Force election SPOC/local authority contact checklist

This is a checklist of topics that might be considered at the pre-event planning meeting between a SPOC and the named local authority contact. It has been prepared as a starting point to work from rather than setting out an approach that must be followed.

The checklist may help:
- as a basis for discussion at the initial pre-event planning meeting and at a further meeting once the candidates and registered campaigners are known
- the returning officer to ensure that their project plan shows that processes are in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity issues and what steps are to be taken to deal with any such integrity issues.

General
- Identify named and alternative contacts at the local authority for elections and referendums.
- Establish what cover will be in place for any planned leave, especially in the period after polling day.
- Exchange contact details for all, including out-of-hours numbers and backups.
- Identify and discuss any issues of concern or risk arising from a review of previous elections and any other issues that may need particular attention at the next election or referendum. For example:
  - Candidates who are new to the electoral process. These candidates may also have untried and inexperienced supporters. It is more likely that aspects of the legislation will be inadvertently overlooked, including nomination forms, giving rise to allegations of malpractice. The same issues apply to campaigners at referendums.
  - Closely contested seats, especially where these may affect the overall control of the authority.
  - Contests in urban and metropolitan wards, where fewer votes are needed to win a seat compared with a UK or European parliamentary election.
  - Where there is a community with limited language or literacy skills which may be more vulnerable to deception or less likely to realise that their vote has been stolen.
  - Cross-boundary absent voter identity checks for UK and European parliamentary constituencies.
  - Formal timescales with a large number of last-minute applications to register to vote and/or to vote by post or proxy.
  - Overnight security of ballots when counting takes place on Friday.
- Identify locations that have historically had incidents or currently show potential for being at risk. Ensure that the discussion does not focus

exclusively on these areas and that any measures proposed are proportionate.

- Refer substantiated suspicions or allegations. Although elections staff are uniquely placed to identify malpractice and are required to carry out some checking processes as required by electoral law, if there are any suspicions or allegations that can be substantiated and the complainant is prepared to make a statement in writing, the matter should be referred to the force election SPOC for investigation.
- Agree trigger points or thresholds for where matters should be reported and for where a combination of issues becomes serious enough to warrant more urgent attention.
- Clarify where the force election SPOC will act (such as allegations of electoral malpractice) and where others may act on operational matters, for example, in maintaining order outside polling stations.

Pre-election and pre-referendum issues

- Registration issues (note: these are issues that fall within the remit of the electoral registration officer rather than the returning officer or counting officer), for example:
  - o Suspicious registration applications submitted during the annual canvass period.
  - o Suspicious registration applications received outside the annual canvass period. Outside the annual canvass period details of additions and deletions to the register are published each month.
  - o Electoral registration officers will also be required to publish two additional updates to the register in the run-up to an election. This may prompt additional challenges or objections to entries on the register.
  - o Suspicious postal and proxy applications. Agree triggers for reporting and police response.
- It may be that the motive for false registration is financial or another, non-electoral crime that would be investigated by an economic crime team, or similar, rather than the force election SPOC. Nonetheless, the RPA 1983 electoral offence should at least be considered in the investigation where appropriate.
- Where UK parliamentary constituencies cover more than one local authority area, the SPOC may need to contact the electoral registration officer for each area.
- Candidates/agents/registered campaigners briefing issues:
  - o Will the force election SPOC be notified and invited to attend?
  - o Consider national Code of conduct for campaigners: postal voting, postal proxy voting, proxy voting and polling stations and Postal voting – a quick guide for party workers (an A5-sized guide).
  - o Establish whether a local code of conduct has been agreed that goes beyond the national agreed code of conduct, for example, requiring

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that party workers should not handle completed ballot papers (note: where a local code of conduct is proposed, no stigma should be attached to any candidate or party not wishing to subscribe to it).

- Media strategy issues: police and council press officers should exchange contact details and briefings as appropriate.
- Public order and public safety issues, for example, in maintaining order outside polling stations. Electors who are queuing in or outside a polling station at the close of poll will be given a ballot paper and allowed to vote. The likelihood that police support may be required at the close of poll and how it might be provided should be discussed.

Election/referendum period issues

- Arrange a meeting after the close of nominations or appointment of registered campaigners to review strategy in view of issues particular to the contest and candidates or referendum campaigners. Although nominations for European parliamentary and local elections will close at the same time, it should be noted that European parliamentary nominations will go to the regional returning officer and local nominations (such as for district council elections) will go to the relevant local authority returning officer.
- The RPA 1983 requires the electoral registration officer to publish two additional updates to the register during the election period.
- Discuss any matters arising from poll card issues.
- Force election SPOC to be alerted to postal ballot delivery issues, for example:
  - Royal Mail Group Ltd or other means of delivery
  - delivery dates by area
  - liaison with Royal Mail Group Ltd contact for the election/referendum
  - internal distribution of Postal voting – a quick guide for Royal Mail drivers and delivery staff by Royal Mail Group Ltd.
- Postal vote opening issues, for example:
  - planned dates and times
  - police presence
  - identifier processes
  - special opening of suspicious postal ballots, if needed
  - white powder in envelope procedures.
- There is no provision in electoral law specifically enabling a police officer to attend any postal vote opening session. Force election SPOCs are encouraged to attend a postal vote opening session to gain an insight into the process. The recommended approach is for the force election SPOC to apply to the Electoral Commission for accreditation as an official observer at the earliest opportunity. It is important that the force election SPOC avoids becoming involved in the process. If the need for investigation arises, this should be conducted after the event.

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Polling day issues

- Local authority contact to provide a list of polling stations.
- Force election SPOC should discuss the level of police support dedicated to polling stations or mobile support. Note: police and community support officers, in addition to police officers, are allowed to enter polling stations.
- Personation guidance and statement form.
- Discuss action in relation to a disturbance within a polling station and maintaining order outside a polling station especially at close of poll.
- Tellers – what local arrangements are in place?
- Issues relating to the collection of postal ballots, for example:
  - Will postal ballots be collected from polling stations during the day?
  - Are any problems expected and would police support be prudent?
- What arrangements are in place for overnight and interim security of ballot papers/boxes, especially for the European parliamentary ballot papers, until they are counted on the following Sunday?
- Issues relating to the count, for example:
  - When and where will it take place (centralised or decentralised)?
  - Police presence and other security at the venue(s) – in particular, control of access to venue and monitoring who is present.
  - Procedure for dealing with suspicious postal voting statements.
  - Postal ballot papers marked with correction fluid.

Post-election issues

- Allegations of malpractice.
- Rejected postal ballot statements.
- There is a duty under RPA 1983 on electoral registration officers to notify every elector whose postal ballot was rejected. This may lead to allegations of electoral malpractice being identified by either the returning officer or electors themselves. The SPOC and the returning officer should clarify the procedure for resolving such allegations.
- Access to documents.
- Recording of actions and audit trail.
- Reporting allegations to National Police Coordination Centre.