

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

2017 County and Parish Elections

Thursday 4 May

Candidate and Agent Information Pack

Introduction

This information pack gives details of various electoral processes and events. It aims to anticipate candidates' needs in planning for the latter stages of the election period and help them to identify their opportunities to attend and scrutinise electoral events and

processes and to plan their campaigns around these activities.

It is intended that this document will be read alongside the briefing note issued to candidates and agents, in which certain key considerations are highlighted in the context of the administrative processes set out herein.

Should there be further information required by candidates or their agents not covered here or elsewhere, further enquiry to electoral services is welcomed via the following contact details.

Tel: 01670 624811

Email: elections@northumberland.gov.uk

A full timetable for the election period can be found at appendix 1.

Information available

Candidates are entitled to receive on request a range of electoral information. Below is a table summarising the information available and how and when it can be obtained.

Item	How to obtain it	When it is available
Electoral register	Request form	Final update from
Absent voter lists	Request form	Final update from 18 April
Polling schedule (stations etc.)	Website	Currently
Electorate statistics	Website	Final figures from 13 April
Street indices	Contact electoral services	Currently
Electoral maps	Website	Currently
Polling station search facility	Website	Currently
Daily postal vote return figures	Contact electoral services	From 21 April

Where the data requested is sensitive (i.e. registers and absent voter lists), the Returning Officer is responsible for its security when fulfilling requests. However, once the data is received by the recipient, the responsibility for its ongoing security rests exclusively with the recipient. Anyone handling electoral data should ensure they are familiar with the relevant sections of the Representations of the People Regulations 2001 and should fully understand the precautions they need to take in handling this data.

Postal voting

Outgoing delivery to voters

Postal votes will be sent to voters in one of two waves released to Royal Mail depending on the date of their application:

- Any existing or new postal voter applying before 3 April will receive their postal vote on or around Wednesday 19 April.
- Any new postal voter who applied between 3 April and the deadline on 18 April will receive their postal vote on or around 26 April.

If a postal vote is lost or spoilt before the voter has opportunity to use it, they can apply for a replacement to be issued. This can be requested from Thursday 27 April by contacting electoral services.

Postal vote returns

Daily timed deliveries will be taken from Royal Mail at Wentworth Leisure Centre in Hexham. These will be counted and logged by division to maintain a clear audit of returns by electoral division before being securely stored ahead of postal vote opening.

Postal votes can be handed in at polling stations if the voter is unable to return it by post in sufficient time.

A Royal Mail sweep will be conducted during the evening on election day to ensure any postal votes still in the mailing system are delivered to the returning officer before the close of poll.

Postal vote opening

Before postal votes can be entered into the count they must pass through a vigorous security process to ensure they have been completed by the electors to whom they were issued. This involves the verification of the date of birth and signature on the postal vote statement against the samples held on file. An automated system performs this verification process. Where a statement fails this automated check it is then scrutinised by eye and is rejected only if still deemed not to match records.

There will be seven day-long opening sessions from Wednesday 26 April through to 4 May (excluding Sunday 31 April and Monday 1 May). These sessions will commence at 9.30am and will conclude by 5pm. The Returning Officer reserves the right to conduct additional sessions or extend existing ones depending on the pressures and requirements of the process.

Ballot papers will be handled face down through these daily sessions as they must be until the close of poll on 4 May.

Postal vote opening will take place at Wentworth Leisure Centre. Whilst there is good parking provision at the venue, anyone wishing to attend these sessions should familiarise themselves with the parking restrictions in place. Further information can be found on the [Council website](#).

Appointment of postal vote opening agents

Candidates are able to scrutinise this opening process either themselves, through their election agent or by appointing a specific postal vote opening agent. The candidate and their official election agent are entitled to attend these sessions without further notice to the Returning Officer. Details of any specific postal vote opening agents appointed must be supplied to the Returning Officer no later than the day before the session they wish to attend. A candidate may appoint multiple postal vote opening agents but only one may be in attendance on their behalf at any one time. A form for this purpose was included in the electronic and paper nomination packs provided by the Returning Officer and further copies are provided at appendix 4.

Final opening session

In order to process any late returns via polling stations and the Royal Mail sweep, a final opening will be held following close of poll on election night. This will begin at 10pm in anticipation of the first returns from polling stations.

Individual counts will not be able commence until all final postal votes have been processed and verified alongside all earlier postal votes and polling station ballots.

It is anticipated that this final opening will session will continue until as late as 2am.

Polling station voting

Polling stations

Across the County 228 polling stations will open to voters at 7am and will remain open until 10pm. Each station will be staffed by a presiding officer and a poll clerk and, in some busier stations, extra poll clerks may be deployed to benefit the voting experience.

In the unlikely event of an overwhelming late surge in turnout, voters queuing at 10pm can still be issued with a ballot providing they were present in the queue as the polls closed. In this instance polling continues until the final voter has cast their ballot.

A schedule of polling stations listed by electoral division can found on the Council's webpages.

The following individuals are permitted entry to polling stations:

- The Returning Officer and their staff
- Candidates, their agents and appointed polling station agents
 - Only for the electoral division in which the candidate stands nominated
- Police officers
- Electoral Commission representatives and accredited observers
- Under 18s accompanying a voter
- Anyone providing assistance to a voter

No one else is permitted entry to the polling station for any reason at any time during the hours of poll.

Appointment of polling agents

The appointment of polling agents must be notified to the Returning Officer by wednesday 26 April. There is no limit to the number of polling agents a candidate may appoint but only one may be present in any given station at any one time. The station(s) to which each agent is appointed must be specified. A form for this purpose was included in the electronic and paper nomination packs provided by the Returning Officer and further copies are provided at appendix 4.

Candidates' seals on ballot boxes

It is permitted for agents to place a seal on the ballot box at close of poll in order to satisfy the candidate that the box has not been tampered with in transit from the station. This must be done immediately upon close of poll according instruction by the presiding officer.

Transport to the count

The ballot boxes from stations in the Hexham constituency will be delivered individually by Presiding Officers directly to the count venue.

Ballot boxes from stations in Berwick constituency will be delivered by presiding officers to Willowburn Sports Centre, where they will be consolidated into a single delivery to the count venue. These are anticipated to reach their final destination by 12.30am

Ballot boxes from stations in Wansbeck and Blyth Valley constituencies will be delivered by presiding officers to Blyth Sports Centre, again to be consolidated into a single delivery to the count venue. Arrival in Hexham is anticipated by 11.30pm.

Verification and Count

Event and venue details

The verification and count for all County divisions and parish councils will be conducted at a single location. Verification for both polls will take place immediately following close of poll on Thursday 4 May. The count for county elections will take place overnight on 4/5th May. The count for parish elections will take place on Saturday 6 May.

Venue details

Venue: Wentworth Leisure Centre
Wentworth Park
Wentworth Place
Hexham
NE46 3PD

Parking: The car park serving the venue is usually under significant demand. For the overnight verification and county count, this will not be an issue and ample parking will be available. Please ensure you aware of the restrictions in place. For the Saturday parish count, this provision will under increased demand. Overflow capacity is available at Tyne Green car park where there are no restrictions or charges in place.

Disabled access: Level access is available to all areas in use at the event and accessible WCs are provided.

Refreshments: Hot and cold drink vending machines are available as well as a limited range of snacks.

Combined verification and counting of county ballot papers

Venue entry time: 10pm

Count floor admittance time 10.20pm

Event start time: 10.30pm

Event finish time: 5am, Friday 5 May (anticipated)

Counting of parish ballot papers

Venue entry time: 8.45am

Count floor admittance time 8.55am

Event start time: 9am

Event finish time: 3pm

A plan of the count floor configuration is set out in appendix 3.

Arrival of ballot boxes

The arrival of ballot boxes from across the County will take place in 3 waves.

First wave: a sustained period immediately following close of poll of individual deliveries by presiding officers from stations across Hexham constituency.

Second wave: a single consolidated delivery from Blyth Sports Centre incorporating stations from across Byth Valley and Wansbeck constituencies, anticipated approximately 11.30pm.

Third wave: a single consolidated delivery from Blyth Sports Centre incorporating stations from across Berwick constituency, anticipated approximately 12.20am.

Verification and count process

The verification and count process will proceed according to the following outline.

1. Each complete county division's polling station ballot boxes, postal vote ballot box/secure wallet and count sundries (paperwork etc.) will be allocated and delivered to a team supervisor. There will be a visual indication of which team is currently handling which division.
 - **Parish postal votes will also be delivered to teams alongside the county division within which they fall.**
2. Station ballot boxes and postal votes will be verified to establish the number of ballot papers to be entered into the count. The process will continue until all polling station and postal vote ballot papers for the division have been verified.
 - **Parish ballot papers must be verified at the same time as those received in respect of the County elections.**
3. Once the verification figures are established for each polling station, and the number of postal ballot papers confirmed, a consolidated figure will be established for the division and any parishes it includes. County ballot papers will remain with the count team to proceed immediately into counting.
 - **Parish papers will be secured and stored ready for the parish count event on Saturday 6 May.**
4. Ballot papers will be sorted according to candidate and then counted. Any doubtful ballot papers will be reviewed by a Deputy Returning Officer and their determinations shared with candidates and agents.
 - **Due to the multiple vacancies at parish elections papers will not be sorted according to candidate. These papers will be counted using counting boards (details of this process will available as a handout at the event.**
5. A final figure will be shared with candidates and agents, providing the opportunity to request a recount. Once these figures are agreed, a formal declaration will be made.

Sharing results

A formal declaration will be made by the Returning Officer for every County division and every parish council or ward thereof. The results will then be disseminated by the following means:

- A copy of the declaration will be posted online on the Council's [webpages](#)
- Social media alerts will be issued via facebook and twitter
- Information screens at the count venue will be updated to reflect results as they emerge

Appendix 1.

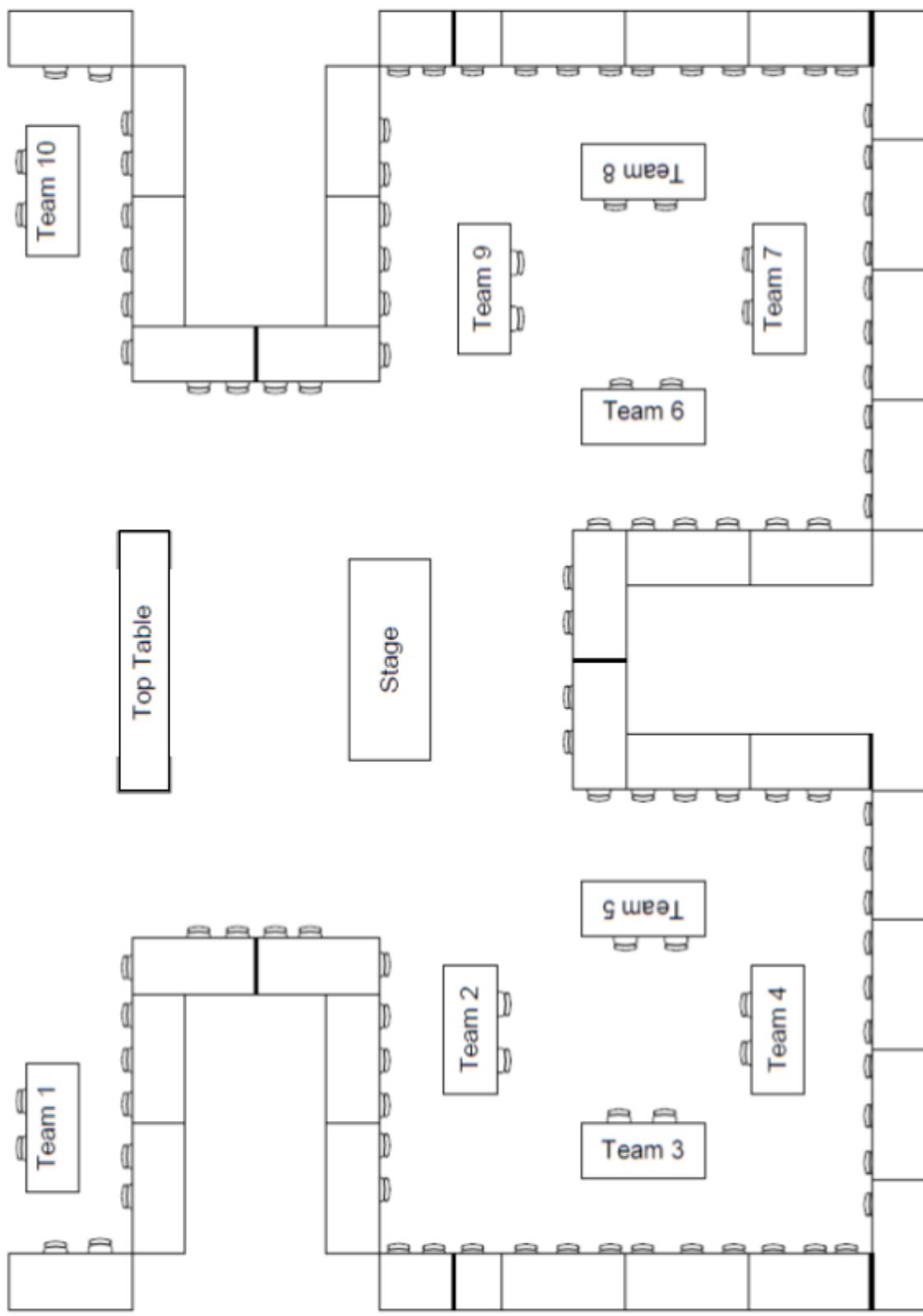
Election Timetable All-Out County and Parish Elections 2017

Event	Date
Publication of notice of election	Monday 20 March
Delivery of nomination papers	From Tuesday 21 March up to 4pm on Tuesday 4 April
Deadline for withdrawals of nomination	4pm on Tuesday 4 April
Deadline for the notification of appointment of election agent (County Council elections only)	4pm on Tuesday 4 April
Publication of statement of persons nominated	Not later than 4pm on Wednesday 5 April
Deadline for receiving applications for registration	Thursday 13 April
First issue postal vote packs released to Royal Mail	Tuesday 18 April
Deadline for receiving new postal vote and postal proxy applications, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	5pm on Tuesday 18 April
Second issue postal vote packs released to Royal Mail	Tuesday 25 April
Deadline for receiving new applications to vote by proxy (not postal proxy or emergency proxies)	5pm on Tuesday 25 April
Publication of notice of poll	Tuesday 25 April
Deadline for notification of appointment of polling and counting agents	Wednesday 26 April
First date that electors can apply for a replacement for lost postal votes	Thursday 27 April
Polling day	Thursday 4 May (7am to 10pm)
Last time that electors can apply for a replacement for spoilt or lost postal votes	5pm on Thursday 4 May
Deadline for emergency proxy applications	5pm on Thursday 4 May
Last time to alter the register due to clerical error or court appeal	9pm on Thursday 4 May
Deadline for submission of candidate expenses return and covering declaration (Parish Council elections only)	Tuesday 1 June
Deadline for submission of candidate expenses return and covering declaration (County Council elections only)	Wednesday 9 June

Appendix 2. Postal vote opening process

Postal votes are brought to the opening session in ballot boxes	8	If the statement or ballot paper envelope is missing, or the numbers on the statement and ballot paper envelope do not match, the document(s) are set aside recorded and stored in secure packets
The covering envelopes (envelope B) are taken out and counted	9	The LRO must verify the dates of birth and signatures provided on the statements
The total number of covering envelopes is entered onto a form	10	The LRO must be satisfied that the dates of birth and signatures on the statements match those previously provided and held on record
Covering envelopes (envelope B) are divided between teams of opening staff	11	A very small number of voters do not need to sign their postal voting statement. These voters will have been granted a waiver because they are unable to sign or provide a consistent signature due to a disability or an inability to read or write. The postal voting statement sent to such electors will make this clear.
Staff open each covering envelope (envelope B) and remove the postal voting statement and the sealed ballot paper envelope (envelope A)	12	Staff open the ballot paper envelopes (envelope A) and remove the ballot paper
Staff check that the number on the postal voting statement matches the number on envelope A	13	Staff check that the number on the back of the ballot paper matches the number on the ballot paper envelope (envelope A)
If the numbers match, staff check that the elector has provided a signature and a date of birth (without checking that they are the elector's at this stage). Postal voting statements without a signature and date of birth cause the postal vote to be rejected.	14	Valid ballot papers (not votes) are counted and the total number is recorded
	15	All valid ballot papers are placed into ballot boxes and stored securely before being delivered to the counting venue for counting after the close of poll

Appendix 3. Count floor plan



Appendix 4. Agent Appointment Forms

- Appointment of polling agents
- Appointment of postal vote opening agents
- Appointment of count agents

Appointment of polling agents

Polling agents can be appointed using this form by the candidate.[1] Contact the relevant Returning Officer to find the deadline by which this form must be delivered.

Local authority / parish council	
Name of division / parish ward	
Name of candidate (Optional: include description, if any):	
Signature of candidate or election agent:	
I appoint the following people as polling agents:	
Name and address of polling agent (include postcode)	List of polling stations to which they are appointed

Name and address of polling agent (include postcode)	List of polling stations to which they are appointed
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Appointment of postal vote agents

Postal vote agents may be appointed by the candidate or their election agent using this form. Contact the elections office to find out the maximum number that you may appoint.

Local authority / parish council	
Name of division / parish ward	
Name of candidate:	
Signature of candidate or election agent:	
I appoint the following people as agents to attend postal vote openings:	
Name of postal vote agent	Address of postal vote agent

Appointment of counting agents

A counting agent may be appointed by the candidate using this form. For the 2017 County and Parish elections each candidate is entitled to appoint one count agent.

The deadline for the return of this form is Wednesday 26 April.

Local authority / parish council	
Name of division / parish ward	
Name of candidate:	
Signature of candidate:	
I appoint the following people as counting agents:	
Name of counting agent	Address of counting agent (including postcode)

Appendix 5

REQUIREMENT OF SECRECY

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1983 - Section 66, sub-section (1), (2), (3), (4) and (6)

- (1) The following persons –
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- (a) every returning officer and every presiding officer or clerk attending at a polling station;
- (b) every candidate or election agent or polling agent so attending;
- (c) every person so attending by virtue of any sections 6A to 6D of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000,
- shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not, except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate to any person before the poll is closed any information as to –
- (i) the name of any elector or proxy for an elector who has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station;
- (ii) the number on the register of electors of any elector who, or whose proxy, has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station; or
- (iii) the official mark.
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- (2) Every person attending at the counting of the votes shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not –
-)
- (a) ascertain or attempt to ascertain at the counting of the votes the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper;
- (b) communicate any information obtained at the counting of the votes as to the candidate for whom any vote is given on any particular ballot paper
- (3) No person shall –
-)
- (a) interfere with or attempt to interfere with a voter when recording his vote;
- (b) otherwise obtain or attempt to obtain in a polling station information as to the candidate for whom a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted;
- (c) communicate at any time to any person any information obtained in a polling station as to the candidate for whom a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given to a voter at that station;
- (d) directly or indirectly induce a voter to display his ballot paper after he has marked it so as to make known to any person the name of the candidate for whom he has or has not voted.
- (4) Every person attending the proceedings in connection with the issue or the receipt of ballot papers for persons voting by post shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of the voting and shall not –
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- (a) except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate, before the poll is closed, to any person any information obtained at those proceedings as to the official mark; or
- (b) except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate to any person at any time any information obtained at those proceedings as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper sent to any person; or
- (c) except for some purpose authorised by law, attempt to ascertain at the proceedings in connection with the receipt of ballot papers the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper; or
- (d) attempt to ascertain at the proceedings in connection with the receipt of the ballot papers the candidate for whom any vote is given in any particular ballot paper or communicate any information with respect thereto obtained at those proceedings.
- (5) No person having undertaken to assist a blind voter to vote shall communicate at any time to any person any information as to the candidate for whom that voter intends to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given for the use of that voter.
- (6) If a person acts in contravention of this section, he shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not

) exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.