



The
Electoral
Commission

Part B – Planning and organisation

Greater London Authority elections:
guidance for Returning Officers

September 2019

In this guidance we use 'must' when we refer to a specific legal requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be recommended practice, but which are not legal requirements.

Translations and other formats

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1 Planning for the elections

1.1 To plan effectively for the elections, you should prepare a project plan, treat it as a ‘living document’, keep it under regular review, and use it to monitor progress.

1.2 You should ensure that your planning supports the delivery of the following outcomes:

- voters are able to vote easily and know that their votes will be counted in the way they intended
- it is easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with these rules, and they can have confidence in the management of the process and the results

1.3 Liaison between the Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO), Constituency Returning Officers (CROs) and Borough Returning Officers (BROs) should start at an early stage to support the delivery of a consistently high-quality experience for voters and those standing for election across London.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to develop and implement robust project planning processes. This should include evaluating the planning for and delivery of previous polls and identifying lessons learnt, updating plans as required. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place project planning documentation which is kept under regular review and which reflects lessons learned from previous polls. This part of the guidance sets out what this project planning documentation should cover.

1.4 Before starting your detailed planning, you should set out what you want to achieve and what success would look like. Your project plan should include clearly defined objectives and success measures. You should liaise with the GLRO at an early stage to ascertain their objectives and success measures so that you can reflect these in your planning.

1.5 If you have not already done so, you should evaluate the planning for, and delivery of, previous polls, identify what worked well and what did not, this should then inform your planning for this election. Your project plan for the election should also include a plan to evaluate procedures post-election and identify lessons learnt. Further guidance on reviewing election procedures can be found in [Part F – After the declaration of results](#).

1.6 You should ensure that your planning reflects the particular context and circumstances of the elections, such as any legislative changes which have come into effect. You will need to review your plans to ensure they outline your processes and the safeguards that you have in place, as they will provide a sound basis for you to meet your data protection obligations. Your council’s

data protection officer will be able to help you meet your requirements and ascertain best practice. In particular, you will need to ensure that you are registered with the ICO as a data controller.

Further detailed guidance on data protection legislation, including registering as a data controller, is contained in our resource on the [EU General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018](#).

1.7 For an overview of the particular aspects of context relevant to these polls which should underpin all aspects of your planning, see chapter 2 of [Part A - Returning Officer role and responsibilities](#).

1.8 As Returning Officer for the constituency, you will need to ensure that any practical implications resulting from your constituency including multiple boroughs are reflected in your planning. As part of this, it is important that CROs and BROs use the Memorandum of Understanding as a means of discussing and formalising roles and responsibilities, including the delegation of responsibilities.

1.9 Your project plan should cover contingency planning and business continuity arrangements. The continuity arrangements should include provisions to cover loss of staff and loss of venues during the election period. Guidance on developing continuity arrangements for these specific processes is provided in the relevant sections throughout this part of the guidance.

1.10 Your project plan should also identify the resources required. Once the scale of fees has been set for the election by the GLA you should reconcile projected costs for activities against the available budget.

1.11 The Commission has developed a template risk register that you may wish to use. The template provides some example risks and suggestions for mitigating those risks. In addition to the risks identified in the template you should also identify any other risks, including ones specific to your local circumstances, and how you would mitigate those.

2 Staffing

2.1 Your project plan should identify staffing requirements, including any necessary recruitment arrangements. It is essential that you identify the staff you will need and make timely appointments.

2.2 You should seek advice from your local authority's human resources department as necessary to ensure that the methods used to identify, recruit and employ staff are robust and comply with all legal requirements.

2.3 Following an assessment of the performance of staff used at previous electoral events, you may wish to write to staff used previously at an early stage in the planning process to check their availability.

Project team

2.4 You should establish a project team to support you in carrying out your functions and in delivering a well-run election. In addition to yourself, your project team should include:

- any appointed deputies
- other elections staff members
- BROs in your constituency
- Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in your constituency (where they are not also the BRO)
- any other key personnel you consider appropriate

2.5 The project team should also include any other key personnel you consider appropriate.

Deputies

2.6 You should ensure that deputy arrangements are in place in case you are unable to act personally. You may appoint deputies to discharge all or any of your duties. In particular, you should consider appointing the BROs in your constituency to act as your deputy for certain aspects of the polls in their borough or the City of London. Any appointed deputies should have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions they have been assigned. Appointments must be made in writing and should include details of the functions that the deputy is authorised to exercise on your behalf. The acceptance should also be made in writing.¹

2.7 A deputy is liable, in the same way as the GLRO and CRO, for a breach of official duty.²

Election office staff

2.8 Election office staff, with their experience of running elections, should be part of the project team. You should assess whether the team is adequately staffed or whether you will need to recruit any additional staff to support the effective delivery of the election.

Electoral Registration Officers

2.9 You will need to liaise closely with the ERO and staff for each of the local authorities to obtain the relevant registration and absent voting data. You should ensure that data protection is considered and that any transfer of data is secure. If there is a need for exchanging data electronically, you should agree timings for the exchange of data and ensure that a test of the process is carried out ahead of the first scheduled transfer. There will be updates to the data at a number of points within the election timetable, as the ERO must publish two interim notices of alteration as well as the final election notice of alteration. The Commission has published a [timetable](#) containing the dates related to the publication of these notices.

Support staff

2.10 You should identify support staff and ensure they are available to assist with any public enquiries you may receive in the run-up to the election. You should set up a dedicated team (or train front reception or call centre staff) to deal with a range of basic enquiries, such as questions about whether or not a person is registered to vote, postal and proxy voting and the location of polling stations.

2.11 You should also liaise closely with the ERO and BRO at the other borough or the City of London to ensure that it is clear how public enquiries across the whole of the constituency will be received and responded to. Whatever arrangements you put in place, you should ensure that they support the delivery of a consistent, high-quality service to all electors, regardless of where in the constituency they live.

2.12 Any staff who will be dealing with public enquiries should receive training to deal with such enquiries and be provided with responses to frequently-asked questions, as well as a list of the locations of polling stations and key dates in the election timetable. A process should be in place for the escalation of more complex enquiries to the elections team.

2.13 EROs will need to consider whether they will need any additional support staff to assist with the processing of registration and absent vote applications in the lead-up to the election – and in particular in the lead-up to the registration deadline on the 12th working day before the poll.³



Further information on processing registration and absent vote applications in the lead-up to an election can be found in [Part 4 - Maintaining the register throughout the year](#) and [Part 5 – Absent voting](#) of the Commission's guidance for EROs.

Staff for specific election processes



The Government has moved the early May bank holiday in 2020 from Monday 4 to Friday 8 May to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

Staff that you usually rely on to undertake count duties may be unavailable due to 8 May now being a bank holiday. You will need to consider how you will recruit and train a sufficient number of staff.

You will also need to manage the potential impact of having large number of inexperienced staff.

2.14 As well as establishing your project team and support staff, you will need to appoint staff to help you to undertake the various election processes. Staff working on specific election processes are likely to be identified and provided by the BRO in each borough and the City of London and the guidance in this section will be relevant to them also. You and the BROs should have access to a database of staff used at previous elections. Staff can also often be recruited from among local authority employees. Local authorities can permit their staff to work on the election, but they are not required to do so.

2.15 As part of your identification and recruitment of staff, you should consider the skills appropriate to each role. For example, those with experience working in finance could be recruited to record the number of unused ballot papers at the count, or to work at postal vote opening sessions to record the daily totals.

2.16 As there is no age restriction for staff working on specific election processes, you could liaise with local further and higher education establishments to identify young people who could be recruited to work at polling stations or at the count, which could also help to boost their engagement with the democratic process.



Information on the payment of fees to staff after the elections can be found in [Part F – After the declaration of results](#).

Polling station staff

2.17 You must appoint and pay a Presiding Officer and such Poll Clerks as may be necessary to staff each polling station. This cannot be any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate or political party in or about the election.⁴

2.18 In order to ensure voters can receive a high-quality service, when deciding on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations you will need to ensure that polling stations are properly staffed, giving consideration to the factors set out in paragraph **2.23**.

2.19 The Commission recommends the following ratios (which exclude postal voters) when allocating electors and staff to polling stations:

- A polling station should not have more than 2,500 electors allocated to it.
- In addition to a Presiding Officer, there should be one Poll Clerk for polling stations with up to 750 electors.
- One additional Poll Clerk should be appointed for polling stations with up to 1,500 electors.
- One further Poll Clerk should be appointed to a polling station with up to the maximum of 2,500 electors.

2.20 These ratios are recommended minimum levels: there may be circumstances in which you wish to employ a higher number of staff.

2.21 Any polling station over 2,000 electors will create particular challenges in ensuring voters can vote without delay, taking into account the hours of poll and the fact that voters will not typically vote in an even spread across the day. To be able to respond to these challenges, staff should be capable of being deployed flexibly to respond to peaks in voter activity and limit the time voters are expected to queue to receive their ballot papers. One mechanism for managing larger polling stations effectively could be to split the register within that polling station to create two separate issuing desks each managed by two members of staff, thereby doubling the capacity for processing, while recognising that there would need to be sufficient space within the polling station for this to operate effectively.

2.22 It is important that when allocating electors and staff to polling stations the reasoning behind the decisions on allocation can be explained. Each decision should be taken on a case-by-case basis.

2.23 In deciding on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations, as a minimum you should consider:

- the impact the particular circumstances of the GLA elections will have, such as on the time taken to issue three ballot papers and for voters to complete these
- any particular local circumstances such as population increases and demographic trends
- levels of postal voters
- projected turnout, taking into account the potential for late engagement and interest in the election by which point scope for adjusting plans will be limited – as a minimum you should assume that the turnout will be not less than the turnout at the last equivalent election
- voter throughput and flow, including how the voter will move through the voting process from entering to exiting the polling station

- any local, London-wide or national issues which may affect turnout

2.24 This list is not exhaustive, and you should also consider any other factors that you consider appropriate.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to decide on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations, giving consideration to the factors set out in this guidance, in order to ensure that polling stations are properly staffed so that voters can receive a high-quality service. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to set out the approach you have taken to allocating electors and staff to polling stations.

2.25 There are different options open to you for deploying staff within polling stations. Your plans should be sufficiently flexible to allow you to deploy staff to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout polling day. While voters in a queue at their polling station at 10 pm must be issued with their ballot papers⁵, it is still important that sufficient staff are in place to enable the delivery of a high-quality service to voters throughout polling day. You should, however, be prepared to respond if there is a queue at one or more polling stations in your area at 10 pm. The [handbook for polling station staff](#) outlines the procedures to be followed throughout polling day and at the close of poll.

2.26 Although you should decide on what roles the staff at each polling station should carry out, it might be necessary to adapt this at different points in the day, for example, at particularly busy points. It is therefore essential to retain flexibility to allow you to adapt to changing circumstances throughout polling day.

2.27 If the polling station is located in a polling place which contains multiple polling stations, one or more members of staff could be used as an information officer covering all of the polling stations and to assist with directing voters to the correct polling station. Also, staff from one polling station in the polling place could potentially be used to assist staff in another polling station within that building if required, for example as a result of a high number of voters attending one of the stations at a particular time when the other station is quiet. While appointing 'stand-by' staff may not always be practical or feasible within your budget, you should nevertheless be able to deploy staff flexibly on polling day to respond to specific issues that may arise.

2.28 You may also consider appointing part-time Poll Clerks to provide assistance at expected peak polling hours or in the run-up to 10 pm. In addition, you could appoint a team of back-up polling station staff to be deployed at peak times to specific polling stations or to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout polling day or at the close of poll. If parts of the constituency are not easily accessible, it may be helpful to have teams positioned in different parts of the constituency.

2.29 To be able to deploy staff flexibly on polling day, staff will need to be trained appropriately. Further guidance on training can be found in [chapter 3 - Training](#).

Polling station inspectors

2.30 Polling station inspectors play an important role in the effective management of the polls, including dealing with queries and problems arising at polling stations on polling day. You should make arrangements to appoint polling station inspectors to visit and inspect polling stations on your behalf on polling day. The inspectors need to be aware of the particular arrangements and requirements of the GLA elections.

2.31 In deciding on the allocation of polling station inspectors to polling places, you should consider:

- the geography of the area and travelling distance between polling places
- the number of polling stations in each polling place
- the experience of polling station staff at each polling station
- expected turnout levels and any particular local circumstances
- the number of visits polling station inspectors will be expected to make to each polling station during the day

2.32 Polling station inspectors should ensure that all of their assigned polling stations are properly set up in such a way as to take account of voter needs and contribute to the smooth running of the polling station, and are fully equipped and accessible to all voters. They should also ensure that the polling station meets your expectations of service to voters.

2.33 The polling station inspector should work with the Presiding Officers and other polling station staff to identify and deal with any problems arising throughout polling day and at the close of poll, and should escalate any issues to you as appropriate.

2.34 The polling station inspector may be involved in liaising with the electoral registration offices regarding polling day amendments to the register and emergency proxy applications. In these instances, you should have a process in place for communicating any changes, and should advise polling station inspectors of their role in it, if any.

2.35 For initial visits, polling station inspectors should aim to visit all of their allocated polling stations as quickly as possible in order to be able to reassure you that all stations have opened on time and are operating effectively. These visits could be preceded, where possible, by a separate communication sent by Presiding Officers to their polling station inspectors, prior to the opening of the poll. For example, polling station inspectors could be notified via text message confirming whether the polling station is set up and ready for opening, and whether there are any issues. This should then help the polling station inspector prioritise their visits to polling stations.

2.36 Subsequent visits throughout the day can be used for a variety of purposes including collecting postal votes, answering any questions that polling station staff may have, to check that all notices remain properly displayed and to deliver any missing or additional equipment that is required.

2.37 Polling station inspectors should therefore carry with them spare equipment and stationery in case of any shortages or missing items. This should include polling station handbooks and quick guides, ballot papers, equipment, stationery and other items such as forms, envelopes and copies of the register of electors.

2.38 You should provide polling station inspectors with instructions as to their role and a checklist of tasks that they should carry out. A checklist that may be given to polling station inspectors for them to complete during their polling station visits is available. This document also contains a list of what each polling station inspector should receive prior to polling day.

2.39 Beyond highlighting any issues, completed checklists can also be used to inform an evaluation of the suitability of polling stations as part of the post-election review process.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

2.40 You should identify staffing requirements for your postal vote issuing and opening sessions. The following staff may be required:

- specially trained supervisory staff
- clerical staff
- IT staff

2.41 You must not appoint any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate or registered political party in or about the election.⁶

2.42 In devising your plans you should also be mindful of the demands the issue and opening of postal votes can place on core staff. There will be a number of postal vote issues in the immediate run up to polling day to pick up those who have applied to vote by post and to register in the lead-up to the registration deadline. You will need to consider how to manage this, ensuring postal votes can be issued to electors as early as possible.

2.43 You should take into account the total number of current postal voters and projected turnout of postal voters when deciding on your staffing arrangements. For planning purposes, taking into account the potential for late engagement and interest in the election by which point scope for adjusting plans will be limited, as a minimum you should assume that the turnout of postal voters will be **not less** than the turnout of postal voters at the last equivalent poll. Also, your review of previous electoral events will give you an indication of how robust your previous staffing assumptions were.

2.44 This assessment may need to be revised after you have received the final postal voters' lists from EROs. In any event, you should build sufficient flexibility and contingency into your staffing arrangements to deal with a last-minute increase in numbers of postal voters, an unexpected increase in turnout, or varying volumes of postal votes being returned on different days. Your arrangements also need to be such that you can ensure you can

effectively manage those delivered to polling stations on polling day, for example by using polling station inspectors or office staff to collect postal votes at different times throughout polling day.

2.45 Even if you decide to outsource all or part of the postal vote issuing process you should designate a member of the project team to monitor outsourced work and the work of the contractor, and specifically to attend those parts of the issuing process that have been contracted out. This person should monitor the work of the contractor, which should include carrying out task such as spot checks to ensure that the postal voting stationery does not contain any errors, the postal ballot packs are being correctly collated and that any postal votes that need to go overseas are being prioritised. Further guidance on managing contractors and suppliers can be found in **Chapter 5, below**.

2.46 You must have arrangements in place to enable the checking of 100% of postal vote identifiers.⁷



Further guidance on the postal vote issue and opening processes are provided in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Count staff

2.47 The GLA elections will be counted using e-counting machines across three centres (Olympia, Alexandra Palace and ExCel) and coordinated from City Hall. The Constituency London Assembly Member contests will be declared at the relevant count centre by you. The Mayor and London-wide Assembly Member results will be announced at City Hall by the GLRO.

2.48 The number and type of staff you will require to run your verification and count for the elections has been identified by CGI/Smartmatic, the e-counting provider. You should appoint staff to align with the e-counting timetable, including the training schedule.

2.49 You must not appoint any person who has been employed by or on behalf of a candidate or registered political party in or about the election.⁸

2.50 Screens will be available for observers at the count showing the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers and the progress of the count.



The Commission has produced guidance on the verification and count process.

Guidance on the principles of an effective verification and count process is contained in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [our performance standards](#), you will need to put in place appropriate resources to ensure the verification and count are timely and to ensure the verification and count processes are designed and managed to secure an

accurate result, with a clear audit trail. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to set out how the verification and counting is to be organised and managed, including the process you followed to arrive at your decision.

You will need to ensure that count processes are transparent, with everything at the verification and count carried out in clear view of all those entitled to attend, with information provided to attendees on the processes to be followed.

3 Training

- 3.1 Your project plan should contain a plan for training which identifies the training needs of both permanent and temporary staff.
- 3.2 While training activities for temporary staff may not take place until shortly before the election, planning for those activities should start at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.3 It is vital that each member of the team, whether permanent or temporary, understands their role. All staff should receive training on the legislative requirements and responsibilities relevant to their role, as well as training on ensuring equal access and good customer care.
- 3.4 You will need to ensure that everyone handling personal data is aware and is trained in the legal requirements for handling person data in line with data protection legislation. Data protection training will help you to embed the data protection principles in your work and demonstrate compliance with data protection legislation. You should discuss any data protection training with your council's Data Protection Officer.
- 3.5 You should also develop methods of evaluating the training sessions and materials to inform future planning.
- 3.6 London Elects will facilitate training or hold briefings. You should ensure that you and your staff attend the relevant training sessions.

Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and polling station inspectors

- 3.7 Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and other front line staff are frequently the only members of your staff that voters will meet in person. It is therefore particularly important that such staff are trained to understand their role and to perform their duties professionally and effectively, and are able to provide a high standard of customer care. It is important for such staff to be able to communicate well with all voters, and so accessibility issues should be covered in training sessions for all external facing staff. You will also need to ensure that polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations and polling station staff are trained to set-up polling stations in such a way that takes account of voter needs. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to make an assessment regarding access needs, identifying any problems and

actions taken to remedy these and you will need to have in place guidance/training to be provided to polling station staff.

3.8 All polling station staff should be required to attend a face-to-face training session. Standard training materials will be available from London Elects, having been developed through a borough-led working group. The core materials will be compulsory. You will be able to add content to the core material to reflect local circumstances. The training session should address:

- the tasks to be carried out ahead of polling day
- setting up and managing the polling station
- who can attend a polling station and the procedures to be followed on polling day itself
- the importance of being customer-focused and offering assistance to all voters, including disabled voters
- the security of election stationery, including returned postal votes
- the procedures to be followed at the close of poll
- health and safety issues

3.9 For flexible resourcing to be able to work effectively, Poll Clerks and Presiding Officers should be trained in such a way as to ensure that both have the technical knowledge to carry out each other's roles if required and as far as the law permits.

3.10 Polling station inspectors should receive the same training as polling station staff so they can be deployed flexibly and carry out polling station duties if required. You should also provide an additional briefing for polling station inspectors, covering items that are specific to their role.

3.11 Both polling station staff and polling station inspectors should be given a copy of the [handbook for polling station staff](#) and [polling station quick guide](#), and be instructed to read both ahead of polling day and to bring their copies with them on polling day itself. Polling station inspectors should be given spare copies of the handbook and quick guide that they can provide to polling stations in the event of polling station staff forgetting to take their copies on polling day.

3.12 In addition, you should provide polling station staff and polling station inspectors with contact numbers for use in the event of any problems. As well as numbers for the elections office, this should include a contact number for the police.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

3.13 You should brief all postal vote issue and opening staff. Briefings on procedures may be provided immediately prior to commencement of the issuing or opening processes. All staff should, however, be provided with guidance notes in advance.

3.14 Also, you should consider training supervisory staff a day or two in advance of the issuing or opening session.

3.15 Whether you are issuing in-house or have contracted out the issuing of postal votes, you should ensure that supervisory staff are appropriately trained to carry out the required quality assurance checks.

3.16 Supervisory staff at postal vote openings should be trained to ensure that the opening procedures and the verification process are correctly followed and an audit trail is maintained.

3.17 Any person who will be undertaking the verification of postal vote identifiers and has been delegated the authority by you to make decisions on postal voting statements should follow the [Commission and Forensic Science Service guidance on signature checking](#). You should also consider whether any additional training may be appropriate for anyone undertaking this role. You should ensure staff are trained accordingly to ensure that any personal data is handled in accordance with data protection legislation.

Count staff

3.18 CGI/Smartmatic, the e-counting provider, will deliver training for count staff on behalf of London Elects so that staff are fully aware of their duties. These training days will be delivered to the whole count team, a constituency at a time.

3.19 Prior to the start of the verification and count proceedings, you should undertake a walk-through of the procedures you are expecting everyone to follow so that everyone is aware of what is expected of them at each stage, and how the different roles relate to each other.



Guidance on the principles of an effective verification and count process is contained in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

4 Venues

4.1 Your project plan should cover the identification of suitable venues for all processes that you are responsible for.

4.2 Identifying appropriate venues for all of the various election activities should be done as early as possible. The managers of polling station and postal vote issue and opening premises should be contacted at an early stage and informed of the relevant dates, and the necessary booking arrangements made. These activities, done at an early stage, will highlight where venues are not available and should allow sufficient time to act on the information and identify alternative premises. London Elects has made the required arrangements for the count venues.

4.3 Under the Equality Act 2010, service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting people with disabilities at a substantial disadvantage compared to people who are not disabled⁹. To comply with the duty, you should work closely with people who have a expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people. The equalities officer at your local authority should be able to provide you with advice and assistance.

4.4 Contingency arrangements should be put in place for all venues to address the risk of the loss of a venue. You should prepare a list of alternative venues, including making arrangements for the use of stand-by portable polling stations/mobile vehicles and alternative venues for the issue and opening of postal votes if necessary. London Elects will be making contingency arrangements for the count venues. Staff should be briefed on contingency arrangements: for example in the case of the loss of a polling station on polling day, they could be advised to set up a temporary polling station in their car until alternative arrangements can be made. You should ensure that any changes made to venue location are communicated to candidates, agents, electors and any others as appropriate.

Polling stations

4.5 You should undertake an assessment of the suitability of the polling stations you are intending to use. Where access problems exist, you should document the problems, identify potential improvements and record any action taken to try to remedy these problems.

4.6 Ideally, you will have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area, with owners willing to hire them out for polling station use at low cost. Unfortunately, in practice, this is often not the case and in some areas there may be little choice available.

4.7 You should work closely with people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises. You should be able to demonstrate that an

assessment has been conducted of the polling stations to be used at the election. Where access problems exist, you should document the problems, identify potential improvements and record any action taken to try to remedy these problems.

4.8 In order to ensure that voters can receive a high-quality service you will need to ensure that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations. As part of your planning, you should ensure that any additional equipment you have identified as required to make the polling station accessible will be delivered and set up in good time for the opening of the poll.

4.9 Schools that are publicly funded, including academies and free schools, can be used as polling stations free of charge, and the legislation allows you to require a room in such schools for use as a polling station¹⁰. You are also entitled to use, free of charge, any publicly-funded room as a polling station. You will, however, need to pay for any lighting, heating, etc., costs incurred when using such rooms. You should liaise with the relevant schools and managers of publicly-funded rooms at the earliest opportunity to confirm that you want to use certain rooms within their premises as polling stations.

4.10 It is essential that polling stations provide sufficient space for voting to take place.



Further information on polling station voting, including polling station set-up, can be found in [Part C – Administering the poll](#).

Last-minute changes to polling stations

4.11 There may be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling station is required at short notice. As part of your planning, you should compile a list of stand-by or portable polling stations that could be used in such circumstances. Local authorities are responsible for designating polling places and polling districts and you must, except in the case of special circumstances or where the parliamentary polling place is outside the electoral area, designate a new polling station within the same polling place.

4.12 Usually, if there is a need to change the polling place, council agreement will be required. If delegation procedures are in place, you should follow these and contact the person or persons who are entitled to make changes to the scheme of polling places. However, flood, fire or vandalism occurring in the immediate lead-up to polling day could constitute a ‘special circumstance’ enabling you to designate a polling station outside the polling place without the need to seek council agreement.

4.13 You should amend the notice of situation of polling stations to reflect any changes to your polling stations.

4.14 There are a number of mitigating measures you can take to ensure that electors who are affected by a late change to a polling station are able to vote with minimum disruption. You should have a protocol for what to do in case of a last-minute change. As a minimum, you should:

- if time allows, send out a letter to all affected electors informing them of the change to their polling station
- if time allows, use the local media to disseminate information to the affected electors – for example, through issuing press releases
- put up signs at the old polling station informing electors about the change, including directions to the new one
- display clear and visible signage at the new polling station

Postal vote issue and opening venues

4.15 You should take into account the following key factors when selecting venues for postal vote issuing and opening sessions:

- lessons learnt from previous electoral events
- volume of postal ballot packs to be issued
- estimated volume of returned postal votes
- intended workflows
- IT requirements
- security and storage requirements
- disabled access, both to and within the venues



Guidance on the layout of postal vote issue and opening venues can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Count venue

4.16 The GLRO and London Elects have made arrangements for the count venues for the GLA election. There will be three count centres (Olympia, Alexandra Palace and ExCel) and a central venue (City Hall).



Further guidance on preparing for the verification and count can be found in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes](#).

5 Managing contractors and suppliers

5.1 You can outsource particular work required to deliver the election, but not the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations.

5.2 Do not automatically assume that outsourcing is your only and best option. You should make an assessment of the need to outsource, and your decision should be taken as part of an assessment of the costs, risks and benefits of outsourcing work, as compared to in-house delivery by your staff. Your review of previous electoral events and consideration of the specific requirements for the election will help to inform your decision as to whether or not to outsource a particular function or task.

5.3 If outsourcing is considered appropriate, your project plan should cover the management of contractors and suppliers and the development and management of contracts.

5.4 When appointing a contractor or supplier you must ensure that they can provide sufficient guarantees that the requirements of data protection legislation will be met. You should ensure that data protection is integral in any tender exercise (documenting your decision-making process) and that specific requirements are met in any contract awarded.

Section 7 Using contractors and suppliers' of our resource on EU General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 contains the specific requirements which a written agreement must include in order that the requirements of data protection legislation will be met.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#) you will need to put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required by the specification. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to have in place arrangements for the management of contractors and suppliers.

Procurement

5.5 Where a decision has been made to outsource, you should commence the procurement process as soon as possible. Your local authority will have adopted standing orders or regulations relating to procurement and contracts. You should take advice from relevant staff at your local authority on the procedures to be followed and legal requirements for procuring supplies and services.

5.6 All stages of the procurement process should be documented and the risks of outsourcing should be clearly acknowledged, with contingency arrangements identified and built into the process.

5.7 Good public procurement practice recommends obtaining at least three written quotations from prospective suppliers. Some local authorities may, however, have a standing list of approved contractors who have already been through a tendering process and in some instances it may be more effective and economical to use such existing contractors and systems.

5.8 The Commission has produced a contract management checklist designed to highlight key considerations relevant to outsourcing work and managing contracts.

5.9 A detailed specification of requirements is essential for effective procurement, and should be developed for all outsourced work. Suppliers should be able to provide robust information on how they are going to deliver the work as required by the specification.

5.10 When evaluating any bids received, the final price in the suppliers' proposals should not be the only consideration in choosing a contractor. The focus should be on 'value for money', with the final decision being a judgement based on the best combination of the cost of the goods or service and the ability to meet your requirements as laid out in the specification. Work needs to be completed on time and to a high standard, and therefore each bid should be carefully considered to assess exactly what it offers.

5.11 You should take steps to ensure that the selected contractor understands the requirements and has the experience and suitability to undertake the work being outsourced. The contract management checklist sets out the minimum steps you should take to be satisfied that the company will have the capacity to complete any contracted work on time and to the standard required

5.12 Contractors may sub-contract work out and you should give prior written consent before sub-contractors are to be used. You should ensure that any sub-contractors are aware of the specific requirements as detailed in the specification. Once you have made your final decision, you should notify unsuccessful applicants and be prepared to debrief them should they request it.

5.13 You should have a formal, written contract in place with every contractor to which you have outsourced a function or task. It is essential that statutory requirements and their implications are fully explained wherever contractors are used, and that these requirements are explicitly stated in the contract for any work. Contracts should be developed with advice from other departments of the local authority, for example, legal services and procurement. Experienced managers in these fields can be used to ensure that appropriate and rigorous procurement and contract management procedures are followed, thereby minimising risk.

The [contract management checklist](#) sets out the minimum steps you should take to be satisfied that the company will have the capacity to complete any contracted work on time and to the standard required.

Contract management

5.14 The key to effective contact management is continuous and open lines of communication with the contractor, underpinned by clear and robust provisions in the contract as to the quality and timescales expected and required.

5.15 In order to assist contractors and suppliers in delivering the work on time, it is essential to keep to agreed timescales for providing the information or data they need to do the job. You should ensure that contractors are aware of how IER may impact on timescales. For example, EROs have until the determination deadline (i.e. 6 working days before the poll) to receive the required evidence from a prospective elector under the exceptions process and make their determination.¹¹ If they also applied to vote by post, this will impact on the number of postal votes to be included in the last issue. If there is slippage, for example because of the time required to process bulk last minute postal vote applications, you should advise the contractors as soon as possible.

5.16 You should document all stages of the process. In particular, you should keep a formal record in order to be able to demonstrate that the processes are undertaken in accordance with the law.

5.17 Any variations from the agreed specification could result in a breach of legislation and any such breach is the personal responsibility of the relevant Returning Officer, so any variations should be formally documented and signed off by you or by someone authorised to act on your behalf.



Further guidance on what to consider if you have outsourced the postal vote issue can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

Finding printers

5.18 The e-counting contractor will print the ballot papers, with the additional stationery required for the postal vote packs to be printed locally.

5.19 If you decide that you need to outsource production and are having difficulty finding a suitable printer, the British Printing Industries Federation may be contacted for assistance:

British Printing Industries Federation
Head Office
Unit 2 Villiers Court
Copse Drive
Coventry, CV5 9RN
Tel: 0845 250 7050
www.britishprint.com

Royal Mail

5.20 You should already be in contact with your Royal Mail account manager, and you should continue to liaise with them on a regular basis. At an early stage in your planning process you should take steps to ensure that any business reply licences you hold are up to date.

5.21 It is important that you have early discussions with Royal Mail to ensure that any arrangements you put in place with them in relation to postal voting will help to maximise the time available to postal voters to receive, complete and return their postal vote. For example, you should take steps to ensure that the correct postage will be included on any postal votes being sent to addresses outside the UK.



More information on working with Royal Mail in respect of postal voting can be found in [Part D – Absent voting](#).

6 Preventing electoral fraud and maintaining the integrity of the election

6.1 Voters and candidates should be confident that elections are free from fraud, and that the results declared are a true and accurate reflection of the will of the electorate. Trust and confidence in the integrity of elections is essential but can be fragile – it will be difficult for you to rebuild trust or confidence which has been lost as a result of allegations or proven cases of fraud.

6.2 While you will need to be able to work with the police and prosecutors to investigate any allegations which might be made, you should also put in place effective strategies for preventing electoral fraud from the outset.

6.3 In order to ensure that voters and candidates can have confidence that votes will be cast and counted in the way voters intended, you will need to have in place plans and processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential electoral fraud.

6.4 Your plans should be developed in consultation with your local police force single point of contact (SPOC) and include specific steps to identify and deal with any potential electoral fraud, and should also identify how you will communicate your approach to maintaining electoral integrity to support public confidence in the election.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in [performance standard 1](#), you will need to have in place processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity problems, including what steps are to be taken to deal with any such problems. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered, you will need to have in place processes for dealing with integrity problems.

A template memorandum of understanding between the Returning Officer and the police on joint planning for elections and the reporting and investigating of electoral fraud is available on the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice website.

Assessing and managing the risk of electoral fraud

6.5 You are uniquely placed to identify incidents and patterns of activity that might indicate electoral fraud in your area. Effective early action to identify and address possible fraud could help to avoid costly police investigations or legal challenges to the results of the elections.

6.6 You should ensure that you have mechanisms in place to assess the risk of electoral fraud in your constituency, including considering:

- whether there has been a history of allegations of electoral fraud in the constituency at previous elections
- whether the election is likely to be particularly close and hard fought
- whether it is a marginal seat, which would need only a relatively small swing in the number of votes to change control
- whether there is a contest based on strong personal disagreements as well as political arguments
- where there is a highly mobile population with a frequent turnover of electors
- where there are electors who may be more vulnerable, for example because of low levels of literacy and/or English language ability, age or infirmity

6.7 Your plans for managing the risk of electoral fraud in your area will need to reflect any specific local risks you have identified in addition to any general fraud prevention and detection plans.

6.8 For example you should consider risks associated with houses of multiple occupation, student halls of residence or care homes where other people may have access to personal mail or where care givers may assist residents in care homes with completing postal vote applications or postal votes.

6.9 Your plans should set out mechanisms for monitoring indicators for possible electoral fraud and setting thresholds for action in response. Although there are no definitive signs of possible electoral fraud, you should be aware of and consider all the data which is available to you, including whether there:

- have been unusual patterns in registration or absent vote applications at previous elections
- have been unusual patterns of rejected ballot papers, including rejected postal ballot packs, at previous elections.
- is any unusual pattern of registration or absent vote applications in the period leading up to the elections

6.10 You should also communicate and explain your approach to tackling fraud in advance of polling day to provide reassurance to voters and campaigners.

6.11 Consideration should be given to sharing the approach to tackling electoral fraud with parties, candidates and agents at briefing sessions and/or within the information provided to them. You should also consider inviting the police to attend any such briefing sessions and invite them to supply to you any relevant documentation you could include in your information pack.



Following consultation with Returning Officers, police forces and political parties, the Commission has issued a [Code of Conduct for campaigners at elections and referendums](#). The Code applies to all campaigners, and sets out agreed standards of appropriate behaviour before and during an election or referendum.

The Code also makes it clear that if a Returning Officer considers it appropriate to address further specific local risks, and has consulted with relevant national and local parties, we will support them in introducing additional local provisions which go beyond the terms of the nationally agreed Code.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have developed a [template letter seeking agreement from candidates to abide by the Code of Conduct](#) and this should be provided to all candidates standing at an election.

Dealing with allegations of electoral fraud

6.12 Allegations and cases of electoral fraud will not only have a negative impact on the confidence of electors and campaigners, but they may also have a significant impact on your capacity to manage the election process effectively.

6.13 It is therefore crucial that you put in place detailed and robust plans for monitoring and maintaining the integrity of the election in your area. This should include working closely with the local police, ensuring you have in place good lines of communication and have agreed an approach for referring any allegations of electoral fraud.

6.14 Every UK police force has a named single point of contact officer (SPOC) for election-related crime. Your local police SPOC will be a key partner to help you to ensure that any possible instances of fraud are quickly identified and dealt with. You should make sure that you are clear who your SPOC is and how you can contact them.

A template memorandum of understanding between the Returning Officer and the police on joint planning for elections and the reporting and investigating of electoral fraud is available on [the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice website](#).

6.15 You should establish and maintain contact with your SPOC from the outset of your pre-election planning process, with regular contact scheduled in your project plan. Early discussions with your SPOC should cover your mechanisms for identifying possible fraud and what actions will be taken where any suspicions arise. If you have any problems establishing contact with your SPOC, please contact the [Commission's London team](#).

6.16 You should discuss your plans for maintaining the integrity of the election with your SPOC at the earliest opportunity. A [checklist of topics](#) that should be considered at any pre-election planning meeting between you and your SPOC is available. You should, as part of this meeting, consider the possibility of any joint publicity work that can be carried out with the police, for example, jointly running public awareness campaigns within the constituency to highlight what can be done to help detect and prevent electoral fraud.

6.17 As part of your early liaison with your SPOC you should establish an agreement about the division of responsibilities between you and your SPOC, so that there is early clarity about each other's roles. In particular, you should agree with your SPOC an approach for referring allegations of fraud you may receive for further investigation where appropriate. For example, will you be the initial point of contact and refer allegations to the SPOC, or will the SPOC be the initial point of contact and advise you of allegations? In addition, you should agree a mechanism for handling evidence, so that police can carry out any forensic analysis, where necessary.



The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice have provided [guidance to local authorities for handling evidence](#).

6.18 You should ensure that all candidates and their agents understand how to raise specific concerns about electoral fraud relating to the election, including what type and level of evidence will be necessary to enable allegations to be investigated by the police. You should also ensure that they understand how allegations will be dealt with, and what information and feedback they should be able to expect about the progress of investigations.

6.19 The police will investigate any allegations of electoral fraud until, following consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), they are either satisfied that no further action is necessary or appropriate, or they forward the case file to the CPS for consideration with a view to prosecution. The police should keep you and, where appropriate, the ERO informed of the progress of the case.

6.20 The Commission and the National Police Chiefs' Council (formerly the Association of Chief Police Officers) have supported the College of Policing to produce a [manual of guidance for policing elections](#), which is also available to download from our website.



More information for EROs on identifying suspicious registration and absent vote applications can be found in [Part 5 – Absent voting](#), of the Commission's guidance for EROs.

Dealing with allegations of financial offences

6.21 Parties, candidates and agents are subject to a financial regime under electoral legislation. If you have any queries on election spending contact your [local Commission office](#).

Security

6.22 Your project plan should include a review of security arrangements with the local police. You should also consider any security risks as part of your contingency planning exercise and include these in your risk register.

6.23 Your security arrangements should prevent unauthorised access to or use of the ballot papers during all stages of the production process and storage between printing and the poll.

6.24 The count will commence on Friday morning and arrangements will need to be made to gather the ballot boxes and deliver them overnight to the count venues, where they will be kept secure by London Elects.

6.25 You should also take all necessary steps to ensure the security of ballot boxes and relevant stationery from the close of poll through to the declaration of the result, particularly should there be a break in proceedings. You should liaise with your SPOC on this. By law, where the whole or any part of the period between 5 pm and 10 am on the next day is excluded (following consent from the GLRO), you have a duty to place the documents under your seal and to take proper precautions for the security of the papers and documents.¹²

6.26 In addition, you should take all necessary steps to ensure that police officers (which now can include police community support officers) attend at polling stations or call in during polling day, as appropriate, and discuss any security issues relating to any other aspects of the process including community safety for voters.

7 Communications

Raising awareness

7.1 You must take such steps as you think appropriate to encourage the participation of electors in the election, and in carrying out such activity you must have regard to any guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. The GLRO also has a duty to encourage the participation of electors at a GLA election, so you should consider how your activity can be coordinated with the GLRO's strategy and plans.¹³

7.2 You should liaise with the EROs for your constituency as appropriate to ensure that any public awareness activity you carry out is aligned with their work and is designed in such a way as to maximise impact ahead of the registration deadline. Any public awareness activity and messaging should aim to ensure that everyone who wants to vote has the information they need to be able to do so, and can vote using their preferred method.

7.3 Online registration in particular brings greater opportunities to engage local residents in the democratic process and to boost the levels of registration among under-registered groups. And you do not need to do this on your own – opportunities for working with local partners who can reach out to voters in under-registered groups in your area could be a valuable part of your engagement work locally.



General guidance to EROs on working with partners, which could also be of use to Returning Officers, is contained in chapter 5 of [Part 1 of the Commission's guidance for EROs](#).

7.4 When planning your public awareness activity you should consider and document:

- the identification of your target audience
- the objectives and success measures of the activity
- risks – identification and mitigation
- resources - financial and staffing

7.5 In the lead up to scheduled polls, the Commission may run a public awareness campaign focusing on encouraging registration. Such a campaign will usually involve mass media advertising, working with partners and public relations activities. We will also provide resources that can be used locally such as template press releases and tweets. We will provide you with more information on what we will be making available and when in a future [Bulletin](#).

Information to electors

7.6 Public awareness activity that provides essential information to electors to enable them to take part in the election should reach as wide an audience as possible.

7.7 London Elects maintains a website that provides information on the elections and voting process and which will be updated at key stages in the run up to the elections. London Elects will also run a marketing campaign, both to raise awareness of the elections and how to vote. The campaign will be carried across traditional and social media.

7.8 In addition, each elector will receive a booklet with information about the Mayoral candidates and the electoral process. This will be printed and dispatched by London Elects, with additional booklets being provided to boroughs and the City of London for sending to voters added to the electoral register after the date of dispatch.

7.9 You will need to consider what activity you and BROs should undertake to supplement the London Elects campaign. You will need to identify appropriate methods of communication (for example, social media, posters, written information, flyers, raising at community meetings and with partners) and you should seek advice from relevant staff at your local authority, including experts in the communications department.

7.10 Information required by electors in order to successfully participate may include:

- details of the election itself
- the date and hours of poll
- the location of polling stations
- any key deadlines (e.g. deadlines for registering to vote and applying for postal or proxy votes)
- how to vote (i.e. how to mark the ballot papers)
- assistance available to electors (e.g. information for disabled voters)
- how votes are counted
- how the results will be made known

7.11 It is important that public awareness activity provides information that enables electors to take part in the election.

7.12 You should ensure that all your outgoing communications provide appropriate contact details to allow anyone to respond and obtain further information.

7.13 'Where is my polling station?' is a common question in the run-up to polling day on polling day itself. The polling station finder tool will be available on both the London Elect and our website; voters can through this tool easily access information on the location of their polling station. This service can also be easily embedded into your website.

7.14 You can help us by making polling station location data available in an open format, either by publishing the data on your website (through an API or at a particular web address), or by giving the data to Democracy Club. The data you send to the printers in order for poll cards to be printed will likely be enough. The data you provide will help to create a central place where voters can find their polling station, making it easier to inform the public of where their polling station is located.

7.15 You can find out more about how to publish polling station data in an open format on [Democracy Club's website](#).



The Commission will provide templates and tools on [our website](#) to support you with providing information to electors. These will include poster templates, web banners, infographics, template press releases and tweets. We'll provide you with more information on what we will be making available and when in a future Bulletin.

Media liaison

7.16 The GLRO will publish a media plan which will establish processes which you and your communications team can then follow to respond to any issues that arise. You should ensure that stakeholder coordination and communication is embedded throughout your planning, with particular arrangements in place for working with the media, including:

- strategies for dealing with both proactive communication and media liaison in relation to specific events such as the verification and counting of votes
- dealing with general media enquiries
- reactive handling of any issues that arise in relation to the election, for example allegations of electoral fraud
- management of social media

7.17 It is important that media communication is properly managed in order to maintain public confidence that the election is being well-run. To achieve this effectively, there should be a clear process in place which you and your communications team can follow to respond to any issues that arise.

7.18 In order to assist you and your communications team with media liaison at the count, we have developed tips for [managing the media at the count](#).

8 Accredited observers and Commission representatives

8.1 Observers accredited by the Commission are entitled to observe:¹⁴

- the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers
- the poll
- the verification and counting of the votes¹⁵

8.2 Your project plan should include processes to manage potential enquiries from observers and to support their attendance at the electoral processes they are entitled to attend. This should include providing observers with information on the location and timing of the above processes.

8.3 Commission representatives are also entitled to observe these processes and, in addition, are entitled to observe your working practices.¹⁶

8.4 Accredited observers and Commission representatives do not need to give advance notification of where they intend to observe, but will carry with them a photographic identification card issued by the Commission.

Quick guide to the observer badge types

Observer badge type	Who are they?	Access
<p>Example of ID issued to Commission representatives</p>  <p>The Electoral Commission</p> <p>Rebecca Brown Electoral Commission representative</p>	Electoral Commission representatives	Same as candidates and agents, plus access to the issue of postal votes, and working practices of the CRO, GLRO and the ERO

Example of ID issued to accredited observers		
<p>Accredited Electoral Observer</p>  <p>Jane Doe Valid from 00/00/0000 to 00/00/0000 Organisation name Accreditation number</p>	<p>Observers accredited by the Commission</p>	<p>Same as candidates and agents, plus access to the issue of postal votes</p>

8.5 If you are in doubt about the status of a particular individual seeking to gain access to election processes, you can check the registers of observers on the [Commission's website](#).

8.6 You have a legal duty to have regard to the [Commission's Code of practice for observers](#) when managing the attendance of observers.¹⁷ Observers will have agreed to comply with the standards of behaviour set out in the Commission's Code of practice. If you think there has been a breach of the Code of practice, please inform [the Commission's London team](#).

¹ RPA 1983 s35(4)

² RPA 1983 s63

³ RPA 1983 s13AB and s 13B

⁴ Greater London Authority Elections Rules 2007 (SI 2007/3541) sch 1 rule 25, sch 2 rule 26 sch 3 rule 25

⁵ SI 2007/3541 sch 1 rule 38(8), sch 2 rule 39(8), sch 3 rule 38(8)

⁶ SI 2007/3541 sch 1 rule 25, sch 2 rule 26 sch 3 rule 25

⁷ RPA Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/341) reg 85A

⁸ SI 2007/3541 sch 1 rule 25, sch 2 rule 26 sch 3 rule 25

⁹ Equality Act 2010 s20

¹⁰ SI 2007/3541 sch 1 rule 21, sch 2 rule 22, sch 3 rule 21

¹¹ RPA 1983 s13B

¹² SI 2007/3541 sch rule 49; sch 2 rule 50; sch 3 rule 49

¹³ Electoral Administration Act 2006 s69

¹⁴ S6C PPERA 2000

¹⁵ S6C PPERA 2000

¹⁶ S6A PPERA 2000

¹⁷ S6F PPERA 2000