Managing a local government election in England: guidance for Returning Officers

A good practice guidance manual

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process.

LGEE07G

© The Flectoral Commission 2007

The Electoral Commission Trevelyan House Great Peter Street London SW1P 2HW

Tel: 020 7271 0500 Fax: 020 7271 0505

info@electoralcommission.org.uk www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Please note:

All relevant changes are referred to in the appropriate part of the guidance on the basis that the Regulations will be made as laid. The Commission will notify Returning Officers if this is not the case and this guidance may be withdrawn in whole or in part.

Contents

Part A – Context

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Legislation
 Recent changes to legislation
- The electoral framework
 Timing of elections
 Timetable
- 4. Roles and responsibilities
 The Electoral Registration Officer
 The Returning Officer
- 5. The role of other organisations
 The Electoral Commission
 Provision of advice
 Department for Constitutional Affairs
 Elections Petitions Office
 Royal Mail
- 6. Resources

Part B – Preparing for a local government election

1. Planning and risk management
A project management framework
Initial planning
Roles and responsibilities
Identifying and managing risk
Insurance
Reporting methods and techniques
Working with Royal Mail
Planning for post-election activities
Electoral forms and equipment

Managing contractors and suppliers Roles and responsibilities

Procurement

3. Election finance

Returning Officer's charges Receipts Information Vouchers

4. Equal access

Planning for access
Legislation
Language
General issues – good practice
Guidance and advice
Electoral registration
Polling stations
Access for candidates, agents and observers

Polling places and polling stations

5. Venues for election activities

Issue, receipt and opening of postal votes Count venue Briefings Getting equipment to the polling stations and count venue Use of schools and rooms by candidates

6. Staffing

Returning Officer's staff Training

7. Electoral integrity

Secrecy provisions
Key electoral offences
Non-electoral offences
Dealing with allegations of offences
at the election
Security
Election observers

8. Publicity and the media

Planning communication activities Statutory and other notices Managing public enquiries Managing media relations

9. Resources

Key contacts

Part C – Action before the poll

1. Timetable

Changes to the timetable Election timetable

2. Register of electors

Legal requirements
Register to be used for nominations
Amending the electoral register –
clerical errors
Printing of polling station registers
Access and supply

3. Candidates and agents

4. Nomination process

Publication of the notice of election
The register of political parties
Delivery of nomination papers
Inspection of nomination papers
Form of nomination
Candidate's consent to nomination
Request for party emblem
Withdrawal of candidate
Nomination in more than one electoral area
Statement of persons nominated
Uncontested elections

5. Appointment of election agents

6. Death of a candidate

7. Production and distribution of poll cards Distribution

8. Production and allocation of ballot papers Form of ballot paper Allocation of ballot papers

9. Notices and equipment

Notice of poll Notice of situation of polling stations Polling station equipment, notices and supplies

Part D – Absent voting

Integrity issues and personal identifiers Integrity issues

Postal voting, houses in multiple occupation and establishments

2. Absent voting timetable and information

Timetable for absent voting Communicating the postal voting process Confirming receipt of postal voting statements

3. Applications

Content and supply of forms
Receipt of applications
Checking signatures and dates of birth on application forms

4. Proxy and postal proxy voting

Applications
Proxies for medical emergencies
Attestation
Limits on numbers of proxies
Acknowledging proxy and postal
proxy applications

5. Postal voting

Applying to vote by post
Processing absent vote applications
Acknowledging the outcome of
postal vote applications
Receipt of only one identifier

6. Absent voting records and lists

Supply of absent voting lists to candidates, election agents, registered political parties and elected representatives Inspection of absent voting records

7. The issue and distribution of postal ballot packs

Royal Mail good practice guidance Role of the Returning Officer Persons entitled to be present Requirement for secrecy

Timing of the issue

Preparation of postal vote stationery

Logistics

What the voter should receive

Procedure for issuing postal votes

Postal votes issuing process

Record keeping

Despatch

8. Replacement postal votes

Replacement of spoilt ballot papers Replacement of lost ballot papers

Receipt, opening and storage of postal votes

Receipt of postal votes

Security of postal ballots received

Recording and evidencing actions

The opening process

Postal ballot box

Opening the postal ballot paper envelopes

Verification of postal ballot papers

Matching up separated documents

Postal voting statements and the

matching process

Retrieval of cancelled postal votes

10. Postal votes to be included in the count

Receipt of postal ballot papers delivered to the polling station

Opening and verification of postal ballot papers that have been delivered to

polling stations

Form K – statement as to

postal ballot papers

11. Resources

Notification of secrecy requirements Instructions to temporary staff involved in the receipt and checking of absent vote application forms

Part E – The poll

Polling day issues for the Returning Officer and staff

Introduction Legislative changes Hours of poll Public enquiries

Polling station visits

Persons entitled to attend proceedings on

polling day

Responding to emergencies

Emergency proxy applications

Replacements for lost or spoilt postal vote

ballot packs

Clerical errors

Equipment

Guidance for polling station staff

2. Tellers and campaigners

3. Procedure on close of poll

4. Resources

Model layout for the polling station Equipment checklist Accessibility checklist for polling day – setting up a polling station Frequently asked questions for frontline staff on polling day

Part F – Verification and count

1. Count preparations

Planning

Venue

Staff

Security

Count venue plans

Designated areas

Outside the count venue

Inside the count venue

2. Attendance at the count

3. The count process

Receipt of ballot boxes Verification

Postal ballot papers Counting ballot papers

4. Doubtful ballot papers

Examples

5. Recounts

6. Equality of votes

Methods Procedure

7. Declaration of result

8. Storage and disposal of documents

9. Resources

Notification of secrecy requirements Example doubtful ballot papers

Part G – After the declaration of result

1. Return of documents

Forwarding documents to the Electoral Registration Officer Retention and public inspection of documents Marked register of electors and absent voting lists Copies of other documentation open to public inspection

2. Candidates' election expenses

Candidates' returns – election expenses

3. Returns to the Electoral Commission

Candidates' expenditure Other returns

4. Election petitions

Form of petition Costs

5. Resources

Access to election documentation after the election

Part H – Combination of polls

1. Introduction

2. Combination arrangements

Combined or not combined
Postponement of any poll at parish
council elections
The Returning Officers
Timetables

3. The franchise

4. Postal votes

Postal votes issued separately Combined issue of postal votes Other postal vote documentation

5. Notices and ballot boxes

Notice of poll Poll cards Polling station notices Ballot boxes

6. The poll

Marking the register
Corresponding number lists
Official mark on ballot papers
Return of postal votes to polling stations
Close of poll

7. The count and after

Attendance of counting agents
Verification procedure and the count
Death of a candidate
Expenses

Key



Highlights important administrative and good practice issues



Provides links to other parts of the guidance and to other materials and reference sources



Extracts from and key issues relating to electoral legislation