



**BETHNAL GREEN & BOW AND
POPLAR & LIMEHOUSE
PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES**

ARRANGEMENTS FOR COUNTING OF THE VOTES

7 MAY 2015

CONTENTS

Section		Page No.
1	Venue, transport and admission arrangements	1
2	Facilities for candidates, agents, guests and media	3
3	General arrangements for count/layout of the hall	3
4	Provisions to ensure secrecy of the Poll	5
5	How the votes are counted	5
6	Dealing with doubtful ballot papers	8
7	How the votes for each candidate will be calculated, recounts and equality of votes	8
8	Declaration of Results	9
9	Arrangements in case of evacuation or emergency	10
	Appendices	
1	Count Hall floor plan	12
2	Code of Conduct for Candidates, Election Agents, Counting Agents and Candidates' Guests	13
3	Code of Conduct for Media Accredited to Attend the Counting of Votes	14

1. Venue, transport and admission arrangements

- 1.1 The verification and counting of votes will take place at the close of poll, at the ExCel Centre, One Western Gateway, Royal Victoria Dock, London, E16 1XL. It will formally commence at 10.00pm and the admission of those entitled to attend will start at 9.30pm. ExCel's usual rules and regulations apply throughout the Centre (e.g. no smoking on the premises) and, in addition, the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) has put in place Codes of Conduct for those attending the event that must be observed throughout the proceedings. These are set out in Appendices 2 and 3. To gain admission to the count those attending will have to sign an undertaking to comply with the appropriate Code of Conduct and observe any further requirements that the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) puts in place during the event.
- 1.2 Travel options are described on the ExCel Centre's website - <http://www.excel-london.co.uk/visiting-excel/travel-guide/> . All onsite parking is pay and display for Candidates, election agents, counting agents and all other invitees. Some parking bays are reserved for people with disabilities near the entrance. ExCel's normal parking regulations apply.
- 1.3 Admission to the count hall is through the main entrance at the front of the building. Admissions will be registered at the entrance to the count hall, on the main avenue. Only people whose names are on the attendance list will be admitted and photographic ID is required, as indicated in the ARO's letter of appointment. Candidates and agents must bring a signed copy of the code of conduct before being granted entry to the count.
- 1.4 All entrants will be issued with a designated badge and security wrist band which must be worn for the duration of the count.
- 1.5 During the course of the evening, readmission to the count hall will be permitted only for those wearing a security wrist band. This will speed up the process of re-entry in the situation where those entitled to attend choose to leave the hall briefly to use the public conveniences, get refreshments, make a phone call, talk with colleagues, follow onscreen progress with both Constituencies' counts, or watch the plasma TV screens that will be showing election night coverage from around the country.
- 1.6 The site is fully accessible for people with disabilities and the entrance to the count hall is on the ground floor. If you require assistance at any stage, please make yourself known to a member of staff wearing a hi-viz jacket.
- 1.7 The Count is not a public event. Some people, like the candidates, their election agents, counting agents and candidates' personal guests are entitled to attend. Other invitees – such as the media - are at the discretion of the Acting Returning Officer (ARO).
- 1.8 The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) is responsible in law for the conduct of the count. Everyone in attendance is under the direction of the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) and will be required to observe the appropriate Code of Conduct for the duration of the proceedings. Clear signage will be used to reiterate the rules of conduct that apply to all attending the counts, including a ban on the use of mobile phones or other devices in the count hall.

- 1.9 During the counts, the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) will make decisions about the management of the event and, except in the case of an emergency situation, he will first call together any candidates and election agents present in the hall at that time in order to give them prior notice. This will include any decision to suspend a count during the specified hours, which will be taken in consultation and agreement with candidates or election agents.
- 1.10 Once taken, the Acting Returning Officer's (ARO) decisions will be carried out by the Deputy AROs, Constituency Count Controllers, count supervisors, security staff or the Police, as appropriate.
- 1.11 At 10.00pm, before the start of phase 1 (verification), the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) will address candidates, election agents and all others in attendance to:
- remind those present of the verification and count processes
 - confirm the security arrangements for the ballot papers and boxes
 - reiterate how election agents can observe and participate in the adjudication of doubtful ballot papers
 - confirm that smoking is not allowed within the building, that no alcohol is allowed in the count hall, and that mobile phones may not be used in the count hall
 - make necessary announcements regarding health and safety issues, including evacuation procedures and fire drills
 - inform attendees about where they can get further information, and;
 - any other relevant information that is needed for the conduct of the event.
- 1.12 The proceedings of the counts follow a sequence and process that is prescribed in law, and the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) will be proceeding with full regard to the performance standards published by the Electoral Commission on their website [<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>] which are designed to ensure best practice is followed uniformly across the country. The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) will therefore be monitoring progress against all these statutory requirements as the counts proceed and will be able to manage the achievement of best practice, including adjustments as to resources, during the course of the counts.

2. Facilities for candidates, election agents, counting agents, candidates' guests and the media

- 2.1 Tea, coffee, soft drinks and snacks will be on sale in the main avenue of the ExCel Centre, at least for the early stages of the count and we will confirm availability throughout the evening. No alcohol will be sold or should be consumed in the count hall itself or in the main avenue in the vicinity of the hall.
- 2.2 There are prayer rooms at ExCel and these will be identified to guests and staff at the event. If in any doubt, ask one of the staff wearing hi-viz jackets.
- 2.3 The basic catering facility in the second count area – mentioned further in paragraph 3.5 below - is reserved for the ARO's staff only.
- 2.4 The media area shown on the plan will be available for reporters to undertake electronic communications but any interviews with candidates, political commentators etc during the counts must be undertaken in the adjacent count hall.

3. General arrangements for the count/layout of the hall

- 3.1 The Acting Returning Officer (ARO), John Williams, has overall responsibility for the conduct of the count. He will liaise with the candidates and election agents, and also with site management and security staff. At the end of both the verification and count stages of the proceedings he will announce the results from a stage area in the count hall. He will also make regular announcements throughout the event as to the progress of the verification and the count, including when all ballot boxes have been received, occasional updates of the percentage of papers verified, overall turnout in each Constituency, the verification total for each Constituency, occasional updates of the percentage of papers counted, when adjudication starts, and when the declaration of results is imminent. The Deputy Acting Returning Officers will make themselves available to candidates and election agents throughout the event if you have any matter to raise.
- 3.2 The votes will be counted in two separate constituencies. Copies of the floor plan will be provided for all candidates and appointed agents prior to the count. There will be separate count zones for each of the two Constituencies – Bethnal Green & Bow and Poplar & Limehouse. Each will have a dedicated count controller, they will be wearing hi-viz jackets to make them easily recognisable.
- 3.3 The Constituency Count Controller will be assisted by a small team of supervisory staff to complete the paperwork and co-ordinate and facilitate the work of the counting teams.
- 3.4 The counting area for each constituency will comprise of 80 count assistants. There will be one count supervisor and deputy for every 8 count assistants. Separate zoned areas will be marked for unverified and verified ballot boxes. The Acting Returning Officer will announce which polling station each box is from before it is opened for verification.

3.5 The following staff will be appointed for each Constituency:

One Deputy Acting Returning Officer
One Constituency Count Controller
Ten Count Supervisors
Ten Deputy Count Supervisors
Eighty Counting Assistants in teams of two for verification and teams of four for counting of the votes
Five Support Staff
Two Accountants

3.6 There are 36 polling places in use for the Bethnal Green & Bow Constituency and 38 polling places for the Poplar & Limehouse Constituency. From 10.00pm onwards, the Presiding Officers will arrive at the ExCel Centre with their ballot boxes and other equipment. The postal ballot papers received before polling day will already be in the count hall in sealed boxes (probably about 9 boxes), and postal ballot papers received on polling day will be processed in the adjacent count area in ExCel and placed in sealed boxes before being transferred into the count hall after completion of the final opening session. The equipment and other materials returned from polling stations will be also sorted in the adjacent area and, as required by statute, the packets of unused ballot papers will be verified and checked.

3.7 The majority of ballot boxes should arrive between 10.15 and 11.15 pm. If the turnout does not exceed 70%, the target is to complete phase 1 (verification) in the 2 hours following the arrival of the last ballot box. Statute requires that, unless there is good reason, phase 2 (the counting of the votes) should begin by 2.00am and this should be achievable. The duration of phase 2 will depend on several factors, including the number of candidates, the number of ballot papers to be adjudicated and whether or not any form of re-count is necessary (see below).

Postal Votes

3.8 Sealed ballot boxes containing postal ballot papers that have been received and processed in the days leading up to polling day will be situated by the centre tables in each constituency so that the ballot papers can be verified and then mixed with the ballot papers from the polling stations.

3.9 The opening of postal votes received on polling day will be undertaken in the adjacent count area. In accordance with the statutory requirement, the signatures and dates of birth provided on the postal vote statements will be electronically matched against those provided when the voter first applied for a postal vote.

3.10 When this process has been concluded, sealed ballot boxes containing the postal ballot papers will be delivered to the main count hall, so that the ballot papers can be verified and mixed with the ballot papers from the polling stations.

3.11 Each candidate will be invited to appoint a designated number of Counting Agents, who, along with the election agent and the candidate, are entitled to:

- observe the counting process
- require an adjudication on doubtful ballot papers
- object to a ballot paper rejected at adjudication and
- request a re-count.

4. Provisions to ensure the secrecy of the poll

4.1 Everyone attending the count is required to maintain the secrecy of the voting process. Extracts from Section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 are set out below and you must ensure you read them.

Representation of the People Act 1983 Section 66 (2) and (6)

- (2) Every person attending at the counting of the votes shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not—
- (a) ascertain or attempt to ascertain at the counting of the votes the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper;
- (b) communicate any information obtained at the counting of the votes as to how any particular ballot paper has been marked.
- (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 imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

4.2 If you need to keep your mobile phones on during the count process you are asked that these are switched to silent and/or vibrate. You are **NOT** permitted to use your mobile phone in the count hall.

4.3 For the secrecy, integrity and accuracy of the counts, it is imperative that no-one except members of the Acting Returning Officer's (ARO) staff touches any of the ballot papers, the ballot paper accounts or any other documentation or equipment brought in from the polling stations or from the opening of postal votes at any stage during the process.

4.4 The layout therefore provides double width counting tables for all of the count teams and their Supervisors, opposite which there is a row of seats for the counting agents, and – behind them – a roped barrier to stop overcrowding at the count tables and to prevent other observers from crowding the tables.

5. How the votes are counted

5.1 The counting process consists of three phases:

Phase 1 - Verification

5.2 This involves counting the number of ballot papers in the ballot box, to ensure that the number tallies with the number indicated on the ballot paper account

submitted by the Presiding Officer (PO) at each polling station or by the supervisor in charge of a postal vote opening session.

- 5.3 The contents of the box will be counted up to three times if it cannot initially be verified against the ballot paper account. After three counts, the ARO, will make a decision whether to accept a number counted as being the number of votes cast at that polling station. The ARO has instructed that for this election there is to be a zero tolerance threshold at verification and so as far as practicable, figures need to match those on the Ballot Paper Account.
- 5.4 At 10pm, Supervisors will be given permission to start verifying the contents of the postal ballot boxes that will contain the postal ballot papers that have been opened during the week before the election.
- 5.5 From around 10.15pm onwards ballot boxes will start arriving from the polling stations and then Supervisors will start the process of verifying the contents of these boxes.

How will the contents of the box be verified?

- 5.6 Supervisors will open each ballot box and empty the contents onto the table, and should clearly demonstrate to any observers that the box is empty before it is taken away to the marked area. The ballot box number can be seen on the team's verification paperwork and team tray.
- 5.7 The count assistants working in pairs will unfold the ballot papers being sure to keep them **face upwards**. They will then count the ballot papers into bundles of 25 and place a 25 count slip on each bundle.
- 5.8 Any bundles of fewer than 25 will have a 'odds' count slip attached stating the number of papers in the bundle.
- 5.9 No decisions are being made at this point in the process about the validity of the vote so neither count assistants, counting agents, election agents or candidates will make any comments or decisions on any doubtful papers.
- 5.10 Once all the ballot papers have been verified they will then be placed on the centre tables in full view of candidates and agents.

Verifying the unused ballot papers

- 5.11 While the verification and count is being undertaken there will be a team of staff in the adjacent count area undertaking a thorough check of the unused ballot papers, as required by law, and a statement as to the verification will be available on request by election agents

When will we be told what the turnout is?

- 5.12 The ARO will announce the total number of votes cast and the turnout once the verification process for each Constituency has been completed.

Phase 2 – Mixing and Sorting

- 5.13 The process for sorting the ballot papers will be as set out below:
- 5.14 The Supervisor will mix ballot papers into each team tray before they are placed onto the table. It is set out in the law that postal ballot papers must be mixed with ones from the polling stations and ballot papers from polling stations must be mixed with each other.
- 5.15 Depending on the number of candidates in the Parliamentary elections, a two-stage sorting process may be undertaken. The ballot papers will be allocated to assistants, who, working in teams will sort them face upwards into trays for the candidates representing the main parties, plus a tray for 'others' and a tray for 'adjudication'. The assistants will then sort the pile of "others" into piles for the other candidates.
- 5.16 The teams will check the sorted papers to ensure (a) they are all for the same candidate and (b) they all only have one vote marked on them.
- 5.17 Once all the ballot papers for a team have been sorted, the Supervisor will conduct a first stage adjudication of the doubtful votes in view of the candidates and agents. Any papers that are objected to, will be passed to the Acting Returning Officer for final adjudication in a separate area.
- 5.18 Where a voter has marked the ballot paper with ticks or smiley faces instead of crosses, and there is no doubt that this is intended to represent a vote for a specific candidate, the Acting Returning Officer has stated that such ballot papers can be sorted as good and placed in the appropriate tray. Ballot papers marked in any other way, or in a manner which gives rise to some doubt as to the voter's intentions, will be set aside as a doubtful ballot paper.

Phase 3 – counting

- 5.19 Once the ballot papers have been sorted the teams will count the number of ballot papers in each candidate's tray into bundles of 25 and 'odds'.
- 5.20 Once the number of ballot papers has been reconciled to the allocated number, the Count supervisors will collect the candidate trays and place them in the candidate trays on the middle table. Each tray will be clearly marked with the name of the candidate. Marker cards will be used to indicate every 500 ballot papers in centre trays.
- 5.21 Supervisors have been advised to constantly check and re-check the bundles of ballot papers to ensure that bundles for each candidate have been placed together and that each bundle contains papers for that candidate only.
- 5.22 Candidates, election agents and counting agents are entitled to watch the count from the opposite side of the table, but must not touch any ballot paper. If an agent questions the validity of any ballot paper, the counting assistant will, without discussion, place it into the doubtful votes pile. The bundles of sorted / counted ballot papers will be kept in sight of the counting agents at all times.

6. Dealing with doubtful ballot papers

- 6.1 The Acting Returning Officer will undertake final adjudication of any doubtful ballot papers for each area.
- 6.2 The relevant election agents etc. will be formally called to the adjudication table at the end of the count area. Only those entitled to be there will be able to observe the adjudication. The process and criteria for adjudication will be exactly in line with the arrangements demonstrated to election agents and counting agents at the meeting held in March 2015
- 6.3 The Acting Returning Officer will hold up each ballot paper, giving all the agents and candidates sufficient time to see it, whilst at the same time announcing his decision – “good for (name of candidate), or “rejected for being unmarked” etc. Election agents and candidates may object to the rejection, the Acting Returning Officer is final will mark the ballot paper ‘rejection objected to’, but the acting Returning Officers decision is final.
- 6.4 The Acting Returning Officer may only reject a ballot paper in accordance with statutory provisions (as amplified in case law and Electoral Commission guidance) and therefore on the grounds that it:
 - (i) does not bear the official mark
 - (ii) contains more than one vote
 - (iii) contains writing or any mark by which the voter can be identified
 - (iv) is unmarked, or is marked in a manner which leaves doubt as to the voter’s intentions.
- 6.5 Once the decision has been made, the Constituency Count Controller, assisting the Acting Returning Officer, will record the decision, and ensure that good votes are included in the count and that rejected ones are kept separately.
- 6.6 Ballot papers that have been adjudicated will not be re-counted or re-adjudicated in the case of a re-count being ordered by the Acting Returning Officer.

7. How the votes for each candidate will be calculated

- 7.1 When all ballot papers have been sorted and counted the team will write the number of votes cast for each candidate on a summary sheet for their Supervisor to take to the accountants at the back of the count area.
- 7.2 When the accountant receives information from the Constituency Count Controller on the number of adjudicated votes for each candidate, the accountant will add these figures to the “adjudicated allowed” figure and will then calculate the total votes for each of the candidates, for each team.

- 7.3 The accountant will undertake a number of checks on the figures before they compile a summary of votes cast for each candidate. The Acting Returning Officer will double-check the figures and if satisfied the accountant will complete the Declaration paperwork.

What procedure will be followed if a recount is required?

- 7.4 If a recount is ordered by the ARO, the Deputy Acting Returning Officers will ensure that all agents and candidates in the hall are made aware of what is happening by means of a public announcement. There are several types of re-count that might take place:
- (a) A check may simply be made of the bundles between the 500 markers to check the correct number of bundles are in each section.
 - (b) Each individual bundle of ballot papers may be checked to see that they only (i) contain 25 ballot papers; (ii) that all the ballot papers are for the same candidate and (iii) there is only one vote on the ballot paper. This is known as a “bundle flick”. The count slips will stay on the bundle during this process.
 - (c) A full recount will involve the count slips being removed and the bundles taken back to the team tables to be recounted.
- 7.5 Just before the ARO is ready to declare the result, he will show the provisional result to the election agents and candidates to advise them of the outcome and seek their agreement on the announcement of the result. A candidate or election agent may request a recount but the ARO may refuse if he thinks it is unreasonable.

What will happen if two or more candidates have the same number of votes who are in first place?

- 7.6 By law, when there is an equality of votes the ARO must decide between candidates by lot. There is no requirement to draw lots if one candidate has a majority and the equality is between other candidates who are not in first place.
- 7.7 The ARO has decided that if the drawing of lots is required, ballot papers marked with a vote for each of the candidates with the same number of votes will be folded and placed in an empty ballot box, mixed around, and then the ARO will draw one ballot paper. The candidate whose name is on the ballot paper drawn will have 1 vote added to their total votes and they will have the majority.

8. Declaration of results

- 8.1 The Returning Officer, will declare the result for each Constituency’s election on the stage in the main count area.
- 8.2 As the result is being declared, staff will input the results so that they appear on a large screen in the ExCel Centre as well as on the Council’s web site.

9. Arrangements in case of evacuation or emergency

9.1 Fire and major emergencies will be in accordance with ExCel evacuation procedures

- (ii) Members of staff identified by the ARO and wearing hi-viz jackets will ensure that exits are not congested.
- (iii) Once satisfied that the media, observers and guests have left, the ARO will instruct the count staff and the candidates and agents to leave the building in an orderly manner and to convene at the assembly point.
- (iv) The ARO will instruct staff to secure the entrances to the hall and ensure that no one enters or exits other than those involved in dealing with the emergency. No person will be readmitted until the hall supervisor has been advised by the emergency service that it is safe to do so.
- (vi) When advised that the emergency is over the ARO and Deputy Acting Returning Officers (DARO) will re-enter the building, at which time the ARO will decide whether the count will resume. The ARO may wish to discuss this with the election agents.
- (vii) If the count is to resume, the counting staff and the counting and election agents will be readmitted to the building and resume their positions. Once they are in position any other persons previously admitted to observe the count will be readmitted and the process will resume.
- (viii) If it is not practical to resume the count in the hall, the ARO will direct that the ballot papers be resealed in empty ballot boxes in the presence of witnesses, and election agents may affix their own seals to these boxes. These boxes and all other unopened boxes will then be moved to an alternative location or to a secure place until arrangements can be made to restart the count process.

9.2 Lighting/power failure

ExCel has its own backup generators which should kick in immediately in the event of a power failure. At the very least, this system will provide sufficient light should evacuation of the building be necessary. ExCel's management team will ensure that all emergency lights are activated.

9.3 Accident reporting and investigation

You should report any accident or injury to John S Williams or Louise Stamp as quickly as possible, who will take any necessary action.

9.4 Other disruption or time overrun

In the event of disruption for other than any of the above reasons, or in the event of re-counts of significant duration, Acting Returning Officer (ARO) will

announce and activate an appropriate contingency plan that may, following consultation with the candidates and their election agents, involve the adjournment of the count until a later time or to an alternative venue.

John Williams
Acting Returning Officer

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COUNT HALL FLOOR PLAN – To Follow

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London Borough of Tower Hamlets

UK Parliamentary Election Count, 7 May 2015 Code of Conduct for Candidates, Agents and Guests

All attendees at the Count are reminded that:-

- The Acting Returning Officer is responsible in law for the conduct of the count and has authority to exclude anyone from the venue if their behaviour interferes with the effective conduct of the count.
- Candidates, their guests, appointed election agents and counting agents have important statutory roles at the count but these roles must be discharged in a manner that does not interfere with the effective conduct of the count.
- All persons present at the count must maintain the secrecy of the count in accordance with Section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- Only appointed counting agents may occupy the chairs provided opposite the count assistants.

Please note that counting agents and other observers must not:-

- touch the ballot papers;
- interfere or converse with the counting assistants; or distract count staff by speaking loudly at them or amongst themselves;
- lean over or onto count tables;
- knowingly obstruct the count process; or
- breach or attempt to breach the secrecy of the ballot

In order to ensure the secrecy of votes on ballot papers during the count:-

- **No mobile phone or other portable electronic device may be used in the count room**
- No photography or filming is permitted in the count room except by accredited media representatives and under the supervision of communications staff.

No smoking is permitted anywhere in the count venue.

Refreshments may be consumed only in the area of the venue set aside for the purpose. No drinks may be brought into the count room.

Declaration:-

I will observe the above code of conduct. If instructed by the Acting Returning Officer in relation to my conduct I will accept the Acting Returning Officer's instructions.

I have been provided with a copy of section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, I understand its provisions and I will aid in maintaining the secrecy of the ballot.

I understand that any failure to observe the Returning Officer's instructions may lead to my exclusion from the count.

Signed Date

Print Name Designation

**Code of Conduct for Media Accredited to Attend the Counting of
Votes – To Follow**

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