

# Key roles and planning

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Written by College of Policing

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Thorough electoral planning reduces the potential for the intimidation of candidates/campaigners and electoral malpractice. It also enhances the ability for the police service to respond to allegations should they arise. This section highlights the key roles for the police service and other agencies, who need to work together to ensure an effective police response to elections.

## Key roles

### Chief officers

When an election or referendum is announced, a chief officer should be appointed to review their force's existing election policing plans. This review will help inform [command and planning considerations](#), especially in relation to understanding and implementing the processes, structures and resources required to:

- mitigate electoral malpractice
- contribute to a non-intimidatory environment for candidates and/or campaigners
- facilitate peaceful voting

The key roles and partners outlined in this section should participate in this review and, where there is advance notice of the election timetable, it could form part of the [pre-election planning](#) process.

Depending on the nature of the election and the [threat assessment](#), a chief officer may act as the gold commander for the duration of the policing operation.

### Force election single point of contact

Every force has a nominated election single point of contact (SPOC) who:

- liaises with the [Electoral Commission](#) on behalf of their force

- understands the administration of elections and electoral malpractice
- **establishes contact and liaises with** the **electoral services manager (ESM)**
- provides relevant and regular briefings, advice and updates on election related issues to commanders, basic command units (BCUs) and neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs)
- liaises with local authorities and NPTs to identify communities and locations which may be vulnerable to electoral malpractice
- supports the planning process for elections, including preparing memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and providing relevant training for officers and staff
- liaises with local authority **returning officers** to ensure that they have access to police advice/support when needed
- updates local authority returning officers on any criminal investigation related to electoral offences that is being conducted in their local authority areas
- analyses and disseminates intelligence and information which is relevant to the planning process for an election
- promotes awareness of relevant products and advice outlining how prospective **candidates and campaigners** recognise and respond to incidents of harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour, see **'When it goes too far'** for further information
- understands their force's approach for responding to, and investigating, allegations of harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour during an election period, see **command and planning considerations**
- coordinates and supports election related criminal investigations, eg, providing advice to the **senior investigating officer (SIO)** and investigating officers
- reviews election related criminal case files prior to submission to the **Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)**
- liaises with the dedicated CPS lawyer on case progression
- monitors updates to complainants throughout the investigation process and coordinates an exit strategy in cases where no further action will be taken or there is insufficient evidence to proceed
- represents the force at a national level through liaison with the Electoral Commission, for example, providing data on the policing of elections in their force area to the **National Police Working Group for Electoral Malpractice**
- may delegate some of their activities to others, for example, establishing dedicated SPOCs for local authority areas within their force, however, they remain responsible for ensuring effective election policing in their force

## Commanders

A suitable command structure is required to ensure the effective policing of an election. This will be based on the gold, silver and bronze command roles.

- Gold commander – responsible for developing a strategy and retaining strategic oversight and overall command responsibility throughout the operation.
- Silver commander – responsible for developing and implementing the tactical response of the operation in line with gold's strategy.
- Bronze commander(s) – responsible for the command of a group of resources, and carrying out functional (for example, bronze crime, bronze candidate/campaigner safeguarding, bronze security) or geographical responsibilities related to the tactical plan.

For further information see:

- [Gold, silver and bronze command roles](#)
- [Command and planning considerations](#)

## Neighbourhood inspectors

Inspectors work with the local community and other agencies to create a confident, safer and secure neighbourhood. They should participate in the planning of elections by focusing on community engagement, ensuring appropriate resources are available to police the election and that staff receive necessary training prior to the election day. Aspects of the election process, such as polling station vulnerability and the count, should be neighbourhood policing priorities and managed/resourced accordingly.

Additionally, during an election or referendum, the neighbourhood policing inspector:

- maintains clear communication with the local command team, [force election SPOC](#) and [senior investigating officer](#)
- ensures local resources involved in policing elections are briefed prior to deployment
- supports and reassures the community by engaging with community leaders and key networks prior to, during and post election, while ensuring that the police service is seen to be acting impartially

- is aware of the political balance and mix of candidates in their specific ward and any potential impact this may have for resourcing
- understands the process for dealing with allegations of electoral malpractice and offers advice and reassurance at a local level to those affected
- ensures a timely and appropriate response to any issue or allegation raised, escalating if necessary to ensure it is dealt with effectively

## Neighbourhood policing teams

The role of neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) is increasingly vital at times of local and national elections. In areas where communities feel vulnerable, the local policing team has a pivotal part to play in ensuring that individuals feel that their democratic right to vote is supported by law enforcement.

Under the supervision of neighbourhood inspectors, NPTs:

- maintain an open dialogue with community contacts and encourage them to highlight issues associated with electoral malpractice with the members of their community
- undertake reassurance patrols in areas of increased risk, positively targeting vulnerable areas and sites and positively engaging with the community to raise awareness on electoral malpractice
- participate in relevant intelligence gathering, for example, officers and staff who work in the community may receive information and pick up on community tensions that may impact on the elections that are being held in their community
- adopt a positive policing approach, namely, engage and maintain dialogue with the community
- should be aware of electoral legislation and the electoral process, for example, two potential areas that cause concern in communities are the handling of postal votes and the influencing of individuals to vote for a particular party. While not necessarily offences, these types of practices may occur because of the ignorance of canvassers. NPTs can positively discourage such behaviour before it is highlighted, for example, by the media, which can result in damaging or negative consequences for the community

For further information, see [\*\*Electoral Commission \(2016\) Pocket guidance on policing elections and referendums\*\*](#). (Paper copies are available from the Electoral Commission for distribution to front line officers.)

## Senior investigating officer

In the context of policing elections, the SIO:

- oversees/manages investigations (including investigative strategy)
- attends relevant command meetings (for example, gold and/or silver meetings)
- liaises with the force election SPOC, especially in relation to seeking CPS advice
- understands electoral legislation and is alert to offences that may be more suitable to charge (for example, public order or fraud offences)
- understands their role in investigating and/or overseeing investigations relating to allegations of harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour
- ensures electoral malpractice allegations are assessed and responded to in a timely and appropriate manner
- makes available/deploys sufficient investigative resources
- provides regular updates to complainants and key individuals

## Operation Bridger SPOC

Operation Bridger was established in 2016 to provide protective security advice and support to MPs. Every force has a SPOC who is responsible for delivering the requirements of Operation Bridger on behalf of the chief constable.

Force Operation Bridger SPOC activity is coordinated by the Metropolitan Police Service's Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation team (PLaIT). PLaIT forms part of the Joint Parliamentary Risk Assessment Hub (JoPRAH).

In force, the Operation Bridger SPOC will coordinate and facilitate resources to:

- ensure an effective response when Operation Bridger-related incidents are reported (for example, command and control, investigation, offender management)
- arrange regular reassurance visits to MPs and constituency offices
- ensure proactive intelligence collection against the intelligence collection plan
- record Operation Bridger related incidents, crimes and intelligence onto the national Mercury system, to allow the JoPRAH to develop a regular threat assessment product
- help mitigate threats highlighted through Joint Parliamentary Risk Assessment meetings

Election Policing SPOCs should be aware that Operation Bridger only applies to MPs. The Election Policing SPOC should, however, identify and liaise with the Operation Bridger SPOC in their force as they and/or PLaiT are a source of protective security advice which may be relevant to candidates/other elected politicians during an election period.

## Electoral registration officer

Every council is legally required to appoint a council officer to the role of electoral registration officer (ERO). This is a formal appointment with specific powers. The chief executive of a council may be appointed to this role, but in some councils an alternative senior officer of the council, such as the director of legal services, is appointed to undertake the role.

The ERO has a statutory responsibility for preparing and maintaining the register of electors (namely, a list of people entitled to vote at parliamentary general elections, local government elections and European parliamentary elections). They are also responsible for determining absent votes and the absent voters list (namely, a list of people entitled to vote by post or by proxy). Proxy voting allows an elector who is unable to cast their vote in person, owing to illness or injury for instance, to nominate another elector to cast a vote on their behalf.

The ERO is also personally liable if they are found to be in breach of their official duty (RPA 1983 s 63 refers).

Note: Anonymous registration is a process that helps individuals whose safety would be at risk (or where the safety of other people at the same address as them would be at risk) if their name or address was listed on the electoral register, for example, a person who has fled domestic abuse. Police officers of or above the rank of inspector may be asked to provide an attestation to support an application for anonymous registration. For further information, see [Anonymous registration: Supporting survivors of domestic abuse to register to vote](#).

## Returning officer

The returning officer is responsible for ensuring that elections are conducted in accordance with the law. They are personally liable for the conduct of an election. There are a number of key statutory responsibilities to ensure the effective conduct of any election that the returning officer must comply with (for example, the arrangements for polling day and the counting of votes).

The returning officer is also responsible for the management of local elections. For local council referendums, council tax referendums or mayoral referendums, the returning officer becomes the counting officer. The acting returning officer has this responsibility for a UK parliamentary election.

The chief executive of a council may be appointed to the role of returning officer or acting returning officer, but in some councils another senior officer of the council, such as the director of legal services, is appointed to undertake these roles.

The role of the returning officer is restricted to the administration of the election. Returning officers do not have powers to investigate. This function rests with the police service.

Returning officers are subject to the law if they are found to be in breach of their official duty (RPA 1983 s 63 refers).

## Electoral services manager

The role of the electoral services manager (ESM), or local equivalent, is to advise the ERO and returning officer on all electoral matters and assist them in performing their statutory functions. The ESM also ensures that the registration and election functions are administered effectively.

The ESM has responsibility for managing the planning, project management and risk management of both the electoral registration and elections processes. They usually report directly to the ERO and returning officer.

The ESM is the person that the [force election SPOC](#) should make contact with to develop a professional relationship, in connection with electoral integrity and malpractice matters. The SPOC and the ESM should work in conjunction with one another to properly plan, communicate and exchange information and to ensure effective partnership working between both organisations in respect of electoral matters in order to protect the democratic process. [This checklist](#) can help with this process.

## Electoral Commission

The [Electoral Commission](#) is an independent body set up by the UK parliament. Its aim is to promote and ensure integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections.

For UK-wide referendums the Chair of the Electoral Commission will be the Chief Counting Officer, who is responsible for certifying and announcing the result of the referendum. The Chief Counting Officer appoints Counting Officers to run the referendum poll in each local area, and can give them directions telling them how to run specific parts of the referendum poll.

The Commission provides guidance to returning officers on delivering well-run elections and monitors how well they perform against performance standards. Each year the Commission publishes reports on how well elections were run and makes recommendations to improve future elections. The Commission also publishes reports following referendums.

The Commission also provides guidance and advice to candidates and agents. In partnership with NPCC the Commission provides advice and training for [force election SPOCs](#). The Commission also runs an Electoral Integrity Roundtable forum where those with experience of dealing with electoral malpractice or who have introduced an innovative approach to help improve the integrity of elections can meet and discuss key issues. With assistance from NPCC and force election SPOCs, the Commission collects and analyses data on allegations of electoral fraud and publishes an annual report on cases of alleged election fraud.

Force election SPOCs may approach regionally based Commission staff to help prepare for elections (for example, before developing an operational order). These regional contacts can provide information on:

- the type of elections taking place each year (for example, European Parliament, UK General Election, Counties, Districts and others) in force areas
- which authorities are having elections in their force area
- relevant contact details for each local authority

The Commission encourages SPOCs to approach their English Region or Devolved Office team in the first instance when an election related issue or query arises that they wish to discuss.

The Political Finance and Regulation (PFR) directorate of the Electoral Commission registers and regulates the finances of political parties and others that participate in elections and referendums. It is composed of teams which specialise in registration, guidance, compliance and enforcement and:

- provides advice and guidance to help people understand the rules
- receives, analyses and publishes information about party and election finance



- monitors how well the rules are being followed and, where necessary, deals with possible breaches of the rules
- advises the government on changes to the rules and make recommendations for change.

The Commission has specific investigation powers, and a range of civil sanctions it can impose as an alternative to criminal prosecution. Details of the Commission's enforcement role and further information is available [here](#).

The PFR directorate at the Commission can be contacted if it appears that an offence has been committed relating to election spending or donations reporting by a candidate or political party.

## Crown Prosecution Service

The [Crown Prosecution Service](#) is responsible for deciding if there is sufficient evidence and, if so, whether it is in the public interest to prosecute in any particular case. Allegations of electoral malpractice are dealt with by the Special Crime and Counter-Terrorism Division (SCCTD) of the CPS, not the local CPS areas. All requests for advice or decisions to prosecute should be directed to the specialist prosecutors in the relevant SCCTD. The London office covers London, Eastern, South East and South West regions. The York office covers the remainder of England and Wales.

Contact with the CPS should only be instigated with the approval of the [force election SPOC](#). The CPS expects electronic submission of evidence and requests for advice.

Relevant contact details for the CPS are available from the Electoral Commission.

Although officers are encouraged to make contact via their SPOC with the appropriate CPS office early in the investigation, the officer seeking advice by telephone or email must be familiar with issues on which they are seeking guidance.

The minimum information that needs to be provided includes:

- identification of the complainant
- identification of the suspected offender
- identification of the proposed offence, namely, which section of RPA 1983 the offender is alleged to have contravened

- identification of the election and electoral area where the offence is alleged to have been committed
- the date on which the offence is alleged to have occurred

Certain offences that arise at election time, for example, false registration for financial fraud, may be more appropriately dealt with by other officers and the CPS locally rather than by CPS special case workers.

The CPS is responsible for all charging decisions, including cautions. Any type of positive disposal must go to the CPS via the force election SPOC.

## Command and planning considerations

Effective [pre-election planning](#) and [partnership working](#) will help to ascertain the command, operational planning and deployment requirements associated with the policing of an election. The [National Decision Model](#) should be used to underpin all aspects of the operation.

When planning for the policing of an election, commanders and planners should consider:

- policing style and tone, for example, the policing of the election should be approachable, accessible, impartial and fair
- developing a proportionate policing response
- input of specialist advice into the planning and the policing operation, for example, force election SPOC, Electoral Commission, public protection unit, cyber-crime unit
- requirement for dedicated functional bronze command roles, for example, election commander, bronze crime, bronze intelligence, bronze community, bronze media, bronze candidate/campaigner safeguarding, bronze security
- scale of police response, which could be influenced by:
  - intelligence and information (police, local authority and, if implemented, any national policing operations associated with the election)
  - threat assessment
  - level of media interest
  - community implications, expectations and confidence
  - prior history of electoral malpractice in force/specific ward areas

- establishing clear protocols and parameters, where relevant, between different parts of the policing operation to ensure potential operational conflicts of interest can be mitigated, for example, separating the investigation of harassment, intimidation and threatening behaviour relating to candidates/campaigners from the investigation of electoral malpractice investigations
- police role during the operation, for example, facilitation of voting at specific polling stations, maintaining the peace at election counts
- resource (including command) capacity and capability
- appointment of **key roles** and understanding of partner roles
- requirement for specialist resources, for example, police support unit (PSU), briefing officers, public protection staff, intelligence officers
- **legal framework** underpinning the planning and operation
- **communication plans**
- intelligence collection, evaluation, analysis and dissemination
- identifying a named individual or department that candidates/campaigners can contact with concerns relating to harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour
- command resilience
- contingency planning
- intervention policy, namely, documented and agreed with the local authority for police intervention during the election
- requirement for relevant staff training
- staff briefings, for example, key messages, do staff know what their powers and force policy are regarding the policing of the election?

## Threat assessment

A threat assessment relating to the potential for electoral malpractice, intimidation of candidates and threats to peaceful voting should be included in the command and planning considerations. This will help to identify areas of potential increased risk. The threat assessment will, therefore, need to take into account:

- relevant intelligence and information
- previous history of electoral offences or allegations associated with the geographical area
- the potential for offences to be committed as a result of, for example, lack of policing, ill-prepared local authority, complacency, political culture

- community dynamics, for example, transient population, level of community engagement with the police and the local authority
- the control and influence associated with political party workers and candidates
- persons participating in the election such as candidates and agents
- campaign events, for example, hustings
- premises connected to the election, for example, polling stations, and constituency offices
- candidates'/campaigners' homes and other regularly attended locations

The following harms should be considered as part of this assessment:

- physical assault/attack against individuals
- personal harassment/threats/intimidation against individuals
- social media harassment/threats/intimidation against individuals
- disorder related to the election
- criminal damage to property and premises
- notified protests/demonstrations
- spontaneous protest/demonstrations
- hate crimes
- cybercrime connected to the election
- disruptions to process for example, hoax calls, alarm activations
- interference with process, for example, tampering with boxes/impersonation

## Election-day considerations

The policing of an election day should be factored into planning as early as possible. Of particular importance are polling stations and count locations. Relevant considerations include:

- locations and assessment of vulnerability
- police presence, namely, permanent, occasional or no police presence
- police powers, for example, entering polling stations, responding to returning officer requests
- strategy and tactics to minimise risk of public disorder and intimidation, maximise free and unobstructed access, minimise the risk of violence/intimidation to polling station/count staff, minimise the risk of electoral malpractice
- strategy and tactics to arrest subjects, recover and preserve any evidence

Note: CCTV is not allowed inside polling stations. However, some of the buildings used as polling stations may have externally fitted CCTV which could provide evidence gathering opportunities.

[Key stages in the election process](#) and [maintaining order and preventing undue influence outside polling stations](#) also need to be considered when planning.

For further information see Election Security: Notes for Guidance.

## Partnership working

Partners have competing demands on their resources and any operational decisions need to take full account of partners' priorities and the wider availability of resources. Successful partnership working requires partners to cooperate with each other when planning, [sharing information](#), and carrying out operations and investigations. Early engagement and clear communication and ownership of agreed actions between police and partners ensures that everyone involved in the planning and policing of an election is aware of the policing operation, ensuring a 'no surprises' approach and demonstrating a proportionate policing response.

## Partners

In order to police elections, including any investigations into malpractice, the police need to engage with a number of partners, including:

- local authority
- [Electoral Commission](#)
- Royal Mail Group Ltd
- CPS
- political parties

The force election SPOC is responsible for liaising with local authority returning officers to ensure that appropriate assistance is offered and that they are kept updated regarding any criminal investigation within their local authority. They also liaise with the dedicated CPS lawyer on case progression and represent their force at a national level, liaising with the Electoral Commission and the [National Police Working Group for Electoral Malpractice](#) in order to deliver an accurate picture of the policing of elections within the force area.

For further information see:

- [Royal Mail, The Electoral Commission \(2014\) Postal voting – a quick guide for Royal Mail drivers and delivery staff](#)
- [Royal Mail \(2014\) Postal voting](#)

## Pre-election planning

Working together to create a robust plan prior to an election helps police and partners to overcome any issues that may arise and enables appointed officers to be fully briefed and accessible to senior officers from both organisations. Sharing knowledge and information, and having awareness of political sensitivities and assessing the potential risks, means that decision making can be organised and informed, with issues, allegations and the expectations of stakeholders being considered.

Additional benefits of joint planning include:

- key integrity issues can be identified in advance and recorded
- agreed approaches can be established
- appropriate mechanisms for referring, and responding to, different types of malpractice, suspicions and allegations (expected or emerging) can be considered
- risks can be properly assessed
- control measures can be put in place

Individuals who should be involved in planning include:

- gold commander
- silver commander
- force election SPOC and bronze commander(s)
- force planning/divisional planning officers
- crime SPOCs
- local authority, police and Electoral Commission media/press officers
- local authority executive/returning and electoral registration officers
- Royal Mail Group Ltd sorting office/account managers (if required or appropriate)
- neighbourhood policing teams/SIO

The principal planning meetings are the gold command group meeting and the joint agency working group planning meeting. Tasks, which should be recorded and managed by the force election SPOC, are allocated at the joint agency working group meeting. The debrief document from the previous election should be referred to in order to assist in preparing a risk assessment, highlight good practice or identify areas for improvement.

The force election SPOC and the ESM should have a plan for dealing with electoral malpractice ( [this checklist](#) can help the planning process). A [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) between the police and the local authority will provide a clear understanding and agreement regarding the roles, responsibilities and cooperation required. [Certain stages in the electoral timetable](#) could trigger particular types of malpractice activity. The ESM can provide the force election SPOC with further information.

The ESM is uniquely placed to identify suspicious activity, as opposed to electioneering, and may approach the force election SPOC following checks indicating suspicious behaviour in high-risk neighbourhoods. Any intelligence should be shared with the force election SPOC and form part of the planning activity.

A joint meeting between the police and local authority should be held following the election in order to review the event, the systems in place and identify where changes or an alternative approach is needed.

## Memorandum of understanding

A MoU is a useful tool when developing partnership working. Forces should enter into an MoU with each local authority in the force area. This should set out an agreed understanding of how they may cooperate to ensure that elections and referendums are conducted in a fair and inclusive manner and in accordance with the law. Police and local authorities may wish to consider using a [draft template](#) to form the basis of their MoU. This may be edited to suit local requirements.

## Recommended timetable of events for a May election

Event	Date	Responsibility
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Establish gold group and gold strategy	January/ February	Assistant chief constable
Attend the NPCC and Electoral Commission national SPOC seminar	January/ February	Force election SPOC
Identify BCU silver commanders, BCU crime SPOCs, NPT leads, local authority returning officers and deputies	February	Force election SPOC
Gold meeting between gold commander, force SPOC, silver commanders, BCU crime SPOCs, force planning officers, force media officers	February/ March	Force election SPOC
Planning meetings between force election SPOC, BCU crime SPOCs, returning officers and deputies, Royal Mail Group Ltd security advisers/account manager (if required)	March/April/ May	Force election SPOC
Notification of nominees to stand as potential candidates in elections (including notification of election agents)	March/ April	Force election SPOC
Joint police / local authority letter to candidates	April	Chief constable/ local authority



Election candidates and agents briefing	April/May	Force election SPOC
Guidance and training for police officers and staff engaged in election duties	April/May	Force election SPOC/ silver commander(s)
Election day	Thursday in May	Returning officer
Electoral Commission debrief meeting	June/July	Electoral Commission
Archive enquiry information and complete intelligence dissemination	August	Force election SPOC
Gold group debrief	September	Force election SPOC

For further information, see [key stages in the election process](#).

## Communication

[Communication and engagement](#) should continue as needed after the election, in addition to before and during.

Each force has a [nominated election SPOC](#) who liaises between the force, the Electoral Commission, and the local authority's ESM (or local equivalent). Functional bronze commanders for communication, media and/or community may be appointed if considered necessary.

## Impartiality

Both the police and the local authority should take care to remain impartial when dealing with candidates, campaigners and political parties.

Local authorities are prohibited at any time from issuing material that 'in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party'. This may include press releases,

brochures, leaflets, adverts, newsletters, the council's website, social media networks and the staging of events. The local authority's monitoring officer should address the issue of whether publicity is prohibited in line with the [Local Government Act 1986 s 2](#).

[A Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) applies to communications and publicity during the election period. This period, also known unofficially as the 'purdah period', commences with the Notice of Election (the formal start of the election timetable) and continues for approximately six weeks leading up to an election where the local authority is subject to restrictions. Any breach of this Code should be reported to the local authority's monitoring officer.

[NPCC \(2024\) Guidance for Interaction with Candidates and Conduct during Pre-election Period](#) provides further advice to the police when interacting with party political candidates, their representatives or supporters. Under the [RPA 1983 s 100\(1\)](#), it is illegal for police officers to canvass at parliamentary elections or local government elections wholly or partly within the police area, and the [Code of Ethics](#) reinforces the need for police officers and staff to behave impartially.

## Communication strategy

This can help to support public confidence and trust in the police role during the election. Commanders are responsible for ensuring the command structure supports effective communication, and for producing a communications strategy, which should include:

- using engagement and dialogue to demonstrate a 'no surprises' approach
- establishing and maintaining links with political parties, candidates, communities, liaison groups, party workers and other relevant agents in order to build trust and confidence
- coordinating communications activity with the local authority
- plans for communicating with the public, affected communities and the media in the event of allegations of fraud during the election

## Candidates and campaigners

### Harassment, Intimidation and Threatening Behaviour

Products for candidates and campaigners, including those developed in response to The Committee on Standards in Public Life's report [Intimidation in Public Life](#), are available from the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website. Products are also available from the [Electoral Commission](#). Products, including

Welsh language versions, are also available from the [Electoral Commission](#). The candidate briefing packs and/or briefing events present an ideal opportunity to disseminate these products and raise awareness of how candidates/campaigners can report any concerns or incidents regarding harassment, intimidation or threatening behaviour. Forces are encouraged to ensure that candidates/campaigners can contact a named individual and/or dedicated department to discuss any concerns that they may have regarding this type of behaviour.

Forces should also note that [section 30 Elections Act 2022](#) introduces 'disqualification orders'. These may apply against any individual who is convicted of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate, future candidate or campaigner or holder of a relevant elective office ([schedule 9 of the Elections Act 2022](#) presents specific relevant offences). A disqualification order is imposed by the courts and prevents the convicted individual from standing for election, being elected to office or holding a relevant elective office for a period of five years. Investigators should, therefore, consider motivation when investigating any offences listed in schedule 9 against candidates and campaigners.

Commanders may use various methods for engaging with prospective candidates and party workers, including candidate briefing packs, one-to-one meetings and email.

Police attendance at the briefing for candidates and agents held by the returning officer demonstrates the joint approach being taken by the police and local authority, and reinforces expectations of conduct by those standing for election and their agents. In addition, the returning officer and chief constable may send a [joint letter](#) to candidates, agents and campaigners regarding expected standards of behaviour and their agreement to abide by the Electoral Commission's [Code of conduct for campaigners: postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations](#). A candidate's failure to sign their agreement may indicate a potential concern.

The Electoral Commission's Code of conduct for campaigners, postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations in Great Britain sets out what is, and is not, considered acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community during the lead-up to polling day. Although the Code of Conduct is a non-statutory agreement it was developed following open consultation and the main political parties have signed up to the Code, further information is available from the [Electoral Commission](#).

Political parties may set up temporary offices in areas of concern, for example, next to a polling station. This may result in allegations of unacceptable conduct such as inappropriate hospitality offered to prospective voters. The police may wish to visit the premises, which demonstrates to party workers that their presence has been noted and provides an opportunity to reinforce the message of expected standards of conduct.

## Communities

The gold commander should ensure that positive community engagement is a key element in the gold strategy. Silver commanders should write a community engagement strategy for each BCU district. This should include a plan for collecting community intelligence, either via routine or directed community engagement. It should also consider whether a [community impact assessment](#) is needed.

Neighbourhood inspectors implement the community engagement strategy and play a key role in working with the local community and partners to create a confident, safer and secure neighbourhood where individuals feel that their democratic right to vote is supported by law enforcement. They can do this by engaging with community leaders and key networks before, during and after the election.

Messages given by the police, through community leaders (such as mediators or independent advisory groups) and by attending community gatherings, can help to reinforce a positive and cohesive approach within communities.

## Media

Appropriate communication with the media before, during and after elections conveys a policing perspective of events, which may be necessary when allegations and counter-allegations are made by one party or candidate against another. The gold commander is responsible for the media strategy.

Forces may wish to issue a joint statement at the start of the election campaign endorsed by all candidates and parties, the returning officer and the local police force. This shows a clear and cohesive joint approach. This should, however, be a voluntary agreement and no stigma should be attached to any party or candidate not wishing to be included. The Electoral Commission may act as a point of reference for news releases, especially prior to any arrest or prosecution.

**Allegations of electoral malpractice** can result in adverse media coverage at local and national levels and can be intense where high-profile candidates are standing for election. The force election SPOC and ESM need to be aware that media representatives may attempt to test the integrity of the system. If coordinated plans are not in place, this can expose either organisation and can be damaging to the democratic process, the local authority and to the police. A joint approach to media coverage helps to demonstrate a managed and informed position by both organisations and consistency in messages given.

## Post election

### Post-election debrief

Force election SPOCs and silver commanders are responsible for ensuring that they are able to debrief their gold commander and the Electoral Commission regarding events and allegations that have occurred during the election period.

The Electoral Commission receives information via the submissions that the police submit to the **National Police Working Group for Electoral Malpractice** and regular communication between force election SPOCs and the Electoral Commission integrity staff.

The following should be considered when debriefing:

- issues around planning and preparation for policing the election
- polling day (for example, polling stations, the count)
- number of allegations received (including consideration of any increase or decrease in allegations within high-risk communities)
- significant events (community and political issues)
- current status of any investigations (for example, arrests or likely charges)
- feedback from partner agencies, returning officers, ESM or local equivalent
- media interest
- new legislation or organisational learning that would benefit future planning

For further information see **Debriefing**.

## Organisational learning

Information gained from debriefs should be included in subsequent election planning and form part of any force operation order.

Any available organisational learning that may benefit other forces should be sanitised and made available through the Electoral Commission for consideration of dissemination and inclusion in the national SPOC seminar or the bi-annual integrity meeting, or the [Knowledge Hub](#).

## Tags

Elections