counting Officers can only refuse this request if they are not satisfied as to the identity of the voter or if they have reason to doubt the elector's assertion that

they have not received the pack, or have lost their ballot paper, postal voting statement or envelopes

### **Allocation of 100% of ballot papers to polling stations**

We have received several enquiries asking whether my direction to provide 100% of ballot papers to polling stations applies to election ballot papers as well as to referendum ballot papers. Under the combination rules in the PVSC Act (through the application of the relevant combination regulations), the equipment of polling stations – which includes the provision of the number of ballot papers to polling stations - becomes a function of the Counting Officer. This means that our direction to allocate 100% of ballot papers to polling stations applies to both the referendum and election ballot papers.

I'm pleased to say that this is one of the few significant queries we have received so far directly relating to the elections rather than to the referendum. We know that the majority of Counting Officers are focussing on both elections and the referendum and we are happy to receive and try to answer any other election related queries you may have.

### **Circulars and publications**

Today we are issuing a circular providing guidance on the postal voting amendment in the PVSC Act, as promised in last week's bulletin. Tomorrow we will be sending out a communications-related circular on the resources we have developed to help Counting Officers and their staff to encourage participation, and providing links to the suite of stakeholder resources we have published to assist with this work. This circular will also reference the restriction on central or local government publishing promotional material about a referendum within 28 days of the poll. I hope this will be useful for those of you who are putting time and effort into raising awareness of the spring polls with voters.

We'll also be sending out a circular outlining our requirements for the return of electoral data, with links to all the relevant forms and guidance on our website. The circular will also include a link to a feedback form for Counting Officers / Returning Officers. We'd also like to reiterate our earlier call for **volunteers** to supply some further data. We're interested in the proportion of polling station votes cast at different times of day, and in the number of postal votes handed in at polling stations after 6pm on polling day. If you plan to record this information and would be happy to share it with us please get in touch with Will Reburn in the Commission's Research and Evaluation Team – [wreburn@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:wreburn@electoralcommission.org.uk).

This week we have published [media handbooks for the 5 May polls](#) and tomorrow we will post PDFs of the [ballot papers and information booklets being produced](#) on our website, which you can use in local media work. I hope this will help voters to become familiar with these materials before 5 May and feel confident when using them. We know that many voluntary sector organisations find this material particularly useful – if you can think of organisations locally that might like to know of it, please do pass the link on.

## **Meetings**

The minutes from the Elections and Referendums Steering Group, which is being held tomorrow, and the Steering Group's Communications subgroup (who are meeting today) will be available shortly on our website.

Pre referendum briefings for London and East Midlands Counting Officers will take place on 14 March in London and on 16 March in Kettering, respectively.

If you have any comments or suggestions to make about the content or format of these bulletins then please contact Barbara Lines

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