



Part B

Planning and Organisation

**The Scottish Independence
Referendum
Guidance for Counting Officers**

Translations and other formats

This document can be made available in certain alternative formats. For further information, contact Ros Wilson at ros.wilson@edinburgh.gov.uk, telephone 0131 469 3820.

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1 Planning for the Referendum

Project Plan

- 1.1 At an early stage, it is essential to prepare a project plan then to treat it as a “living document” and keep it under regular review, using it to monitor progress and to inform the development of your lessons learned report.
- 1.2 You should ensure that your planning supports the delivery of the following outcomes:
- Voters are able to vote easily and know that their vote will be counted in the way they intended
 - It is easy for campaigners, campaigning organisations and their agents to find out how to get involved, what the rules are and what they have to do to comply with these rules so that they will have confidence in the management of the process and the result



To be able to meet the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to develop and implement robust project planning processes including budget and risk management, encompassing all aspects of the referendum process. To demonstrate that the outcome can be delivered you will need to have in place project planning documentation which is kept under regular review and which reflects lessons learned from previous electoral events.

You will need to be able to provide the CCO with confirmation that your project plan includes all of the criteria as outlined in the performance standard. Further guidance on each criterion is provided throughout this part of the guidance.

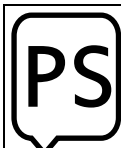
- 1.3 The CCO has produced a template [project planner](#) in that you may wish to use and adapt to fit your local circumstances. This template follows the previous style used by the Commission and is available also in Excel. The template includes a number of deliverables and tasks which are key to the successful administration of the referendum. In addition to the deliverables and tasks identified in the template, you should include any others you identify as necessary, including ones specific to your local circumstances. It is not a requirement for you to use this particular template to meet the standard as long as your own plan contains all of the requirements outlined in the standard.
- 1.4 Before starting your detailed planning, you should set out what you want to achieve and what success would look like. Your project plan should include clearly defined objectives and success measures. As part of the project plan, the CCO has provided some sample aims and suggested tools that will allow you to measure the extent to

which the conduct of the referendum has been successful.

- 1.5 You must, by law, comply with any [directions](#) that the CCO has issued on the conduct of the referendum¹ and should be ready to provide any information she requires to fulfil her monitoring duties.
- 1.6 If you have not already done so, you should conduct a review of previous electoral events to identify what worked well and what did not, which should assist with informing your planning. Further guidance on reviewing procedures can be found in [Part F – After the declaration of results](#).
- 1.7 Your project plan for the referendum should include a plan to evaluate procedures post-referendum and to identify lessons learned. In addition, you should, at the next electoral event, produce a lessons learned document. This document should also inform the planning of any future election or referendum.
- 1.8 Your project plan should cover contingency planning and business continuity arrangements. The continuity arrangements should include provisions to cover loss of staff and loss of venues during the referendum period. Advice on developing continuity arrangements for these specific processes is provided in the relevant sections throughout this part of the guidance.
- 1.9 Your project plan should also identify the resources required. You should take all necessary steps to ensure that your local authority makes the necessary resources available to you to enable you to carry out your functions.
- 1.10 The CCO has published a [timetable](#) containing the statutory deadlines as set out in the [Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013](#) which can be used to inform your planning.

Risk Register

- 1.11 You should prepare a risk register, treat it as a “living document” and keep it under regular review, using it to identify and monitor risks and to document any changes in risk, as well as ensuring that mitigating actions are identified and are being taken forward as appropriate.



To be able to meet the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to have a comprehensive risk register taking into account the requirements of paras 1.12 and 1.13 below.

¹ SIRA 2013 Section 7(6)

1.12 Your risk register should identify the following:-

- Any difficulties and problems that may occur and the actions taken to mitigate them
- The seriousness of any risk by indicating both the likelihood of the risk occurring and the impact of the risk if it did occur

1.13 The CCO has developed a [template risk register](#) that you may wish to use. The template follows the previous style used by the Commission. We have also produced an Excel version of the template risk register. The template provides some example risks and suggestions for mitigating those risks. In addition to the risks identified in the template, you should also identify any other risks, including ones specific to your local circumstances and how you would mitigate those. It is not a requirement to use this particular template as long as your own risk register identifies the requirements as outlined in the standard.

2 Staffing

- 2.1 Your plan should include identification of staffing requirements, including any necessary recruitment arrangements. It is essential that you identify the staff you will need and make the necessary appointments at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.2 You should seek advice from your council's human resources department as necessary to ensure that the methods used to identify, recruit and employ staff are robust and comply with all legal requirements.
- 2.3 Following an assessment of the performance of staff used at previous electoral events, you may wish to write to staff used previously at an early stage in the planning process to check their availability. You can use your experience of staffing at the European Parliamentary Elections to inform your recruitment process for the referendum, while taking into account that the turnout at the referendum will almost certainly be much higher and that additional staff will almost certainly be needed.

Project team

- 2.4 You should establish a project team to support you in carrying out your functions and in delivering a well-run referendum. In addition to yourself, your project team should include:
 - any appointed deposes
 - other referendum office team members
 - where you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the ERO or a senior representative from that service
- 2.5 Your project team should also include any other key personnel as appropriate.
- 2.6 The project team should have a clear remit and understanding of the tasks to be carried out. At the planning stage, a schedule of meetings should be prepared and a record of each meeting should be kept as an audit trail of what was discussed and of any decisions made.

Deposes

- 2.7 You should make early arrangements to appoint deposes in case you are unable to act personally as Counting Officer. You will need to ensure that any deposes appointed have the skills and knowledge required to carry out the functions that they have been assigned. You are required by law to make any such appointment in writing and to include details of the functions that the depositee is authorised to

exercise on your behalf.² Although it is not a legislative requirement, it is good practice for the acceptance also to be made in writing. The Forms Working Group has developed styles for these letters that you may wish to use. These styles will be available on the Knowledge Hub.

Referendum Team

- 2.8 Your core election team, with their experience of running electoral events, should be part of the project team. Based on experience of previous electoral events and taking account of the likely workload at the referendum, you should assess whether the team is adequately staffed and whether you will need to recruit and train any additional members to support the effective delivery of the referendum as part of a dedicated referendum team.

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)

- 2.9 If you are not also the Electoral Registration Officer, you will need to liaise closely with that officer or a senior representative of that office to obtain the relevant registration and absent voting data. If there is a need for exchanging data electronically, you should agree the timings for the exchange of data and ensure that a test of the process is carried out ahead of the first scheduled transfer.
- 2.10 The ERO should consider whether any additional support staff will be needed to assist with the processing of registration and absent vote applications in the lead-up to the referendum.

Support staff

- 2.11 You should identify staff and ensure they are available and adequately informed to assist with any public enquiries you may receive in the run-up to the referendum. You should set up a dedicated team (and/or train front reception or call centre staff) to deal with a range of basic enquiries, such as questions about whether a person is registered to vote, postal and proxy voting and the location of polling places.
- 2.12 Any staff dealing with public enquiries should receive training to equip them to handle the enquiries effectively and should be provided with responses to frequently asked questions, as well as a list of the locations of polling places and key dates in the referendum timetable. The CCO has developed a [template of FAQs for front line staff](#) which you can adapt to fit your local circumstances. A process should be in place for the escalation of more complex enquiries to the referendum team or to the Electoral Registration Office as appropriate.

² SIRA 2013 Section 6(6)

Staff for specific referendum processes

2.13 As well as establishing your project team and support staff, you will need to appoint staff to help you undertake the various referendum processes. You should identify staffing requirements and put processes in place for recruiting the necessary staff. You should have access to a database of staff used at previous electoral events. Staff can be recruited from among council employees. As CO, you should take all necessary steps to ensure that your local authority provides you with the staff you need to support you in fulfilling your role, as it is required to do by law.³

Polling station staff

2.14 You have a legal duty to appoint and pay a Presiding Officer and such Poll Clerks as may be necessary to staff each polling station. This cannot, by law, be any person who is or has been involved in campaigning for a particular outcome in the referendum.⁴

2.15 You must ensure that, when allocating electors and staff to polling stations, you implement any directions made by the CCO. You should also have regard to any advice or guidance issued by her. The CCO has directed that there should be a maximum of 800 electors, excluding postal voters, allocated to each polling station.

2.16 When drawing up your polling scheme, it is important that you give careful consideration to the likely footfall in the polling station at peak hours and the ability of the staff to cope with the volume of electors at these times. It is essential to build in sufficient flexibility to ensure that electors have a positive experience of polling and that there are no avoidable delays.

2.17 It is important that, when allocating electors and staff to polling stations, the reasoning behind the decisions on allocation can be explained. You should be able to provide details of your approach to allocating electors and staff to polling stations. Each decision should be taken on a case by case basis and not for the local authority area as a whole.

2.18 In deciding on the allocation of electors and staff to polling stations, you should consider:-

- expected turnout levels – high turnout levels have been predicted for the referendum and the levels appropriate for the most recent electoral event – the European Parliamentary Elections – are very unlikely to be adequate for a high level of turnout.

³ SIRA 2013 Section 7(9)

⁴ SIRA 2013 Schedule 3 Rule 10

- any particular local circumstances such as population increases or demographic trends
- levels of postal voters
- any local or national issues which may affect turnout



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have a robust polling scheme which complies with CCO guidance and directions and which takes account of local circumstances and voter needs. You should be satisfied that your staffing levels are sufficiently flexible to provide a high quality service to voters. You should be able to provide the CCO with details of the reasoning behind your staffing levels at polling stations. You should also analyse the effectiveness of your strategy for the lessons learned document that you will prepare after referendum day.

- 2.19 There are different options available to you for deploying staff within polling stations. Your plans should be sufficiently flexible to allow you to deploy staff to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout the day of the referendum.
- 2.20 Although you should decide on what roles the staff at each polling station should carry out, it may be necessary to adapt this at different points in the day, for example at peak times.
- 2.21 If a polling place contains multiple polling stations, a member of staff could be used as an information officer for the polling place as a whole to assist with directing voters to the correct polling station. Also, staff from one polling station in the polling place could potentially be used to assist at other polling stations there if required, for example as a result of a high number of voters attending one station while others are quiet. The Senior Presiding Officers in polling places with multiple stations should be briefed on ways of deploying staff to maximise the efficiency of the polling stations and the polling place as a whole.
- 2.22 If practical and feasible within your budget, you could consider appointing a small number of “standby” staff to respond to staffing emergencies. Where your local authority covers a large geographical area, you will have to consider the best location for these staff to ensure that they can be flexibly deployed.
- 2.23 If budgetary provision allows, you could also consider appointing part-time Poll Clerks to provide assistance at peak polling hours or in the run up to the close of poll. Similarly, you could consider appointing a team of back-up polling staff to be deployed at peak times to specific polling stations or to respond to specific issues that may arise throughout the day of the referendum. If parts of the local authority area are not easily accessible, it might be helpful to have teams positioned in different parts of the area. In deciding your staffing levels, you will need to have regard to the provisions of [The Scottish Independence Referendum \(Chief Counting Officer and Counting Officer Charges and Expenses\) Order 2014](#).

- 2.24 To be able to deploy staff flexibly on the day of the referendum, you will need to provide staff with appropriate training. Further guidance on training can be found in [Section 3 below](#).

Polling station inspectors

- 2.25 Polling station inspectors play an important role in the effective management of polls, including dealing with queries and problems arising at polling stations.
- 2.26 You should make arrangements to appoint polling station inspectors to visit and inspect polling stations on your behalf on the day of the referendum. In deciding on the allocation of polling station inspectors to polling places, you should consider:
- the geography of the area and travelling distance between polling places (including any likely traffic issues at peak times)
 - the number of polling stations in each polling place
 - the experience of polling station staff in each polling place and the level of support they might require
 - expected turnout levels and any particular local circumstances (in particular, any history of problems in the polling stations on the route); and
 - the number of visits polling station inspectors will be expected to make to each polling place during the day
- 2.27 Polling station inspectors should ensure that all their assigned polling stations are properly set up in such a way as to take account of voter needs and to contribute to the smooth running of the polling place. They should check that the polling places are fully equipped and accessible to all voters.
- 2.28 Polling station inspectors provide an essential communication link between polling staff and the CO. The polling station inspector should work with the Presiding Officers and other polling station staff to identify and deal with any problems arising and should escalate any issues to the CO or nominated depute as appropriate.
- 2.29 The polling station inspector may be involved in liaising with the Electoral Registration Office and the referendum team about referendum day amendments to the polling list and emergency proxy applications. In these instances, you should have a process in place for communicating any changes and should advise polling station inspectors of their role in it, if any.
- 2.30 Polling station inspectors should aim to visit all their allocated polling stations as early as possible after the poll opens so that they can reassure you that all the stations are operating effectively. You should plan the routes for polling station inspectors to enable them to visit particularly large or problematic polling places at an early stage.

- 2.31 Subsequent visits throughout the day can be used for a variety of purposes including collecting postal votes, answering any questions that polling staff may have, checking that all notices remain properly displayed and delivering any missing or additional equipment required. Polling station inspectors should therefore carry with them spare equipment and stationery in case of any shortages or missing items. This should include polling station handbooks and quick guides, equipment, stationery and other items such as forms, envelopes and copies of the polling lists.
- 2.32 You should provide polling station inspectors with [instructions as to their role and a checklist of tasks](#) that they should carry out. A template checklist has been produced by the CCO. This document also contains a list of items that the polling station inspector should receive prior to the day of the referendum.
- 2.33 Beyond highlighting any issues, the completed checklists can also be used to inform an evaluation of the suitability of polling places as part of the post-referendum review process.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

- 2.34 You should identify staffing requirements for your postal vote issue and opening sessions. The following staff may be required:
- specially trained supervisory staff
 - clerical staff
 - IT staff
- 2.35 You should take into account the total number of existing postal voters and projected turnout of postal voters when deciding on your staffing arrangements. You should use your lessons learned documents from earlier polls to assess how robust your staffing assumptions were at those previous events.
- 2.36 This assessment may need to be revised after you have received the final postal voters lists from the ERO. In any event, you should build sufficient flexibility and contingency into your staffing arrangements to deal with a last-minute increase in numbers of postal voters, an unexpected increase in turnout or varying volumes of postal votes being returned on different days.
- 2.37 Where you outsource all or part of the postal vote issuing process, you need to designate a member of the project team to monitor outsourced work and specifically to attend those parts of the issuing process that have been contracted out. This person should monitor the work of the contractor, carrying out tasks such as spot checks to ensure that the postal ballot packs are being correctly collated and that overseas postal votes are being prioritised. Further guidance on managing contractors and suppliers can be found in [Section 5 below](#).

- 2.38 How the verification of personal identifiers is to be carried out, including how much of this process is automated and how much of it needs to be done manually, will impact on the number of staff you will require for opening returned postal votes. Although by law you are required to check only 20% of personal identifiers,⁵ the CCO has recommended that you carry out 100% checking as a matter of good practice and this is what you should plan to deliver. This will be monitored through the performance standards framework.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with information on your planning processes to achieve 100% checking of postal vote identifiers.



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

Verification and Count staff

- 2.39 To ensure that voters can have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended, you will need to put appropriate resources and management arrangements in place to ensure that the verification and count processes are timely and will produce an accurate result. You should identify the number and type of staff you will require to run your verification and count and make the necessary appointments as early as possible.
- 2.40 In addition to counting assistants, porters, security and reception staff you should ensure that you recruit and train sufficient senior supervisory staff to assist you in running the count.
- 2.41 COs are likely to have their own established system for staffing and managing the verification and count. Typical senior staff roles are as follows:
- A senior officer, probably a deputy, responsible for the overall operation, assisting you with the organisation of the event, the co-ordination of the verification and count processes, the calculation of local totals and their transmission to the CCO
 - A responsible officer to supervise a team dealing with the receipt of ballot boxes, postal votes and paperwork at the verification and count venue and the verification of the unused and spoiled ballot papers and the tendered votes lists.
 - An officer to oversee the secure transportation of the sealed boxes of postal ballot papers to the verification and count venue and to deal with the final opening of postal votes

⁵ SIRA Schedule 2 para 35 (2)

- A team of numerate staff to input figures, aggregate totals and ensure all the necessary forms and statements are completed accurately and formally signed off, providing an audit trail for the verification and count processes
- A team of senior staff (supervisors) responsible for managing those staff sorting and counting the votes
- Teams of staff dealing with the receipt of ballot boxes, postal votes and paperwork and the verification of unused and spoiled ballot papers and the tendered votes lists
- One or more members of your council’s public relations team to liaise with the media and act as spokesperson as required
- One or more IT support officers to ensure the efficient operation of technology in use for the verification and count processes
- Porters, security staff and door attendants to deal with the security of the site and the management of the facilities within and around the site

2.42 Ensure that you employ sufficient counting assistants to undertake all the processes involved for the verification and count, namely

- Opening and checking the postal votes
- Verifying the postal votes previously opened and checked
- Verifying the ballot paper accounts against the unused and spoiled ballot papers and the tendered votes list
- Verifying the ballot papers in the ballot boxes
- Counting the ballot papers

2.43 You will need to ensure flexibility of operation so that the counting staff are kept busy throughout the proceedings. If possible, all counting assistants should be trained in each of the processes to be carried out so they can be moved between teams if required.

2.44 You could recruit a few standby counting assistants in advance of the event and have their details with you so you can contact them quickly if some appointees fail to attend. The operator of your venue may be able to provide a couple of standby staff from their team.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with information on how the verification and count are to be organised and managed, including the total number of verification and count staff and the way in which you will provide a clear audit trail.



Guidance on the management of the verification and count processes is contained in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes.](#)

3 Training

- 3.1 Effective training is an essential component of a well-run electoral event. Your project plan should contain a plan for training which identifies the training needs of both permanent and temporary staff.
- 3.2 While training activities for temporary staff may not take place until shortly before the referendum, planning for those activities should start at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.3 It is vital that each member of the team, whether permanent or temporary, understands their particular role and any statutory obligations associated with the work they are undertaking. All staff should receive training on the legislative requirements and responsibilities relevant to their respective roles as well as training on ensuring equal access and good customer care.
- 3.4 You should also develop methods of evaluating the training sessions and materials in order to inform future planning. If you have training personnel within your local authority they may be able to assist you with this process.
- 3.5 The CCO has organised seminars for COs and senior referendum team members. You should make every effort to attend the seminar which is most convenient for you.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with confirmation that your project plan includes provision for appropriate training for all referendum staff.

Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and Polling Station Inspectors

- 3.6 Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and other front line staff are frequently the only members of your staff that voters will meet in person. It is therefore essential that such staff are trained to understand their role, to perform their duties professionally and effectively and to be able to provide a high standard of customer care. It is important for such staff to be able to communicate well with all voters and so accessibility issues should be covered in training sessions for all staff dealing with the public.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with confirmation that all polling staff have been trained on how to set up polling stations and to perform their duties to take account of access needs.

- 3.7 All polling station staff should be required to attend a face-to-face training session. The training session should address:
- the tasks to be carried out ahead of referendum day
 - the setting up and management of the polling station
 - the persons who can attend a polling station and the procedures to be followed on referendum day itself
 - the need for polling station staff to be customer-focused and to offer assistance to all voters, including young voters who will be voting for the first time and disabled voters
 - the security of referendum stationery, including returned postal votes
 - the procedures to be followed at close of poll
 - health and safety issues: and
 - dealing with emergencies
- 3.8 The CCO has produced a [template PowerPoint briefing](#) for polling station staff which can be used for your polling station staff training sessions, updated with any additional local information you consider necessary. The CCO has also produced [a quiz for polling station staff and role play exercises and scenarios](#) that you can use as a mechanism for testing and embedding learning.
- 3.9 Additionally, given the importance of ensuring that the ballot paper accounts are completed correctly to provide an audit trail of the number of ballot papers issued and the foundation for an accurate verification process, the CCO has developed an [exercise for completing the ballot paper accounts](#) which you can use at your training sessions.
- 3.10 The CCO has also developed [a template graphical guide to packaging materials at close of poll](#) which you could adapt and provide to polling station staff.
- 3.11 For flexible resourcing to be able to work effectively, you should train Poll Clerks and Presiding Officers in such a way as to ensure that each has the technical knowledge to carry out the other's role if required and as far as the law permits.
- 3.12 Polling station inspectors should receive the same training as polling station staff in order for them to be able to be deployed flexibly and to carry out polling station duties if required. You should also provide an additional briefing for these inspectors, covering items that are specific to their role. [The CCO has provided a style for this kind of briefing which can be adapted to suit local circumstances.](#)
- 3.13 Both polling station staff and polling station inspectors should be given a copy of the CCO's [handbook for polling station staff](#) and the [polling station quick guide](#) and be instructed to read these ahead of the referendum and to bring their copies with them on the day of the referendum itself. Polling station inspectors should be given spare copies of the handbook and quick guide that they can provide to polling staff who may have forgotten to bring them.

- 3.14 Aileen Knudsen, Chair of the SOLAR Forms Working Group and her team at South Lanarkshire Council have developed an excellent online polling staff training resource with support from the Electoral Management Board. This resource is not referendum-specific, but deals clearly and informatively with issues that polling staff may face on referendum day. You should commend it to your staff to use as a refresher, following face to face training. The training materials are as follows
- Polling Staff training : <http://youtu.be/qSyu4ajUdHM>
 - Voter Scenarios : http://youtu.be/b6Rp32ID_U4
- 3.15 You should provide polling station staff and inspectors with contact numbers for use in the event of any problems arising. As well as the numbers for the referendum office and for the technical service who will respond to any physical problems in the polling places, this should include a contact number for the ERO and for the police.

Postal vote issue and opening staff

- 3.16 You should make arrangements for the briefing of all postal vote issue and opening staff. Briefings on the particular procedures to be followed may be provided to staff immediately before the start of the issuing or opening sessions. In addition, all staff should be provided with guidance notes in advance.
- 3.17 Also, you should consider training supervisory staff a day or two in advance of the issuing or opening session so that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them.
- 3.18 Whether you are issuing in-house or have contracted out the issuing of postal votes, you should ensure that supervisory staff are appropriately trained to carry out the required quality assurance checks.
- 3.19 Supervisory staff at postal vote openings should be trained to ensure that the opening procedures and verification process are correctly followed and an audit trail is maintained.
- 3.20 Any person who will be undertaking the verification of personal identifiers and has been delegated the authority by you to make decisions on postal voting statements should be provided with a copy of the guidance previously drafted by the [Electoral Commission and Forensic Science Service guidance on signature checking](#) and be instructed to follow it. The guidance has been endorsed by the Scottish Police Services Authority Forensic Service. Additionally, the Forensic Science Service offer training on signature checking which anyone undertaking this role may wish to attend.

Verification and count staff

- 3.21 You should make arrangements for the briefing of all verification and count staff. In general, you should consider providing training, or refresher training, for supervisory staff a day or two in advance of the verification and count to ensure that they are fully aware of their duties and what will be expected of them.
- 3.22 Briefings for counting staff, porters, security staff and door attendants may be held just before the start of the relevant proceedings. They should, however, be issued with guidance notes in advance. All such briefings should, as a minimum, cover the procedures relevant to the respective roles. They should also cover any policy on eating, drinking, photography, the use of mobile phones and tablets as well as health and safety. In particular and where appropriate, staff should be briefed on the correct procedures for moving ballot boxes and carrying heavy sacks in order to reduce the risk of any injuries. The CCO has prepared [template role descriptions for supervisory count staff](#) which you may find useful for these briefings.
- 3.23 Before the start of the verification and count, you should undertake a walk-through of the procedures you are expecting everyone to follow – from the receipt of ballot boxes up to the declaration of the result, so that everyone is aware of what is expected of them at each stage and of how the different roles relate to each other.

4 Venues

- 4.1 Your project plan will need to cover the identification of suitable venues for all processes.
- 4.2 Identifying appropriate venues for all of the various referendum activities should be done as early as possible. You should contact the managers of these premises at an early stage to inform them of the relevant dates and to make the necessary booking arrangements. These activities, carried out early in the planning process, will highlight where venues are not available and should allow sufficient time to act on the information and identify alternative premises where necessary.
- 4.3 As part of your review of previous electoral events, you should have undertaken an evaluation of the suitability of venues used. The results of this should be used to inform your planning and to ensure that any identified barriers to access can be overcome.
- 4.4 Under [the Equality Act 2010](#), service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting people with disabilities at a substantial disadvantage compared to people who are not disabled. In order to comply with this duty, you should work closely with people who have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people. The equalities officer at your local authority should be able to provide you with advice and assistance.
- 4.5 Contingency arrangements should be put in place to address the risk of the loss of any venue. You should prepare a list of alternative venues, including making arrangements, if necessary, for the use of standby portable polling places/mobile vehicles and alternative venues for the issue and opening of postal votes and the verification and count. Staff should be briefed on contingency arrangements. For example, in the case of a loss of a polling place on the day of the referendum, they could be advised to set up a temporary polling place in their car until alternative arrangements can be made. You should ensure that any changes made to venue location are communicated to campaigners, agents, electors and any others as appropriate. You should also remember that, while you, as CO, have discretion to alter the polling stations within a polling place, it is the local authority which fixes the polling places themselves, so your contingency arrangements for polling places will require the approval of your council. You may wish to ask your council to put delegation arrangements in place to deal with last minute changes of polling places.

Polling places

The impact of polling district and polling place reviews

- 4.6 [The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Part 2 Section 17](#) requires local authorities to carry out a review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.
- 4.7 This review may therefore apply to all three forthcoming polls (the European Parliamentary Elections, the Scottish Independence Referendum and the UK Parliamentary Elections) depending on the date on which your local authority completes it.
- 4.8 Completing and implementing the review before the European Parliamentary Elections would permit the same polling districts and places to apply for all three polls.
- 4.9 It would not be in the interest of voters to have different polling districts and places at the Referendum than at the European Parliamentary Elections given the proximity of the two events. So, if the review is not completed and implemented in time for the European Elections, your local authority may consider it best to delay implementation of the review until after the Referendum, bringing the revised arrangements into force for the UK Parliamentary Elections in May 2015.
- 4.10 Where you are not also the ERO for your local authority area, you will need to work closely with them in order to dovetail the review procedures with the registration processes and to minimise disruption to the registration function.

Polling places and polling stations

- 4.11 It is important to know the difference between a polling place and a polling station. A polling place is the location (such as a school or church hall) in which polling is carried out. A polling station is the particular location within a polling place (such as a room, or a part of a room) where voters cast their votes. This being the case, a polling place can contain one or more polling stations.
- 4.12 It is the local authority which designates polling places⁶. As CO, however, you decide on the number and location of polling stations within each polling place.
- 4.13 At an early stage, you should prepare a timeline for the preparation of a list of proposed polling places and the procedures necessary to obtain approval from your council, including time for any local consultations. You should also plan to obtain approval, perhaps through delegation arrangements, for last-minute changes to

⁶ RPA 1983 Section 31(2)

polling places in emergencies. It is very important not to underestimate the time that this exercise will take.

- 4.14 Schools and other buildings that are publicly funded may be used as polling places free of charge and the legislation allows you to require rooms in such premises for use as polling stations.⁷ You will, however, need to pay for any lighting, heating, cleaning etc. costs incurred when using such rooms for this purpose.⁸ You must also meet the cost of rectifying any damage to the room, the premises, its facilities or equipment caused by taking the poll there⁹. You should liaise with your council's Education Service and other managers of publicly-funded rooms at the earliest opportunity to confirm that you want to use the facilities as polling places.
- 4.15 It is worth visiting every proposed polling place at an early stage to ensure that there have been no changes to the accommodation that you wish to use. You should also confirm availability for the date of the referendum and ensure that no significant repair works are planned around that time which might impact on the conduct of the poll.
- 4.16 You should undertake an evaluation of the suitability of the polling places you are intending to use. When making arrangements for polling places and the stations within them you will need to consider access needs.
- 4.17 Ideally, you would have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area, with owners willing to hire them out for polling station use at low cost. Unfortunately, in practice, this is often not the case and the choice of polling places will often be a balance between the quality of the building and the proximity of the building to the electors. When making a decision, all factors will need to be considered and the authority will need to be able to demonstrate the reasoning behind its choice.
- 4.18 You should work closely with people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises. You should be able to demonstrate that an assessment has been conducted of the polling places and stations to be used at the referendum. Where access problems exist, you should document the problems, identify potential improvements and record any action taken to try to remedy these problems.
- 4.19 It is essential that polling stations provide sufficient space for voting to take place. You should draw up a layout plan for each polling station taking into account the likely footfall on referendum day. These plans should be made available to the persons who will be setting the station up (whether it is done by council staff in advance or by the polling team on the day). They should be part of the presiding officers' information pack.

⁷ SIRA 2013 Schedule 3 Rule 7

⁸ SIRA 2013 Schedule 3 Rule 7(4)(a)

⁹ SIRA 2013 Schedule 3 Rule 7(4)(b)



To be able to meet the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with confirmation that you have considered access needs when making arrangements for polling places and stations and that you have identified and taken action to remedy any problems.



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

Last-minute changes to polling places and stations

- 4.20 There may be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling place or station may be required at short notice. As part of your planning, you should compile a list of standby or portable polling places that could be used in such circumstances. As local authorities are responsible for designating polling places and polling districts, you should designate a new polling station within the same polling place as far as is possible and practical. As the location of a polling station within a polling place is your responsibility, there is no need to seek council approval for such a change.
- 4.21 If, however, there is a need to change the polling place, council agreement will be required. If delegation procedures are in place, you should follow these and contact the person or persons who are entitled to make changes to the scheme of polling places.
- 4.22 You should amend the notice of referendum relative to the situation of polling stations to reflect any changes.
- 4.23 There are a number of mitigating measures you can take to ensure that electors who are affected by a late change to a polling place are able to vote with minimum disruption. You should have a protocol to follow in case of a last-minute change. As a minimum, you should:
- if time allows, send out a letter to all affected electors informing them of the change to their polling place
 - if time allows, use the local media to disseminate information to the affected electors – for example, through issuing press releases
 - put up signs at the old polling place informing electors about the change and including directions to the new one
 - display clear and visible signage at the new polling place
 - ensure that all polling staff appointed to that polling place are aware of the change of location, including the polling station inspector
 - You must not forget also to advise referendum and counting agents and the Electoral Commission (for the benefit of their representatives and for accredited observers) of any changes to polling places.

- 4.24 Where the change is to a polling station within a pre-existing polling place rather than the polling place itself, the procedure is simpler. You should check that the new location offers adequate accommodation for the polling station and that its location is clearly signed (this is particularly important for voters who are used to voting in the same room at every electoral event). You should brief the senior Presiding Officer accordingly and ensure that all the staff appointed to the polling place are aware of the change of location, including the polling station inspector.

Postal vote issue and opening venues

- 4.25 You should take into account the following key factors when selecting venues for postal vote issuing and opening sessions:-
- lessons learned from previous electoral events
 - intended workflows
 - IT requirements
 - security and storage requirements
 - disabled access, both to and within the venues
 - accommodation for observers
 - for the opening of postal votes only – accommodation for agents



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

Verification and count venue

- 4.26 You should consider the following points when selecting the venue for your verification and count:-
- lessons learned from previous electoral events
 - size of the venue taking into account the space required to conduct the verification and count processes, sufficient storage space for parcels, ballot boxes and other equipment and adequate space for those entitled to attend and observe proceedings at the event
 - access arrangements for vehicles and parking
 - entrances for those entitled to attend and for staff
 - secure entrance and delivery route for ballot boxes
 - disabled access, both to and within the venue
 - lighting within the venue and outside the venue to and from the car parking area
 - platform or stage for announcing the results and for making regular announcements throughout the proceedings
 - acoustics within the venue
 - internal and external IT and communication systems

- facilities for those attending the count
- media requirements
- furniture requirements (if there are insufficient tables and chairs in the venue, for example, these will need to be acquired from another location or hired for the event)
- security and storage requirements
- contingency arrangements to address the risk of a loss of venue



Guidance on key factors to be considered when laying out the verification and count venues can be found in [Part E – Verifying and counting the votes.](#)

5 Managing contractors and suppliers

- 5.1 You can outsource particular work required to deliver the referendum, but not the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the rules and regulations.
- 5.2 Do not automatically assume that outsourcing is your only and best option. Your project plan should include an assessment of the need to outsource. Your decision should be taken as part of an assessment of the costs, risks and benefits of outsourcing work, as compared to in-house delivery by your staff. Your review of previous electoral events and consideration of the specific requirements for the referendum will help to inform your decision as to whether you outsource a particular function or task.
- 5.3 If outsourcing is considered appropriate, your project plan will need to cover the management of contractors and suppliers and the development and management of contracts.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to put in place arrangements to manage contractors and suppliers to ensure that the work is delivered as required in the specification.

Procurement

- 5.4 Where a decision has been made to outsource, you should start the procurement process as early as possible. Your local authority will have adopted standing orders or regulations relating to procurement and contracts. You should take advice from relevant staff at your authority on the procedures to be followed and the legal requirements for procuring supplies and services. All stages of the procurement process should be documented and the risks of outsourcing should be clearly acknowledged, with contingency arrangements identified and built into the process.
- 5.5 Good public procurement practice recommends obtaining at least three written quotations from prospective suppliers. Some local authorities may, however, have a standing list of approved contractors who have already been through a tendering process and in some instances it may be more effective and economical to use such existing contractors and systems.
- 5.6 The CCO has produced a [contract management checklist](#) designed to highlight key considerations relevant to outsourcing work and managing contracts.
- 5.7 A detailed specification of requirements is essential for effective procurement and should be developed for all outsourced work. Suppliers should be able to provide robust information on how they are going to deliver the work as required by the specification.

- 5.8 When evaluating the bids received, the final price in the suppliers' proposals should not be the only consideration in choosing a contractor. The focus should be on "value for money", with the final decision being a judgment based on the best combination of the cost of the goods or service and the ability to meet your requirements as set out in the specification. Work needs to be completed on time and to a high standard and therefore each bid should be carefully considered to assess exactly what it offers.
- 5.9 You should take steps to ensure that the selected contractor understands the requirements and has the experience and suitability to undertake the work being outsourced. The CCO's checklist – managing contracts and suppliers - sets out the minimum steps you should take to be satisfied that the company will have the capacity to complete any contracted work on time and to the standard required.
- 5.10 Contractors may sub-contract work and you should give prior written consent before sub-contractors are used. You should ensure that any sub-contractors are aware of the specific requirements as detailed in the specification.
- 5.11 Once you have made your final decision, you should notify unsuccessful applicants and be prepared to debrief them should they request it.
- 5.12 You should have a formal, written contract in place with every contractor to whom you have outsourced a function or task. It is essential that statutory requirements and their implications are fully explained wherever contractors are used and that these requirements are explicitly stated in the contract for any work. Contracts should be developed with advice from other departments of the local authority, such as legal services and procurement. Experienced managers in these fields can be used to ensure that appropriate and rigorous procurement and contract management procedures are followed, thereby minimising risk.
- 5.13 [Scotland Excel](#) provides guidance and good practice advice on all aspects of procurement.

Contract management

- 5.14 The key to effective contract management is having continuous and open lines of communication with the contractor, underpinned by clear and robust provisions in the contract as to the quality and timescales expected and required.
- 5.15 In order to assist contractors and suppliers in delivering the work on time, it is essential to keep to agreed timescales for providing the information or data they need to do the job. If there is slippage, for example because of the time required to process bulk last minute postal vote applications, you should advise the contractors as soon as possible.

- 5.16 You should document all stages of the process. In particular, you should keep a formal record in order to be able to demonstrate that the processes are undertaken in accordance with the law.
- 5.17 Any variations from the agreed specification could result in a breach of legislation and any such breach is the responsibility of the CO, so any variations should be formally documented and signed off by you or by someone authorised to act on your behalf.



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

Royal Mail

- 5.18 You should already be in contact with your Royal Mail account manager and you should continue to liaise with them on a regular basis.



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

Finding printers

- 5.19 If you decide that you need to outsource production and are having difficulty finding a suitable printer, [Graphic Enterprise Scotland](#) or the [British Printing Industries Federation](#) may be contacted for assistance:

Graphic Enterprise Scotland
112 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 4LH
Tel: 0131 220 4353
www.graphicenterprisescotland.org

British Printing Industries Federation
Farringdon Point
29-35 Farringdon Road
London EC1M 3JF
www.britishprint.com

6 Maintaining the integrity of the referendum

- 6.1 To ensure that voters can have confidence that their vote will be counted in the way they intended, your project plan will need to include processes to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate potential integrity issues and what steps are to be taken to address those issues.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with information on the processes that you have put in place to identify suspect patterns of activity and the steps you would take to address such problems.

- 6.2 You should establish and maintain contact with your local police Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and your project plan should schedule regular contact with that officer.

Offences

- 6.3 There are a number of offences in relation to the referendum. Information on these offences is contained in the [Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013, Schedule 7](#).

Dealing with allegations of fraud and malpractice

- 6.4 Although you and your staff are uniquely placed to identify fraud and malpractice, you have no power to investigate allegations of this sort. Any allegations or suspicions should be referred promptly to your SPOC.
- 6.5 If you need additional information on the handling and referral of allegations of electoral fraud or malpractice or are having difficulties in making contact with your SPOC, you can contact:

Nick Dishon
The Electoral Commission
Lothian Chambers
59-63 George IV Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1RN
Tel: 0131 225 0208
Fax: 0131 225 0205
ndishon@electoralcommission.org.uk

Dealing with allegations of financial offences

- 6.6 Designated organisations and permitted participants are subject to a financial regime under Schedule 4 of the [Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013](#). Any queries on referendum spending should be referred to the Electoral Commission's office in Scotland.

Security

- 6.7 Your project plan should include a thorough review of security arrangements with the local police. You should also consider any security risks as part of your contingency planning exercise and include these in your risk register.
- 6.8 Your security arrangements should prevent unauthorised access to or use of the ballot papers during all stages of the production process and storage between printing and the poll.
- 6.9 You should also take all necessary steps to ensure the security of ballot boxes and relevant stationery from the close of poll through to the declaration of the result, particularly if there is a break in proceedings for any reason. You should liaise with your SPOC on this.
- 6.10 Whichever method of storage you choose, it should be such that you can be satisfied that you have taken all necessary steps to ensure that ballot boxes and other items are kept securely at all times and cannot be interfered with.
- 6.11 In addition, you should liaise with your SPOC to ensure that there is an appropriate police presence at polling places on the day of the referendum according to your assessment of the level of risk. You should obtain emergency numbers from your SPOC which can be notified to your presiding officers.

7 Raising awareness

- 7.1 [The Scottish Independence Referendum Act 2013](#) provides that the Electoral Commission must take such steps as they consider appropriate to promote public awareness and understanding in Scotland about the referendum, the referendum question and voting in the referendum.¹⁰ To this end, the Commission will work with the CCO's Communications Network and will provide details of its public awareness campaign and materials to the CCO, COs and EROs to support them in their respective public awareness activities.
- 7.2 The Commission has already planned an extensive public awareness campaign which was unveiled to the Electoral Management Board in August 2013.
- 7.3 The CCO and COs also have a legal duty to take such steps as they think appropriate to encourage the participation of electors in the referendum.¹¹
- 7.4 Details of the respective responsibilities in relation to public awareness are covered in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the Commission and the CCO.
- 7.5 The CCO has set up a Communications Working Group to support COs with their public awareness activities.
- 7.6 Your project plan should include details of your local public awareness activity.
- 7.7 When planning your public awareness activity you should consider and document:
- the identification of your target audience
 - the objectives and success measures of the activity
 - risks – identification and mitigation
 - resources – financial and staffing
- 7.8 With the franchise at the referendum being extended to sixteen and seventeen year olds, COs and EROs will have to develop materials to target this particular new group of electors.

¹⁰ SIRA 2013 Section 23

¹¹ SIRA 2013 Section 26

Information to electors

- 7.9 To communicate information effectively to electors, you should consider who you want to reach through your awareness activity and the method of communication to be used. You should take advice and seek input from relevant staff at your local authority such as those in the communications department.
- 7.10 You should ensure that formal notices and other information are readily accessible to electors by as many means as possible, including through your council's website.
- 7.11 The information you make available should assist the voter to participate fully in the referendum. This may include details of:-
- the referendum itself
 - the date and hours of poll
 - the location of polling places
 - any key deadlines (including deadlines for registering to vote or for applying for postal or proxy votes)
 - how to mark the ballot paper to indicate a preference
 - what assistance is available to electors (e.g. information for disabled voters)
 - how votes are counted
 - how the result will be made known
- 7.12 You should ensure that all outgoing communications provide appropriate contact details to allow anyone to respond and obtain further information.



The Electoral Commission will provide templates and tools for you to adapt to fit your local circumstances. The CCO has supplied a list of [frequently asked questions](#) (FAQs) that you can customise with your local details and use in-house to respond to enquiries from the public.



To be able to achieve the outcome set out in Performance Standard 1, you will need to be able to provide the CCO with links to the notices and other referendum material available on your council website.

8 Accredited observers and Electoral Commission representatives

- 8.1 Observers accredited by the Electoral Commission are entitled by law to observe:¹²
- the issue and receipt of postal ballot papers
 - the poll
 - the verification and the counting of the votes
- 8.2 Both individuals and organisations can apply for and be granted accreditation as observers.
- 8.3 Your project plan should include processes to manage potential enquiries from observers and to support their attendance at the electoral processes they are entitled to attend.
- 8.4 This should include providing observers with information on the location and timing of the processes in 8.1 above.
- 8.5 Electoral Commission representatives are also entitled to observe these processes and, in addition, are entitled to observe your working practices.¹³
- 8.6 Neither accredited observers nor Electoral Commission representatives require to give advance notification of where they intend to observe, nor do they need to obtain accreditation from you as Counting Officer. They will carry and need to display the photographic identification card issued to them by the Commission. The Commission will provide styles of these photographic IDs for your information and for your use in training sessions for polling staff and for the staff controlling access to the count.
- 8.7 If you are in doubt about the status of a particular individual seeking to gain access to referendum processes, you can check the registers of observers on the [Electoral Commission's website](#).
- 8.8 You have a legal duty to have regard to the principles contained in the Electoral Commission's "[Code of practice for observation at the referendum for independence in Scotland](#)" when managing the attendance of observers. Observers are required to comply with the standards of behaviour set out in the Code. If you think there has been a breach of the Code of practice, please inform the Electoral Commission's office in Scotland at the undernoted address:-

¹² SIRA 2013 Sections 19 and 20

¹³ SIRA 2013 Section 18

The Electoral Commission
Lothian Chambers
59-63 George IV Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1RN
Tel: 0131 225 0200
Fax: 0131 225 0205
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk