

Part E – The poll

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Electoral Commission has produced a separate *Handbook for polling station staff* designed to assist Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, which covers the procedures involved in managing a polling station and which should be referred to for any questions relating to the duties of polling station staff. This part of the guidance manual does not replicate the content of that handbook, but instead aims to cover the key issues around polling day that affect Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and electoral administrators on polling day.

1.2 A copy of the *Handbook for polling station staff* can be downloaded from the Commission's website, and hard copies will also be sent to councils that ordered them from the Commission.

Legislative changes

1.3 Following the enactment of the EAA, LEPAR 2006 and P&C Rules 2006, and the further amendments made to the RPR 2001, it is important to be familiar with, and to brief staff on, the various procedures that are now in place.

1.4 It is particularly important to be familiar with the impact of these pieces of legislation on the following aspects of polling day:



- persons entitled to attend at polling day proceedings
- standard voting procedure, in particular the replacement of ballot paper counterfoils with a corresponding number list
- ability to issue a tendered ballot paper to electors or proxies on the postal voters list who claim not to have applied to vote by post
- ability to correct clerical errors on the register up to 9pm on polling day
- emergency proxy applications
- collecting postal votes from polling stations throughout polling day
- allowing for replacement postal ballot packs to be issued up to 5pm on polling day
- variation to the standard voting procedure for anonymously registered electors

2 Polling day issues for the Returning Officer and staff

Hours of poll

2.1 The hours of poll for local government elections in England and Wales are **7am to 10pm**.

Public enquiries

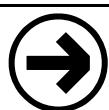
2.2 In the weeks leading up to polling day, the Returning Officer's staff can expect to receive an increasing number of enquiries from members of the public, ranging from people who do not know where their polling station is to various queries about electoral registration matters.

2.3 One of the most frequent enquiries on polling day is likely to be from members of the public who arrive at a polling station to find out that they do not appear on the register and are therefore unable to vote. There is usually very little that can be done, other than sending them a rolling registration form.

2.4 Presiding Officers should be instructed, however, to direct any person who is insistent that they made an application to register to the Electoral Registration Officer as the register can be amended up to 9pm on polling day in the event of a clerical error.¹ Further information on clerical errors can be found in Section 4, 'The register of electors'.

2.5 The Returning Officer's staff can also expect to receive many and varied enquiries from electors, candidates and agents, party activists and polling station staff.

2.6 It is particularly important to anticipate any enquiries that may arise in relation to the recent changes to the voting procedure, or concerns about the secrecy of the ballot as a result of the use of the corresponding number list, which contains both the ballot paper number and the voter's elector number.



Some suggested frequently asked questions (FAQs) for frontline staff will be produced by the Commission and will be available for download from the Commission's website. These are designed for use by staff who do not normally work in elections, such as call centre staff and receptionists, in dealing with general enquiries, to increase their awareness and understanding and to assist in promoting good practice and good customer service. FAQs for polling station staff are contained in the *Handbook for polling station staff*.

¹ Section 13B, RPA 1983, as inserted by Section 11, EAA.

Emergency proxy applications

2.7 Electors can apply to appoint a proxy on medical grounds up to 5pm on polling day.² Returning Officers will need to alert polling staff to this possibility and set up procedures for receiving applications on polling day and contacting Presiding Officers should any applications be received.

2.8 Where possible, if the Electoral Registration Officer grants an emergency proxy application on polling day, they should establish direct contact with the relevant Presiding Officer to communicate their decision.

2.9 The emergency proxy will have been supplied with a proxy paper, and should be advised to take this documentation to the appropriate polling station as authorisation that they have been appointed to vote as a proxy at that polling station. This paper could then be handed to the Presiding Officer and kept with the absent voters list as a record that the proxy has been issued with a ballot paper. Returning Officers may consider applying some form of security marking to any such documentation, particularly where direct contact with the polling station staff is difficult.

2.10 Additionally, it is recommended that a blank form be attached at the end of the absent voters list and issued to polling stations to allow Presiding Officers to record the details of any electors whose emergency proxy applications have been granted on polling day, allowing an audit trail to be created even where a proxy paper has not been handed over by the proxy, has been returned to the proxy or has been otherwise misplaced.

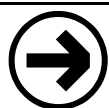


As a matter of good practice, Returning Officers may wish to provide Presiding Officers with some application forms for appointing proxies in a medical emergency. This prevents the elector having to locate a form and expedites the process for both the elector and the Electoral Registration Officer. The Commission has provided downloadable forms on its website.

Replacements for lost or spoilt postal vote ballot packs

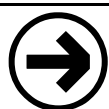
2.11 Postal voters and postal proxy voters can apply to the Returning Officer for a replacement postal ballot pack up to 5pm on polling day if they have not received a postal ballot pack, or have lost or spoilt the contents. In addition, replacement postal ballot packs may be issued to those electors or proxies appearing on the list of postal or postal proxy voters but who claim never to have applied for a postal vote and who have not received one.

² Regulation 56(3A), RPR 2001.



The Commission has produced a template form on which the details of any elector or proxy claiming not to have applied for a postal vote may be recorded, and which includes a space for electors or proxies to sign. Completion of this form, although not required, would provide a signature which could then be checked against the absent vote application form after the election. This template form will be available to download from the Commission's website.

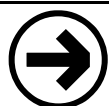
2.12 Suitable staff need to be available on polling day to deal with these requests and any associated queries. It is important to make sure that these staff members are able to advise on the suitable forms of identification the elector needs to present when applying for a replacement postal ballot pack.



Further advice on these forms of identification and the general process of replacing postal ballot packs can be found in Part D, 'Absent voting'.

Polling station visits

2.13 Many Returning Officers undertake polling station visits themselves and also instruct other members of staff to carry out visits on their behalf. Although the exact nature of these visits is for Returning Officers to determine, they can be used for a number of reasons, such as to check that polling stations have been set up correctly, including making an assessment of accessibility issues, and to answer any enquiries that Presiding Officers may have.



An accessibility checklist for polling stations can be found in Section 7, 'Resources'.

2.14 It is advisable for visiting officers to carry with them spare equipment, stationery and other items such as forms, envelopes and copies of the register of electors, in case of any problems at polling stations, e.g. shortages or missing items, or non-working stamping instruments (if being used).

2.15 Returned postal votes can be collected from polling stations throughout the day, so Returning Officers may use these visits to collect any postal votes that have been delivered by hand to the polling station. It is important to ensure that postal votes removed from the polling station before the close of poll are transmitted in a secure manner and that there is a clear audit trail.

Responding to emergencies

2.16 Various emergencies may occur on polling day, e.g. a fire at a polling station, a Presiding Officer running out of ballot papers, polling staff being taken ill, etc. The Returning Officer will have previously developed a series of contingency plans to deal with such emergencies.

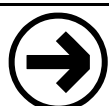
2.17 It is important that Presiding Officers know who to contact in the event of any such emergency. They should be provided with a contact telephone number, which should be staffed throughout polling day. Staff based in the office should have mobile phone numbers for any visiting officers because they may be closest to the polling station in which an emergency occurs.

2.18 Presiding Officers should also be given a contact number for the police. Polling stations may be visited by police and police community support officers during polling hours. Every police officer should have a pocket guide covering electoral integrity issues, which has been developed by the Commission with the Association of Chief Police Officers, on which the details of the Presiding Officer may be noted. The exchange of contact details between visiting police officers and Presiding Officers should be encouraged.

3 Managing the polling station

Briefings for polling station staff

3.1 All polling station staff should be required to attend a briefing session shortly before polling day. This should give Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks all the information that they require to run the poll, any relevant local information and details of what to do at the close of poll.



The Commission has developed several resources to support the training of polling station staff.

It has produced a separate *Handbook for polling station staff*, which can be downloaded from the Commission's website. Hard copies will also be sent to those Returning Officers who ordered them from the Commission. This handbook covers all procedures involved in running a polling station and should be referred to for any questions relating to the duties of Presiding Officers and other polling station staff.

The Commission will also make available on its website downloadable template lesson plans and a template PowerPoint presentation to support councils in the training and briefing of polling station staff.

3.2 Evaluation of all briefing sessions should be carried out in order to gauge their effectiveness. One possible method of evaluation would be to require all attendees to complete a questionnaire, either at the conclusion of the session or perhaps after the close of poll, when staff will be in a position to determine whether their briefing had equipped them to carry out their duties successfully on polling day.

Equipment

3.3 The Returning Officer is required to provide each polling station with sufficient equipment for the poll, including ballot boxes, ballot papers, a copy of the register of electors, the corresponding number list, the lists of postal voters, proxy voters and postal proxies, and the relevant notices, forms and packets.³



It is important to note that the corresponding number list for use in the polling station must **not** include the unique identifying marks of the ballot papers.⁴

3.4 Each Presiding Officer should be given a copy of the list of equipment that they are provided with, so that they can check that they have everything on polling day.

3.5 A full checklist of equipment is included in Section 7, 'Resources'.

³ Rule 26, LEPAR 2006.

⁴ Rule 26(3)(d), LEPAR 2006.

Persons entitled to attend proceedings on polling day

3.6 The law restricts who may be present inside a polling station. In addition to voters and members of the Returning Officer's staff, only the following people may attend:⁵

- persons under the age of 18 years who are accompanying voters
- candidates at the election and their election agents
- polling agents (only one polling agent per candidate at any given time)
- police officers on duty
- Electoral Commission representatives
- observers accredited by the Commission
- companions of disabled voters

3.7 The attendance of persons under the age of 18 years who are accompanying voters, representatives of the Commission and observers accredited by the Commission is permitted as a result of changes made by the EAA and LEPAR 2006.

Persons under the age of 18 years who are accompanying voters

3.8 Persons under the age of 18 years are now able to accompany voters into the polling station.⁶ Although it has previously been common practice to allow children to accompany voters into the polling station, it is worth being aware that it is now a requirement to allow them in, although the Presiding Officer may limit the number of under-18s in the polling station at any one time.⁷ This power should, however, only be used when their attendance hinders the proceedings in some way.

Electoral Commission representatives

3.9 Representatives of the Commission are entitled to observe various electoral procedures in addition to the working practices of Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers, referendum Counting Officers and staff appointed by them.⁸ This includes attending the polling station during, before and after polling hours. They may ask questions of the Returning Officer and their staff, of candidates and agents, and of electors. Commission representatives are instructed not to interfere with the proceedings in any way.

Accredited observers

3.10 Individuals and organisations may apply to the Commission to be accredited to observe the proceedings at the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers, the poll and the counting of the votes.

3.11 Observers accredited by the Commission do not need to give advance notification of where they intend to observe. Every observer must, however, carry photographic identification and should not be allowed to observe proceedings without it. Sample observer badges can be found in

⁵ Rule 30, LEPAR 2006.

⁶ Rule 30(1)(b), LEPAR 2006.

⁷ Rule 30(2), LEPAR 2006.

⁸ Sections 6A and 6B, PPERA, as inserted by Section 29, EAA.

Part B, 'Preparing for a local government election', Section 7, 'Electoral integrity', and on the Commission's website.

3.12 The Returning Officer and electoral services staff can check the status of those seeking to gain access to procedures as observers at any time by downloading the registers of all accredited observers from the Commission's website. Since accreditation does not become effective until three days after an observer has been added to the online register, the registers effectively 'close' three days before polling day.



Electoral observation is a legitimate and valuable part of the electoral process, and care should be taken not to hinder or obstruct the conduct of the observation. Although Returning Officers are entitled to limit the number of accredited observers who may be present at any proceedings,⁹ the Commission advises that caution should be used in the exercise of this power. It is important to note that no officer is entitled to bar all observers from the entire process, only to limit the number of observers present at any one time. Careful consideration therefore needs to be given to the locations used as polling stations or for postal vote opening sessions, ensuring that sufficient space is made available for observers.

In all instances, officers should only seek to limit the number of observers if their presence is hindering the conduct of the proceedings or jeopardising the secrecy of the ballot.

Accredited observers are obliged to follow the Code of practice for observers, which is available on the Commission's website.

Presiding Officers should be familiar with the salient points of the Code and should be instructed to notify the Returning Officer of any potential breaches. Returning Officers should report any allegations to the Commission as soon as possible.

The Commission has also issued separate guidance to Returning Officers and Presiding Officers on the exercise of their powers in relation to observers, as it is required to do by statute. Returning Officers and Presiding Officers are required to refer to this guidance before exercising any of their powers in relation to observers, such as excluding them from polling stations.

Personation

3.13 On rare occasions, a member of the polling station team, another elector, a candidate, election agent or polling agent may suspect that a person requesting a ballot paper is not who they claim to be. A Presiding Officer has no powers to interrogate that person, although the prescribed questions may be asked before issuing a ballot paper. To aid with any future investigation, Presiding Officers could record a witness statement, noting the key facts and any observations. The Commission has developed a template form, available

⁹ Section 6E, PPERA, as inserted by Section 29, EAA.

for download from its website, which may be used for recording such a statement.

3.14 Further advice to Presiding Officers on how to deal with allegations of personation can be found in the *Handbook for polling station staff*.

Anonymous electors

3.15 There may be some electors who have anonymous entries on the electoral register. Anonymous electors will appear on the register without their name and address: their entry on the register will consist of their elector number and the letter 'N', and will be found at the end of the register under the 'Other electors' section. The voting procedure for anonymous electors differs from that for ordinary electors: anonymous electors **must** have their poll card in order to vote.

3.16 Full details of the appropriate voting procedure for electors with an anonymous entry are set out in the *Handbook for polling station staff*, and should be highlighted at the pre-election briefing session for polling station staff.

4 The register of electors

4.1 Each Presiding Officer should be provided with the appropriate register of electors for their polling station. They should also be made aware of the various categories of electors shown on the register. It can be useful to include these as a separate sheet or on the cover sheet of the register. All the categories and associated markers are included in the *Handbook for polling station staff*.

Clerical errors



The deadline for correcting clerical errors on the register is 9pm on polling day.¹⁰

4.2 There are two types of clerical error that may come to the Electoral Registration Officer's attention on polling day:

- those where an elector has been entered on the register incorrectly, e.g. mis-spelling of a name, or incorrect inputting of numbers in a date of birth indicating that the elector is under 18
- those where a registration form has been received by the Electoral Registration Officer but no entry has been made on the register

4.3 Differing views have been expressed in the past concerning the extent of the Electoral Registration Officer's power in relation to the correction of clerical errors. Within the strict wording of the legislation, the Electoral Registration Officer can determine that the register 'contains' a clerical error.

4.4 However, the Commission's view is that this corrective ability is intended to encompass any clerical errors, including the omission of names clearly shown on a registration application form received by the Electoral Registration Officer in time for the election in question and where an error has been made during the processing of the application form. The register in such a case contains a clerical error in the omission from it of the name on the application form.

4.5 If, however, the elector has made an error in completing the application form and the Electoral Registration Officer has processed the form correctly, this does not amount to a clerical error and so is not covered by the clerical errors provision.

4.6 It is unlikely to be necessary to correct clerical errors on polling day where the elector appears on the register in some form and is able to legitimately answer the statutory questions satisfactorily. However, Presiding Officers should be instructed to act consistently in any such cases and where there is any doubt they should contact the Electoral Registration Officer.

¹⁰ Section 13B, RPA 1983, as inserted by Section 11, EAA.

4.7 When an Electoral Registration Officer makes a determination to correct a clerical error to enable an elector to vote, they must issue a notice in accordance with the legislation and should notify the Presiding Officer.¹¹ If the Electoral Registration Officer determines that a correctly completed application form was received but the person's details have not been entered onto the register as a result of a clerical error, the Electoral Registration Officer must issue an instruction (either written or verbal) to the Presiding Officer by 9pm to allow that person to vote up to 10pm on polling day.

4.8 The Electoral Registration Officer must take reasonable steps to communicate the notice to the appropriate Presiding Officer (either in writing or orally) in order to ensure that the person who is the subject of the notice is permitted to vote. If the notice is communicated orally, which includes by telephone, the Presiding Officer must make a written record of the elector's name and number.¹²

4.9 The legislation is silent on how the Presiding Officer should make this written record. The Commission's view is that, wherever possible, a blank form should be attached to each polling station register to allow Presiding Officers to write down the name and elector number of any such electors, if and when they are communicated.

4.10 Once the instruction has been received, the Presiding Officer must issue the ballot paper in the usual manner, and either the instruction notice issued by the Returning Officer or the Presiding Officer's written record must be marked to show that the elector has voted.¹³

4.11 The legislation requires that both the marked copy of the register of electors and any marked copy notices issued to correct clerical errors have to be included in the same sealed packet at the close of poll.¹⁴

¹¹ Regulations 36 and 36A, RPR 2001.

¹² Regulation 36A(2) and (3), RPR 2001.

¹³ Rule 35(3), LEPAR 2006.

¹⁴ Rule 43(1)(d), LEPAR 2006.

5 Tellers and campaigners

5.1 It is a well-established practice for candidates or their agents to appoint 'tellers' positioned outside polling stations to record the names of electors who have voted, usually by asking for their poll card or elector number. This is for the purpose of assisting party workers to identify potential supporters who have yet to vote.



The Commission has consulted on guidance on the activities of tellers. This guidance can be found in the Commission's *Handbook for polling station staff* and *Guidance for candidates and agents*. Both of these documents are available to download from the Commission's website.

5.2 It is important to remember that the Returning Officer is in charge of the conduct of the election, so if they feel the poll is being adversely affected by the activities of tellers, they should request that tellers either comply with agreed behaviour or leave the polling place. If any reports of incidents occurring at polling stations are received, members of staff charged with conducting polling station inspections should be directed to attend immediately with a view to resolving any issues. It is also useful to have the telephone number of the local police available in case of any incidents that cannot be resolved amicably.

6 Procedure on close of poll

6.1 Presiding Officers should be briefed to close their polling stations punctually at 10pm. They should be given clear instructions on what they are expected to do after the close of poll. Poll Clerks should be instructed to deal with notices and polling screens, etc. to allow Presiding Officers to concentrate on the important paperwork.

6.2 Clear instructions should be provided to Presiding Officers about the arrangements for the collection of the ballot boxes for onward delivery to the count location or, for those who are required to transport the boxes to the count venue, about the arrangements for delivery. In this case, Presiding Officers should be advised as to the location of the count venue, any parking arrangements, at which entrance they should deliver their ballot boxes, and procedures for handing in the boxes, ballot paper accounts, any postal votes handed in at the polling station and any other election stationery, including the marked registers.

6.3 A contact number should have been provided to Presiding Officers in case they experience any difficulties or delays in getting to the count venue. It is important that this number is continually staffed in the event of such a situation.

6.4 Presiding Officers should have been instructed on how to complete the ballot paper account correctly and about sealing the various packets of documents. A checklist is provided in the *Handbook for polling station staff* but it is important to make sure these are then double-checked when arriving at the count venue.

6.5 It can be useful to appoint staff solely responsible for receiving and checking items into the count venue until all materials have been received from the polling stations.

6.6 To aid efficiency, the Presiding Officer should hand in the ballot paper account and the packet containing any postal votes returned to the polling station separately.

6.7 The following documents should also be checked on arrival at the count venue:

- the unused and spoilt ballot papers
- the used and tendered ballot papers
- the marked copy of the register (including any marked copies of notices of alteration) and the list of proxies
- the corresponding number lists of all used ballot papers
- the spoilt ballot papers and the certificates of employment
- the tendered votes list, the list of voters with disabilities assisted by companions, the list of voters marked by the Presiding Officer and accompanying statement, and the declarations made by the companions of voters with disabilities

6.8 It is helpful to supply Presiding Officers with two different sacks: a clear one for the packets of documents to be returned to the Electoral Registration Officer for storage; and an opaque sack for other items of stationery. Presiding Officers should also be advised to dispose of any rubbish at the polling station.

7 Resources

Equipment checklist

7.1 The full list of items that must be provided at each polling station is as follows:

- ballot box(es)
- relevant part of the register and any notices issued under Section 13B(3B) or (3D) of the RPA 1983
- corresponding number list
- absent voters lists – postal voters, proxy voters and postal proxies
- ballot papers
- ballot paper accounts
- tendered ballot papers
- stamping instrument (if official mark is not pre-printed)
- voting device for use by blind or partially sighted voters
- copy of the statutory questions
- copy of the requirements as to secrecy (Section 66, RPA 1983)
- forms of declaration by companions of voters with disabilities
- form of list of tendered votes
- form of list of votes marked by the Presiding Officer
- form of statement of number of votes marked by the Presiding Officer
- form of list of voters with disabilities assisted by companions
- direction for guidance of voters
- large-print version of the ballot paper
- enlarged hand-held sample copy of the ballot paper
- voting compartment notices
- polling station notices
- polling screens
- plastic seals or locks for sealing the ballot box¹⁵
- pencils for use by voters, and string to attach them to the polling booths
- notepaper for use by polling station staff
- stationery items as required, e.g. paper clips, drawing pins, Blu-Tack, adhesive tape
- envelopes, preferably with seals, in which to place postal ballot papers returned to the polling station
- envelopes for making up packets
- plastic sacks (one clear, one opaque) for returning stationery and equipment to the count venue
- form to record errors on the register of electors
- form of list to record electors marked as postal voters but who claim not to have applied for one

¹⁵ The Commission does not recommend the use of sealing wax for health and safety reasons. However, if this method is used, it is important that staff are instructed to exercise extreme caution.

Accessibility checklist for polling day – setting up a polling station

7.2 The initial setting up of a polling station can make all the difference as to whether it is accessible or not. It is therefore important that polling staff who are responsible for setting up polling stations should be made aware of all the following provisions.

Signage at polling stations

- Signs should be placed so that electors can be directed to the entrance for disabled voters, if this is different from the main entrance to the polling station.
- All signs should be placed at a height so that someone in a wheelchair can read them without difficulty.
- A simple notice could be displayed outside the polling station to advise voters to ask the Presiding Officer to provide help if required.
- A large polling station sign should be visible from the main road.

Car parking for disabled people

- Any car parking spaces for disabled people should be clearly marked.
- Polling station staff should not park their own cars in these spaces and should, if possible, keep an eye on them throughout polling day to ensure that they are kept available for use by disabled people.

Level access to polling stations

- If temporary ramps are to be used at a polling station, the Presiding Officer should be informed beforehand and ideally be shown how to install them, if they are not in place before polling day.
- Ramps should be secure and stable with a low gradient. If they are not fitted properly, they can be dangerous and could cause injury to electors.
- Ramps should be kept clear of any obstructions.
- Polling station staff should check any temporary ramps at regular intervals to make sure that they have not become dislodged or are presenting a hazard to electors.

Entrances to polling stations

- Heavy doors that are difficult to open can be a major access barrier to some electors. Propping doors open can help, although this is obviously not ideal if polling station staff are left sitting in a cold draught and electors have to vote in cold conditions.
- Any loose mats should be removed, if they are likely to present a trip hazard.
- If there is separate access for disabled people, this should be clearly signed and kept open.

Inside the polling station

- Inadequate space inside the polling station causes problems for wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments who may need

more space to manoeuvre. It also means that people cannot be assured that their vote is secret and unobserved by other voters.

- Polling station staff should set up the polling station considering the best place to site themselves, the ballot box and polling booths so that people have enough space to get in and out of the polling station.

Lighting of polling stations

- Adequate lighting is important for people with visual impairments. Many people's vision is dependent on the quality of lighting, especially for reading and writing. Good lighting, both in the polling booth and where the large-print version of the ballot paper is displayed, is vital.
- Lighting outside the polling station and particularly in the area leading up to the entrance should be adequate.
- Lighting inside the entrance, corridors and room where the polling booths are situated is also important so that voters can get to and from the polling booth easily.
- Polling station staff need to be aware of the lighting conditions in the polling station and should switch on whatever lights are necessary.

Low-level polling booths and ballot boxes

- Low-level polling booths are an easy way to improve the accessibility of polling stations and should be installed in every polling station.
- The ballot box should be placed on a chair rather than a table as this allows wheelchair users and other people who are not able to reach ballot boxes on tables the opportunity to cast their vote independently and confidentially.
- A white strip placed around the slot of the ballot box helps visually impaired people to locate the opening more easily.

Guidance to voters

- The notice which must be displayed in every compartment of every polling station explaining how to fill in the ballot paper can be produced in a graphical format or in any other way that makes the information more accessible to persons who might not otherwise have reasonable access to the information.¹⁶

Large-print notice of ballot paper and hand-held sample copy

- Large-print notices are important to people with visual impairments and can allow someone to vote independently.
- At least one large-print version of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station for the assistance of voters who are blind or partially sighted. However, it is helpful to provide more than one large-print version of the ballot paper.
- The legislation also requires that an enlarged hand-held copy of the ballot paper, marked as a 'specimen', is available to anyone who requires it. This can be given to voters to take into the polling booth with them. If these are laminated, it helps to prevent them getting torn or dirty.

¹⁶ Section 199B, RPA 1983.

Device to enable voters who are blind or partially sighted to vote without assistance

- It is a legal requirement to provide a tactile voting device at every polling station. The tactile template is a device that allows someone who is blind or partially sighted to mark the ballot paper themselves once the details on the ballot paper have been read out, either by their companion or by the Presiding Officer.
- Polling station staff should be made aware that the provision of a tactile template is a legal requirement and should be trained in the use of the device in order to be able to assist those who wish to vote using the device.
- If Returning Officers choose to print double-column ballot papers, then an appropriate template will be required and the polling station staff should be trained in its use.
- In many cases, voters who may find the template useful may not be aware that this is available for them to use. It may, therefore, be helpful for polling station staff to suggest to electors that they may wish to use the device where it appears appropriate. The right approach is important to avoid causing offence.

Seating

- Chairs can be provided in polling stations for anyone who needs a rest. However, chairs should not be placed so that they get in the way of other voters, nor should they overlook people casting their votes.

General

- All disabled people and older people should be treated as individuals. The manner in which such people are approached is important: if you think someone needs assistance, ask them first, rather than make assumptions.
- Presiding Officers can set up a table in the polling station with all the materials for disabled voters, so that they or their companions can see everything that is available to assist them, including the enlarged sample copies of the ballot papers and the devices to assist voters who are blind or partially sighted.

7.3 Seeking feedback from disabled voters as to the access and disabled facilities at their polling station may help to highlight any previously unnoticed accessibility issues and drive future improvements.

Notification of secrecy requirements

Section 66, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)

(1) The following persons –

- (a) every returning officer and every presiding officer or clerk attending at a polling station,
- (b) every candidate or election agent or polling agent so attending
- (c) every person so attending by virtue of any of sections 6A to 6D of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not, except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate to any person before the poll is closed any information as to –

- (i) the name of any elector or proxy for an elector who has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station;
- (ii) the number on the register of electors of any elector who, or whose proxy, has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station; or
- (iii) the official mark.

[...]

(3) No person shall –

- (a) interfere with or attempt to interfere with a voter when recording his vote;
- (b) otherwise obtain or attempt to obtain in a polling station information as to the candidate for whom a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted;
- (c) communicate at any time to any person any information obtained in a polling station as to the candidate for who a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given to a voter at that station;
- (d) directly or indirectly induce a voter to display his ballot paper after he has marked it so as to make known to any person the name of the candidate for whom he has or has not voted.

[...]

(5) No person having undertaken to assist a blind voter to vote shall communicate at any time to any person any information as to the candidate for whom that voter intends to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given for the use of that voter.

(6) If a person acts in contravention of this section he shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months.