

Candidates' and agents' briefing

City of Wolverhampton Council

Bilston North By Election, 31 October 2024

Topics

- Who's who
- key dates of the election timetable
- agents
- postal votes
- the poll
- voter ID
- accessibility
- counting of votes
- candidate spending
- contacts

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<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent>

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Who's who



- **The Returning Officer** is the person responsible for running the election. The Returning Officer for this by-election is David Pattison.
- **The Electoral Registration Officer** is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists. The Electoral Registration Officer is Tim Johnson

Who's who

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Two Deputy Returning Officers (DRO) appointed:



Surjit Tour DRO-
Deputy Monitoring
Officer



Laura Gittos
DRO/Head of
Governance

Update from Police –
Talhad Burbank
Detective Constable for West
Midlands Police

Election timetable

Deadline for applications to register to vote	Midnight Tuesday 15 October
Deadline for new postal vote applications /changes to existing postal or postal proxy vote applications	5pm Wednesday 16 October
Publication of notice of poll/situation of polling stations	By Wednesday 23 October
Deadline for applications for new proxy votes	5pm Wednesday 23 October
Deadline for applications for a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's document	5pm Wednesday 23 October
Appointment of counting and polling agents	Thursday 24 October
Polling day	Thursday 31 October
Deadline to apply to vote by emergency proxy	5pm Thursday 31 October
Replacement for lost/spoilt postal votes ends	5pm Thursday 31 October
Alterations to register to correct clerical error	9pm Thursday 31 October
Return of election expenses	Thursday 5 December

Campaigning dos and don'ts

- Do use imprints on all your campaign material, including digital material.
- Do comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners.
- Do make sure outdoor posters are removed 2 weeks after the election.
- Do not produce material that looks like a poll card.
- Do not pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).
- Do not handle any postal voting documents you are not entitled to.

Use of Loud Hailers

A loud hailer when campaigning should not be used as that could contravene The Control of Pollution Act 1974. Depending on how, when and where the activity takes place, it could also be considered antisocial behaviour.

Code of conduct for campaigners (1)

- Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, but their activities should not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.
- Electoral registration and absent vote applications:
 - Ensure forms fully conform to the requirements of electoral law
 - Include the ERO's address for the return of forms
 - Ensure unaltered applications are sent to ERO within **two working days**.
 - Make sure electors understand implications of applying for an absent vote.
 - Do not encourage postal ballot pack redirection.
 - Do not encourage electors to appoint a campaigner as proxy.
- Voter Authority Certificate Applications:
 - Should not handle paper based Voter Authority Certificate applications and should encourage electors to send them directly to the ERO

Code of conduct for campaigners (2)

- Postal ballot packs:
 - Never touch a postal ballot paper
 - Never observe electors completing their postal vote.
 - Never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot pack from voters
- Campaigning outside polling stations:
 - You are allowed to put your messages to voters on polling day, including public spaces outside polling places.
 - Keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter.

Tellers

- Tellers are not allowed inside the polling station or polling place (building polling station is in).
- They can record the elector numbers of people who have voted (but in Wolverhampton we only allow this after they have left the polling station, they should not ask for this on the way in). They have no legal status so voters can refuse to give information to them.
- There should be no more than one teller at a polling station for each candidate at a time.
- Tellers cannot interfere with the administration of the election and must comply with the instructions issued by the Returning Officer or Presiding Officer.
- Tellers may remind voters as they approach the polling station that they will need to provide Photo ID in order to be issued with a ballot paper but they must not ask to see or check any voters Photo ID themselves.

Candidate spending

- Defined as certain expenses ‘used for the purposes of the candidate’s election’ during the regulated period.
- **Regulated period begins on Monday 30 September 2024**
- Responsibility of **election agent**
- Limit on expenses:
 - £960 + 8 pence per elector in ward/division
 - £1742.40 for Bilston North ward
- Must get and keep receipts (over £20)
- Returns must be submitted by **5 December**
- Returns made public by Returning Officer
- No spending is reimbursed
- Failure to submit a spending return is a criminal offence enforceable by police

Candidate Expenses Return

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- **All candidates must complete all three forms:**
 - Declaration by election agent as to election expenses
 - Declaration by candidate as to election expenses
 - Return of candidate election expenditure
- Key dates you will need for preparing your spending return:
 - Date of publication of notice of the election: **Monday 30 September 2024**
 - Date you officially became a candidate:
 - **After 30 September 2024 once you or others have declared yourself a candidate or you submit your nomination papers, whichever is earliest**
 - Date of election: **Thursday 31 October 2024**
 - Date election result expected to be declared: **Thursday 31 October 2024**
- **Nil returns are required**
- Further guidance and advice can be found on the **Electoral Commission** website or by contacting them directly.

Questions?

Appointment of agents

Forms have been emailed – deadline to appoint is **24 October 2024**

Agent	Number	Role
Polling	No limit – but no more than one polling agent may be admitted at the same time to a polling station on behalf of the same candidate	Entitled to observe proceedings and detect personation
Postal Vote	No limit – notify 24 hours in advance of each opening session	Right to observe
Count	2 - The formula is the number of count assistants divided by number of candidates.	Entitled to observe and make sure count is accurate, draw attention to doubtful ballot papers

Postal vote opening sessions

- Only candidate, agent, postal vote agents entitled to attend
- Let Electoral Services know which sessions you will be attending 24 hours in advance
- If a session is stood down Electoral Services will inform candidates and agents

Date	Time	Location
Tuesday 29 October	10am – 1pm	Committee Room 5-Ground Floor Civic Centre
Wednesday 30 October	10am – 1pm	Committee Room 5-Ground Floor Civic Centre
Thursday 31 October	Final opening session to start at 8pm	Committee Room 5-Ground Floor Civic Centre

Postal votes

- Currently there are **1,584** postal voters in the Bilston North ward
- A video to assist electors to complete postal pack will be available on website: Wolverhampton.gov.uk/elections
- Initial dispatch date (for postal voters who had applied by 2 October): 11 October, to land on doorsteps on 12 October 2024
- Second dispatch date (for postal voters who had applied by 16 October): 18 October to land on doorsteps on 19 October 2024.

Questions?

Polling day

- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm
- Office open 6am to 10.15pm for queries or problems relating to the administration of the election
 - for queries relating to election finance issues, contact the Electoral Commission
- Voters in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station at 10pm can apply for a ballot paper
- Postal votes – can be handed into polling stations within Wolverhampton or delivered to the elections office until 10pm.
- A person in a queue at a polling station at 10pm waiting to hand in a postal vote can do so after 10pm.

Polling day procedure - Voter ID

- Further information on Voter ID and types of ID acceptable can be found on website: www.Wolverhampton.gov.uk/elections
- If an elector forgets to bring their ID or does not bring an accepted form of ID they will be asked to return with photo ID by 10pm.
- If an elector brings an accepted form of ID but the Presiding Officer does not think it bears a likeness to the elector or suspects it is a forged document, a ballot paper will be refused (in consultation with a second opinion from a Polling Station Inspector, if required)
- An elector may wish to request the use of a privacy screen to check their ID in private.

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Polling day procedure- Accessibility

How to vote at this election

- 1** Go to the desk and tell the staff your name and address.
They will give you your ballot paper. 
- 2** Take your ballot paper to a voting booth. 
- 3** Read the instructions in the booth and mark your ballot paper. 
- 4** When you have marked your ballot paper, fold it so that nobody can see how you have voted. 
- 5** Put your folded ballot paper into the ballot box. 

Voting is secret. Do not let anyone see how you have voted.
If you make a mistake or need some help, just ask the staff

- Additional equipment available to support people with a disability
- Poll clerk in meet and greet role throughout the day to be the first point of contact to support
- Additional yellow and black signage around the polling station

Elections Act- Postal Vote Handling rules

- Electors are now required to complete a **postal vote return form** when handing in postal votes at the polling station or the Civic Centre. This form must be handed over to polling staff or a member of electoral services.
- Electors can hand in a **maximum** of 5 packs plus their own.
- Exceeding this number will result in the pack(s) being **rejected**.
- If a form is not completed the law now requires that the postal pack(s) is **rejected**.
- Electors will be informed that the postal vote has been rejected as part of the normal notification process within **3 months of the close of poll**.

For staff use only:	Date and Time:	Location:	
Postal vote return form			
Please read the information on page 2 before completing this form. Your postal vote (s) will be rejected if you do not complete this form in full.			
Section 1			
1. Are you handing in your own postal vote?			Yes/No
2. Are you handing in the postal votes of other electors? (if 'No' go to question 3)			Yes/No
a. If 'Yes', how many other electors? (max. per poll is 5 plus your own - see note 1 on page 2)			
3. Are you a political campaigner? (see note 2 on page 2) (if 'No' go to question 4)			Yes/No
a. If 'Yes', and you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, do the postal votes all belong to close relatives or to people for whom you provide regular care?			Yes/No
4. How many envelopes containing postal votes are you handing in? (including your own, if applicable)			
Section 2			
5. Name			
6. Address			
7. If you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, please provide a reason why			
8. I declare that in total I have not handed in postal votes for more than the permitted number of electors, either at any polling station or to the Returning Officer, at this/these poll(s) and that to the best of my knowledge I am: (delete (a) or (b) as appropriate)			
(a) not a political campaigner for whom it is an offence to handle certain postal votes or			
(b) a political campaigner and have only handed in my own postal vote and/or that of a close relative, or someone for whom I provide regular care.			
9. Signature		10. Date	
Section 3 To be completed by the Relevant Officer			
I, (insert name)....., being the Relevant Officer at the following location(add polling station name or council offices):			
A. am satisfied that this form has been completed properly and provides the information as required. I do not suspect that more than the permitted number of postal votes have been handed in, nor do I suspect that the individual named above is a political campaigner committing an offence by handing in the postal votes. Therefore the postal vote(s) handed in is/are to be accepted (tick if applicable for all postal votes handed in) <input type="checkbox"/>			
B. reject the attached postal vote(s) because the person handing it/them in: (tick all reasons that apply)			
i. did not fully complete the postal vote return form (incomplete)			<input type="checkbox"/>
ii. handed in postal votes on behalf of more than the permitted number of electors			<input type="checkbox"/>
iii. was a political campaigner not permitted to handle the postal votes			<input type="checkbox"/>
iv. did not complete the postal vote return form (left behind postal voting document)			<input type="checkbox"/>
Total number of postal votes rejected			<input type="text"/>
If you have accepted the individual's own postal vote(s), please tick here			<input type="checkbox"/>

Emergency Proxy

- In certain circumstances (medical, service or employment) an elector can apply for an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day.
- New reason added – someone has lost or damaged their intended voter ID after the proxy deadline (5pm 23 October)
- If eligible, Electoral Services will advise elector to complete proxy form (collect from Civic)

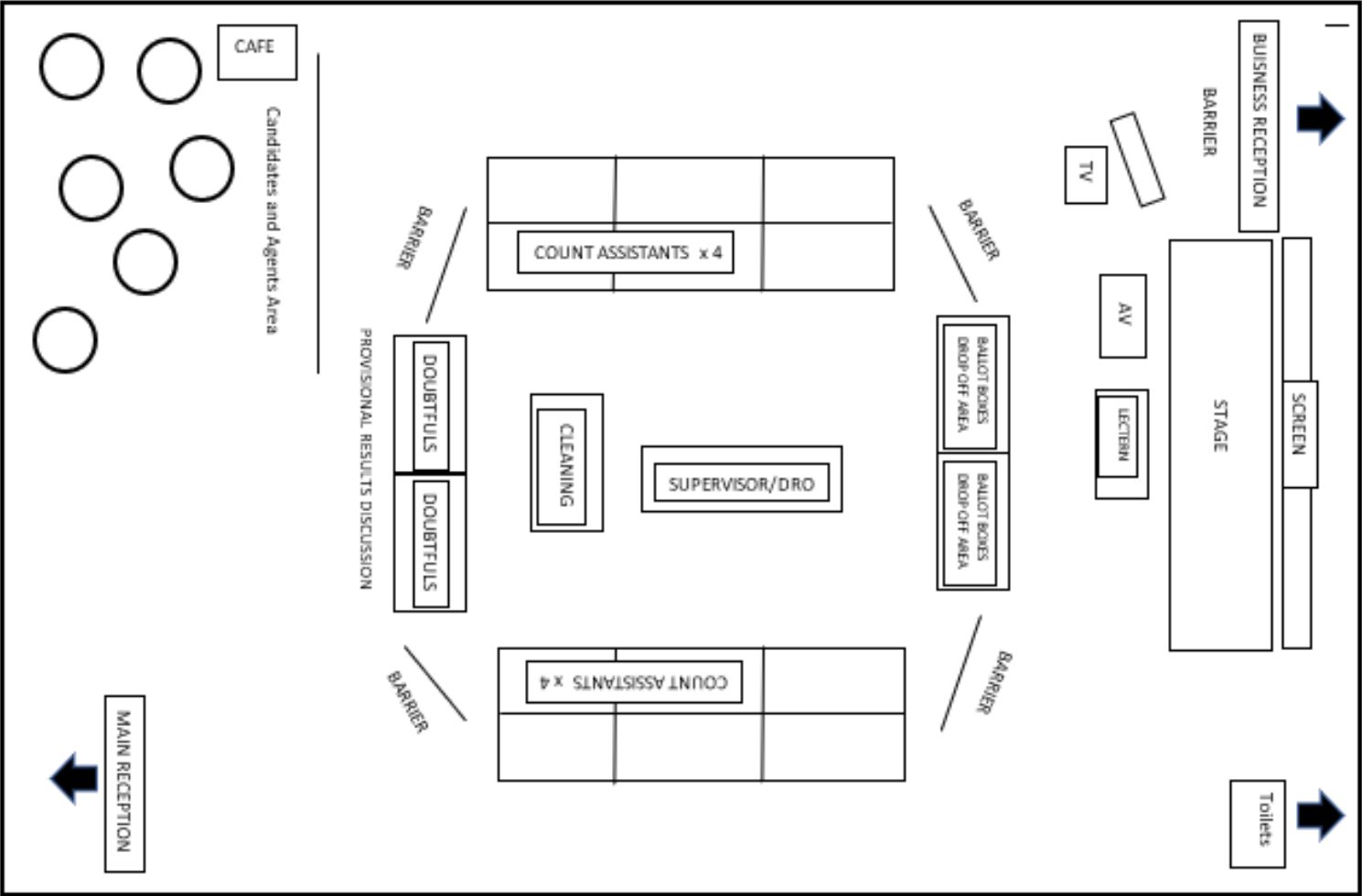
Questions?

Verification and count

- The verification and count will be held in:
 - **The Atrium, Civic Centre (Ground Floor), St Peters Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RG**
- Receipt of ballot boxes and final postal vote opening session on Thursday 31 October 2024 from 10pm until midnight.
- Count venue will open to candidates and agents from 9.30am
The verification will commence from 10:01pm.
- We anticipate verification will be finished by 11:30pm.
- The count will start as soon as ward verification is complete.
We estimate the count will be finished by 1am at the latest.
- A letter inviting you to the count will be sent out a week to two weeks before the election. A lanyard will be issued on arrival.

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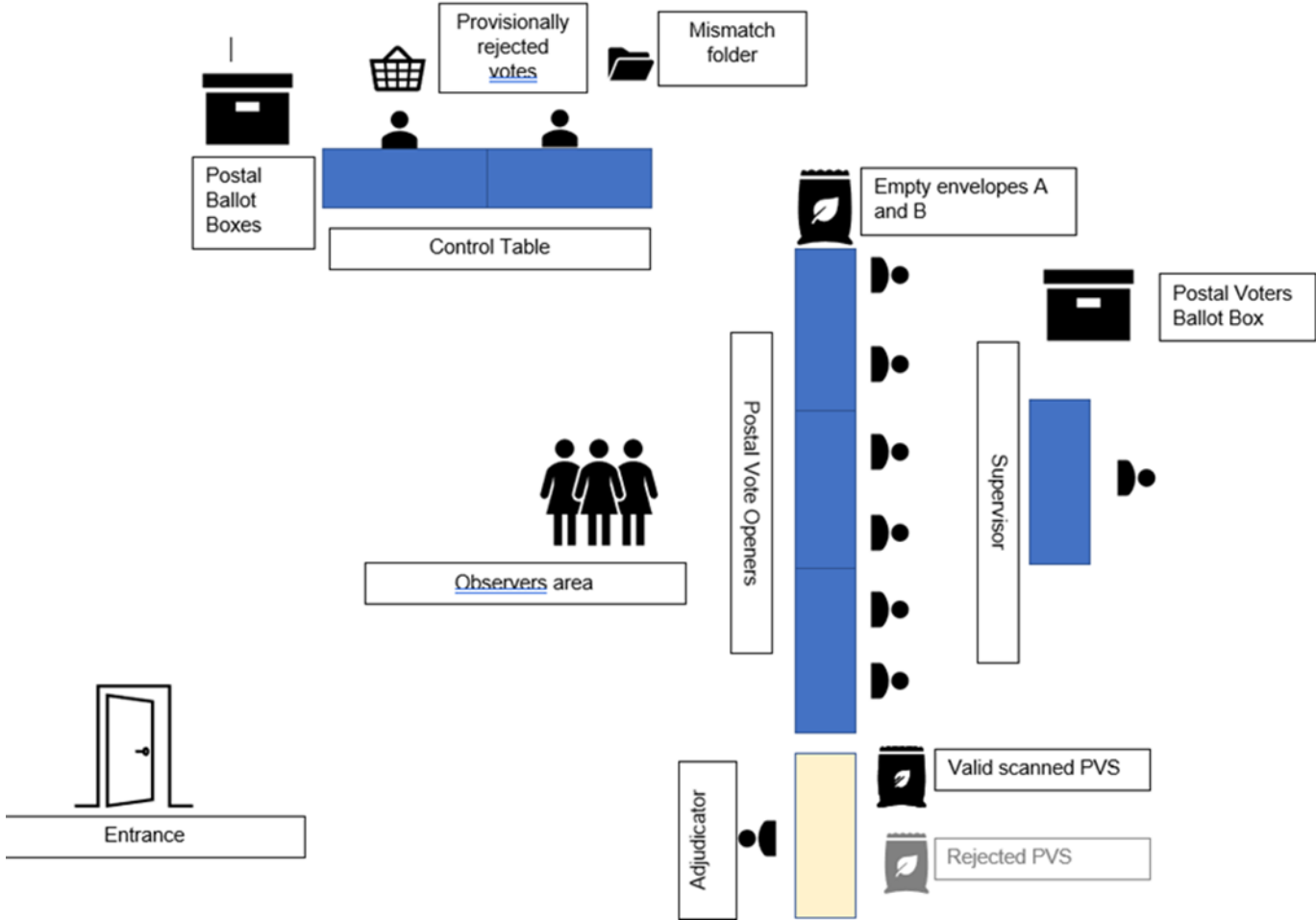
Count Layout



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Postal Vote Opening – Committee Room 5

Postal Vote Layout



Count tickets

- Counts tickets and car park permits will be posted out within the next 10 working days to Candidates and Election Agents.
- Count Agents and guests will receive them a few days before the Count, after the deadline to appoint Count Agents on 24 October.



General information

- Café will be open on the ground floor for the purchasing of refreshments and food. They do take card payments.
- No food or hot drinks in the Count hall.
- No mobile phone use in the Count hall.
- The Returning Officer will remove anyone at the Count who is being disorderly.

Verification

- On 31 October, from 10:01am - Verification will take place first. Ballot papers will be counted face up into bundles of 20 (having first counted two sets of ten). They will be checked by another count assistant with a big tick placed on the count slip to indicate this has taken place. They will then be collated into bundles of 100. A bundle of 100 will have an elastic band around the ballot papers. Bundles which are not 100 will be clearly marked with a count slip indicating the total number. The Returning Officer will be able to give the turnout figure at the end of the Verification process.
- Once Verification has been completed the counting of ballot papers face up by Candidate voted for, will begin.

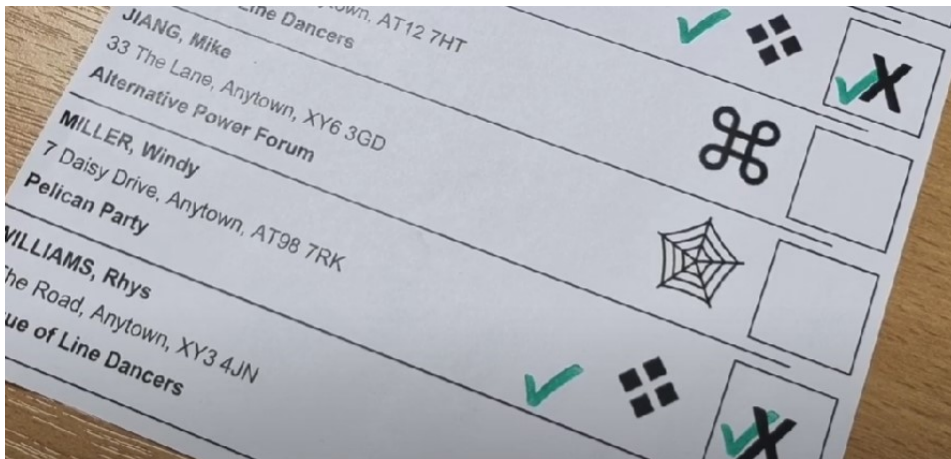
Doubtful ballot papers

- Doubtful ballot papers will be placed in a tray at the end of the Count table. Doubtful ballot papers will be adjudicated by a Deputy Returning Officer in front of Candidates and Agents. Rejected vote reasons are:
 - a. Want of official mark**
 - b. Voting for more candidates than entitled**
 - c. Writing or mark by which elector could be identified**
 - d. Unmarked or void for uncertainty**

Doubtful ballot papers

Adjudicated ballots – good votes

- Where a ballot paper has been adjudicated to have a good vote, a Green Tick Stamp will be used by the Deputy Returning Officer to make a green tick in the correct box, where there is a good vote. A green tick on a ballot paper will be counted as a standard good vote.



Declaration of results and media

- DRO's will call candidates and agents for the ward to view the provisional results. A check will be undertaken to make sure it is only the Candidates and Agents entitled to be there for that ward. Once agreed – final results will be prepared for Returning Officer
- Returning Officer will make declaration of results on the stage. Results will be updated on the Council's website.
- Laura Gittos (DRO) will collect winning candidate to sign declaration of acceptance of office.

Questions?

Contacts

- **Elections office:**
 - Candidates@wolverhampton.gov.uk
 - 01902 555050 (number for candidates and agents only)
 - 01902 551177 (public number – customer services)
- **Electoral Commission:**
 - infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
 - 0333 103 1928

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Thank you