

Candidates and agents Briefing

Southampton City Council elections, 2 May 2024

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Topics

- key dates
- other agents
- code of conduct for campaigners
- polling day
- verification and counting of the votes
- candidates' expenses
- contacts

Election timetable

Deadline for applications for new proxy votes	5pm on 24th April
Deadline for applications for Voter Authority Certificates	5pm on 24th April
Appointment of counting and polling agents	25th April
Polling day	2nd May – 7am to 10pm
Deadline to apply to vote by proxy on grounds of medical emergency, if unexpectedly called away because of employment or service, voter authority certificate conditions	5pm on 2nd May
Replacement for lost/spoilt postal votes ends	5pm on 2nd May
Return of election expenses	+35 calendar days from result

Other agents

- Other agents can be appointed to attend postal vote openings and the count on the candidate's behalf:
 - Notice in writing of any appointed counting agents must be given to the Returning Officer by **25 April**.
 - Notice in writing of any postal voting agent appointments must be made before the start of the relevant session.

Code of conduct for campaigners (1)

- Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, but their activities should not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.
- The Returning Officer asks all candidates and agents to agree to abide by the Electoral Commissions 'Code of Conduct for Campaigners'.
- This code of conduct covers all aspects of the electoral process: registration, Voter Authority Certificates, postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations

Code of conduct for campaigners (2)

- Campaigning outside polling stations:
 - campaigners are allowed to put their messages to voters on polling day by making use of public spaces outside polling places, as long as they are not impeding access;
 - tellers should remain outside the polling station and must not be able to see or hear what is happening inside;
 - ensure that ‘tellers’ comply with the Electoral Commission’s guidance;
 - access to polling stations and the pavements around polling places must be kept clear to allow voters unimpeded access to enter.

Polling day

Polling day (1)

- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm.
- Elections Office open 6.30am to 10.00pm for queries or problems relating to the administration of the election
 - for queries relating to election finance issues, contact the Electoral Commission.
- Postal votes should be delivered to the elections office before 10pm.
- Any postal votes taken to polling stations must be handed in to a station within the relevant city ward.
- NB: new requirements for anyone handing in postal votes - Representation of the People (Postal Vote Handling and Secrecy) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

Polling day (2)

- Voters in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station at 10pm can apply for a ballot paper.
- A person in a queue at a polling station at 10pm waiting to hand in postal vote can do so after 10pm.

Temporary Voter Authority Certificates

- The Electoral Registration Officer is permitted to print a Temporary VAC if they are satisfied that:
 - the elector applied for their substantive Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline (5pm on 24 April); **and**
 - the substantive VAC was printed by the supplier after 5pm on 24 April, but before 5pm on polling day; **and**
 - there is reason to believe the substantive Voter Authority Certificate may not or has not been delivered in time for the elector to use at the poll.

Verification and the count

Verification of the ballot papers

- The verification of the ballot papers for both the city council and Police & Crime Commissioner polls will take place on **Thursday 2 May**, after the polls close.
- This will take place at:
 - The O2 Guildhall, West Marlands Road, Southampton.
- The verification stage will start at 10.00pm, and the venue will be open to candidates and agents from 9.30pm. Access is via the main entrance to the Civic Centre.
- Candidates, election agents and counting agents are entitled to attend the verification
 - maximum no. of counting agents: 1 per candidate.
- Tickets for entry to the verification must be shown.

Verification

- 4 verification/count teams.
- Verification stage:
 - the total number of returned and validated postal ballot papers is checked;
 - the issued ballot papers for each of the polling stations in the ward are counted into bundles of 20 and the number checked against the ballot paper accounts;
 - the unused and spoilt ballot papers for each of the polling stations are also be checked against the ballot paper accounts.

Counting of the votes

- The counting of the votes for the city council elections will commence once the verification stage is complete. This is likely to be around 2.00am on Friday morning.
- Counting the votes:
 - the ballot papers are sorted for each candidate and counted into bundles of 20;
 - doubtful papers are dealt with as they arise and any decision by the Returning Officer or his Deputies to reject a ballot paper will be communicated to candidates and agents;
 - the Returning Officer or his Deputies communicates the provisional result for each ward with the relevant candidates and agents.

Election expenses

Candidate spending

- Election spending is defined as certain expenses used for the purposes of the candidate's election during the 'regulated period' (from the **day after** they officially became candidate until 2 May 2024).
- Completion of the spending return is the responsibility of the **election agent**.
- Current limit on expenses: £960 + £0.08 pence per elector.
- Candidates must stay within this limit during the regulated period and record spending on items and services and any donations received.
- Keep receipts/invoices for any expenditure over £20.
- Forms relating to the return of candidate spending and donations are available from the Electoral Commission's website.

Candidates' spending returns

- Returns due 35 calendar days after result of election (deadline: Friday 7 June 2024).
- Sample of returns may be reviewed by the **Electoral Commission**.
- Failure to submit an expenses return is a criminal offence enforceable by the police.
- No spending will be reimbursed.

Contacts

Contacts (1)

- Elections office:

Tel. – 023 8083 3954

Email – mike.hickman@southampton.gov.uk

- Highways department:

Tel. – 023 8083 2628

Please note:

The Returning Officer and his staff have a duty to conduct elections strictly in accordance with the appropriate laws, rules and regulations.

They are required to comply with these at all times and this may occasionally restrict the level of assistance that can be offered.

Contacts (2)

- Electoral Commission:
 - For enquiries about guidance or standing for election:
Tel: 0333 103 1928
Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
Website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Questions