Print supply and postal vote considerations

Chris Highcock   Depute Returning Officer, City of Edinburgh Council
Secretary of the EMB

In this session….

- Print as **critical** to the election

- Cost of a postage

- UKPGE 2024 experiences

- Developing resilience

- Practical actions

- Royal Mail reforms

# Critical importance of print and postal voting

- Elections remain paper-based

- SP election 2021

  - 4.2 million poll cards

  - 8.4 million ballot papers

  - 1 million plus postal vote packs

- Defined legal specification, secure production process, strict and demanding timetable

- Printers and Royal Mail critically important suppliers

  - They are responsible, **YOU** are accountable
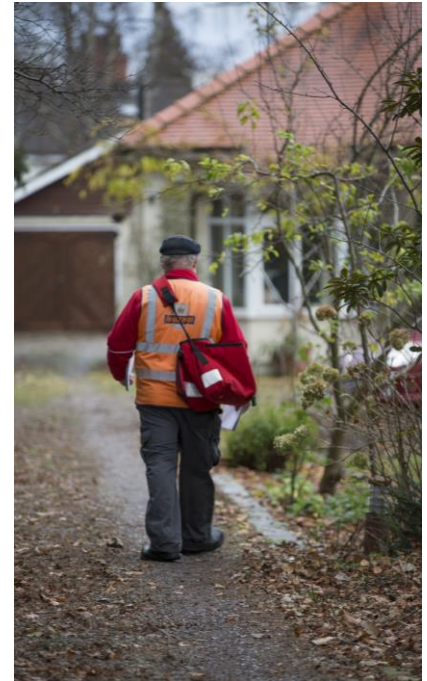
License: CC0 Public Domain

Scale of postal costs

- Increasingly significant costs

  - Postal costs around 28% of total

- Poll Cards postage approx. 57p

- Postal packs approx. 95p each way

  - Edinburgh - UKPGE 2024

    ◦ over £220,000 poll card postage

    ◦ over £185,000 postal vote postage

- **PLUS it went wrong….**

- Costs to increase for SPE 2026
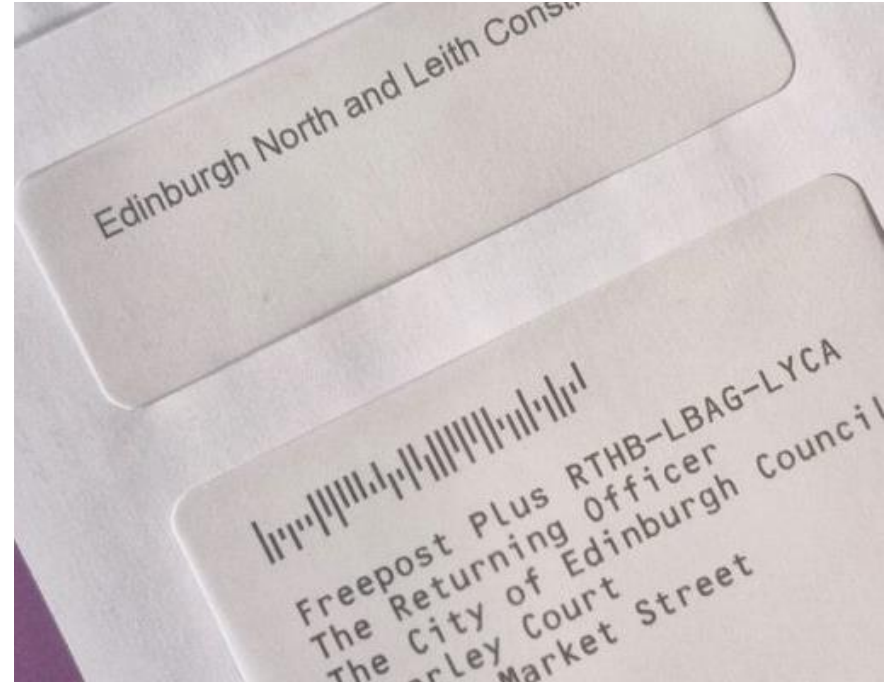
UKPGE 2024: delivered well but with major challenges around postal votes…

*"Overall, the May and July 2024 elections were **well-run**, and voters continue to have high levels of confidence and satisfaction in the polls. **However**…..*

*Postal voting systems did not work well enough for **some** voters this year – especially in Scotland and for overseas electors. **Some** did not receive their postal votes in time to complete and return them before polling day.*

In a limited number of areas this was because of errors or problems with suppliers.

*In other cases, **voters did not understand** when they should expect to receive their postal votes. This meant that they were not able to choose a different way of voting that would better suit their circumstances."*
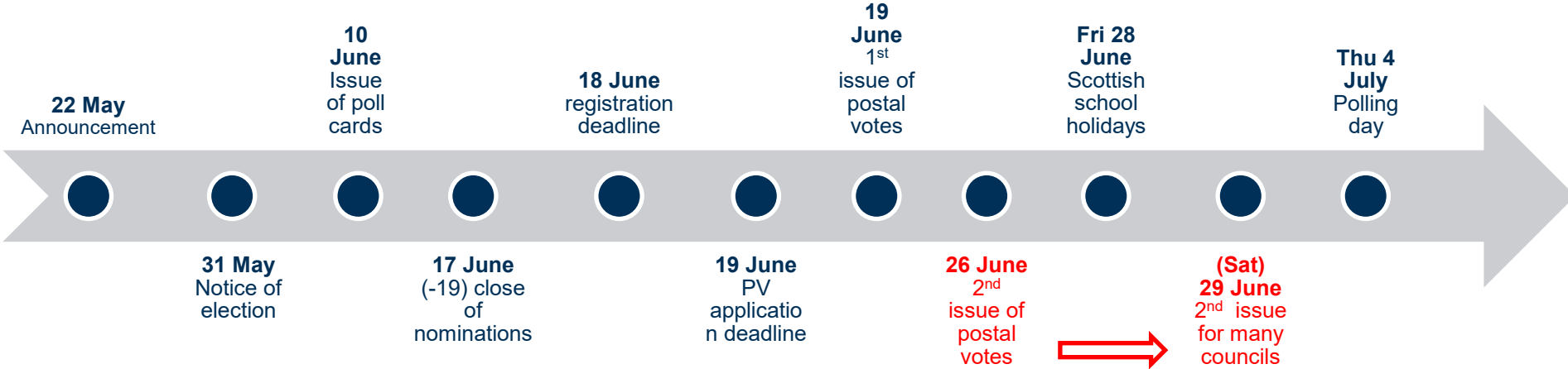
Recommendation 2 - Electoral Commission Report on UKPGE 2024

UKPGE 2024 experience

UKPGE 2024

- Electorate 4,078,398 across 57 UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland

  - 997,891 (24%) were postal voters

- Increase of over a third (269,743) since UKPGE 2019

- First issue on 19 June, for postal voters registered by ~7 June

- Some delivery complaints on first issue

- Second issue scheduled for (Wed) 26 June

  - Already tight for those on holiday from Fri 28 June

- Production problems - dispatch for many councils 28/29 June and receipt 1-2 July (Mon, Tue)

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The Electoral Commission

22 May Announcement

31 May Notice of election

10 June Issue of poll cards

17 June (-19) close of nominations

18 June registration deadline

19 June PV application deadline

19 June 1st issue of postal votes

26 June 2nd issue of postal votes

Fri 28 June Scottish school holidays

(Sat) 29 June 2nd issue for many councils

Thu 4 July Polling day

8

- Approx. 68,000 which should have been dispatched on Wed 26 June

  - Approx 7% of the total

- Delayed until 27-29 June

- Response Team: EMB, EC, MHCLG, Printer, Royal Mail

- Royal Mail support for logistics

- Emergency PV "re-issue facilities"

- Media statements etc.

- Political questions…

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Postal Vote & Print - UKPGE 2024

Emergency re-issue facilities – well used

Importance of clear communications

Many complaints, especially from overseas voters

Some postal voters were unable to vote

Overall postal vote turnout remained high **81.7%**

- (UK was 80.7%)

Contributing factors

|			
Timing (school holidays)	**Short Notice/ Unscheduled**	**Timetable**	**Print capacity**
Resilience	**Logistics**	**Postal vote electorate growth**	**Voting methods**
	Contingency plans	**Legislative change**	**Complexity of PV pack**

Roundtable

- 27 February 2025

  - ROs / EROs

  - The Electoral Commission

  - Governments UK and Scottish

  - AEA

  - Royal Mail & Printers

  - Academics

- What happened and what we can do about it ……
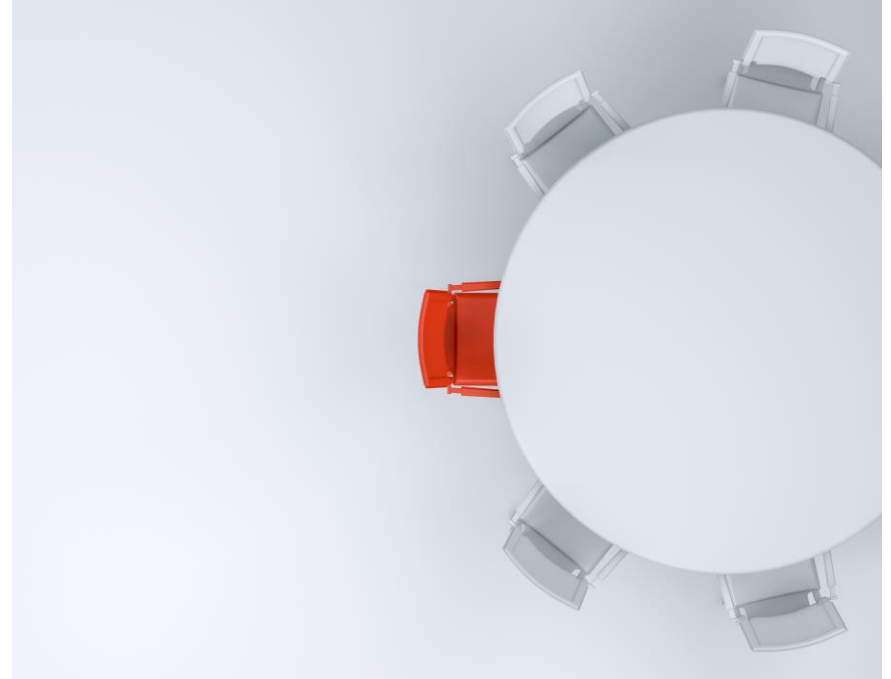
Recommendations

- Clear **communications with voters** on deadlines etc.

- Developed and realistic **contingency plans** for ROs, EROs and suppliers to cope with failures and the need for replacement.

- **Additional capacity** in the print sector so that supply is less concentrated and less at risk of catastrophic or significant failure across wide areas

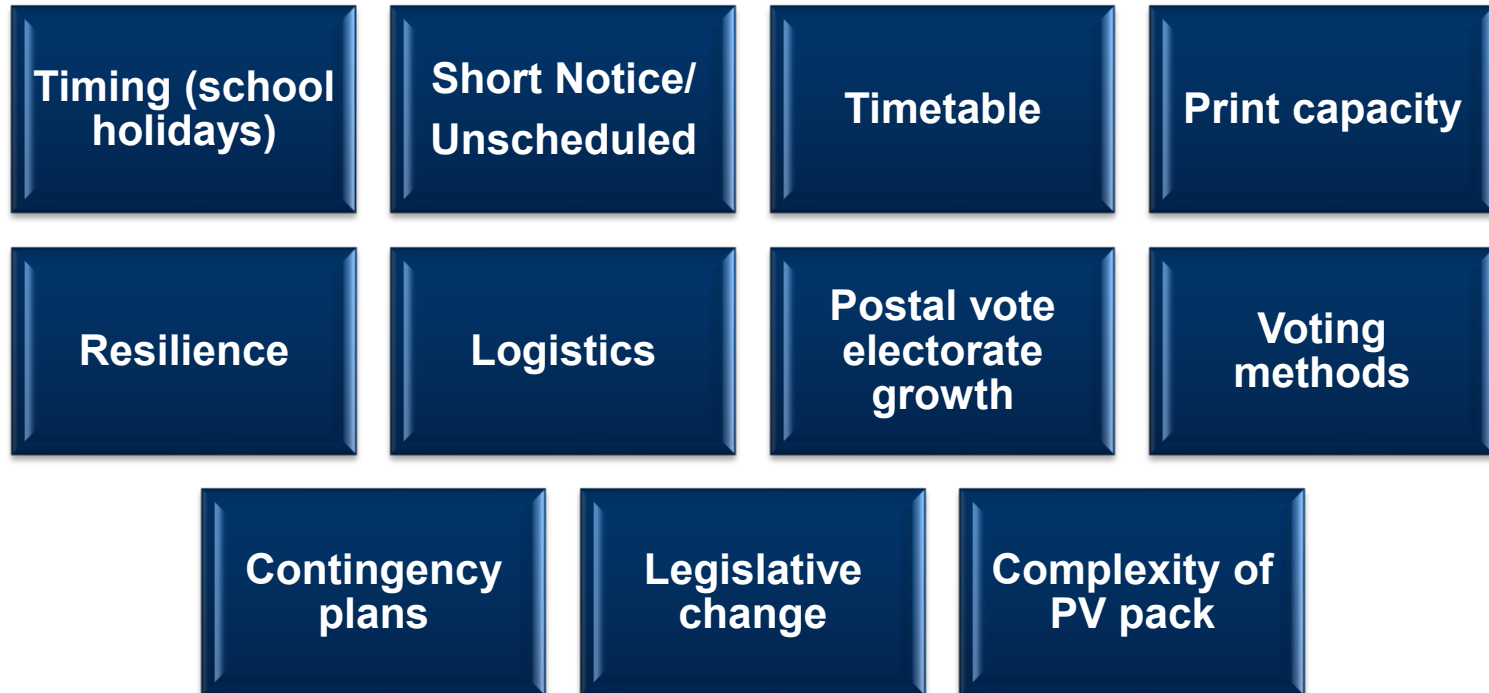- **Innovation in the design** of materials to facilitate production across additional suppliers.

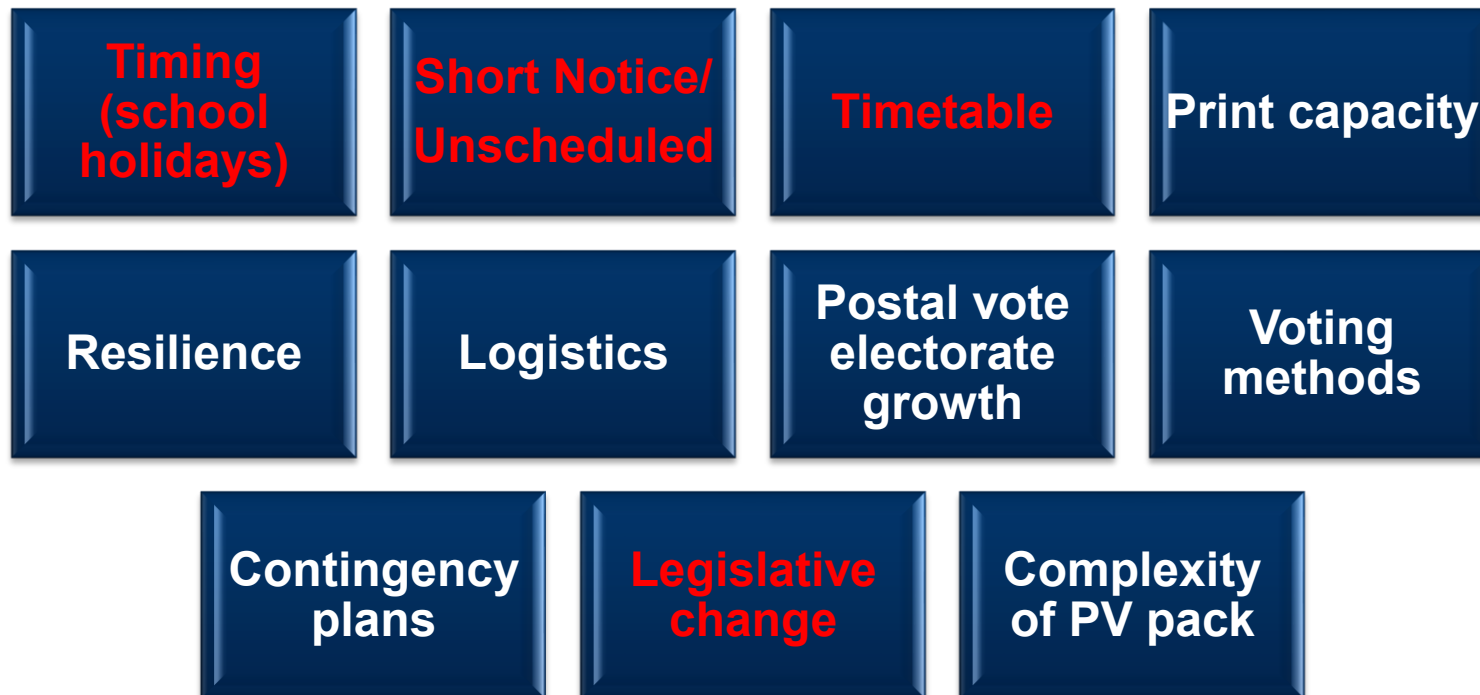# Recommendations for future change?

- The establishment of in-person **early voting facilities**, in addition to postal and proxy options;

- A **longer timetable for the UKPGE**

- Alternative voting options for overseas voters

- A return to **fixed date elections** to give clarity and certainty to planning, production and delivery

October 15 - November 3
Downtown Milwaukee Campus
Student Center (S Building), Third Floor
700 W. State Street

Monday-Friday - 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Saturday - 9 a.m. to noon

EARLY VOTING

MATC students, faculty, staff and administrators who are City of Milwaukee residents can vote early!

State law requires a photo ID to vote
• Driver's License or State ID
• Current Student MATC IDs and current class schedules

For SPE 2026

Timing (school holidays)	**Short Notice/ Unscheduled**	**Timetable**	**Print capacity**
Resilience	**Logistics**	**Postal vote electorate growth**	**Voting methods**
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Royal Mail reform

- From July 2025, delivery of 2nd class items will only take place every other weekday.

  - 99% of first-class letters are to be delivered within 3 days (D+3)

  - 99% of second-class letters are to be delivered within 5 days (D+5)

- Shift in emphasis from speed to reliability

- What will this mean in practice?

- EMB/SAA regular meetings with Royal Mail monitor performance, escalate and expedite

Reforming letter deliveries to ensure a reliable, affordable and sustainable service

SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSAL SERVICE

Securing the Future
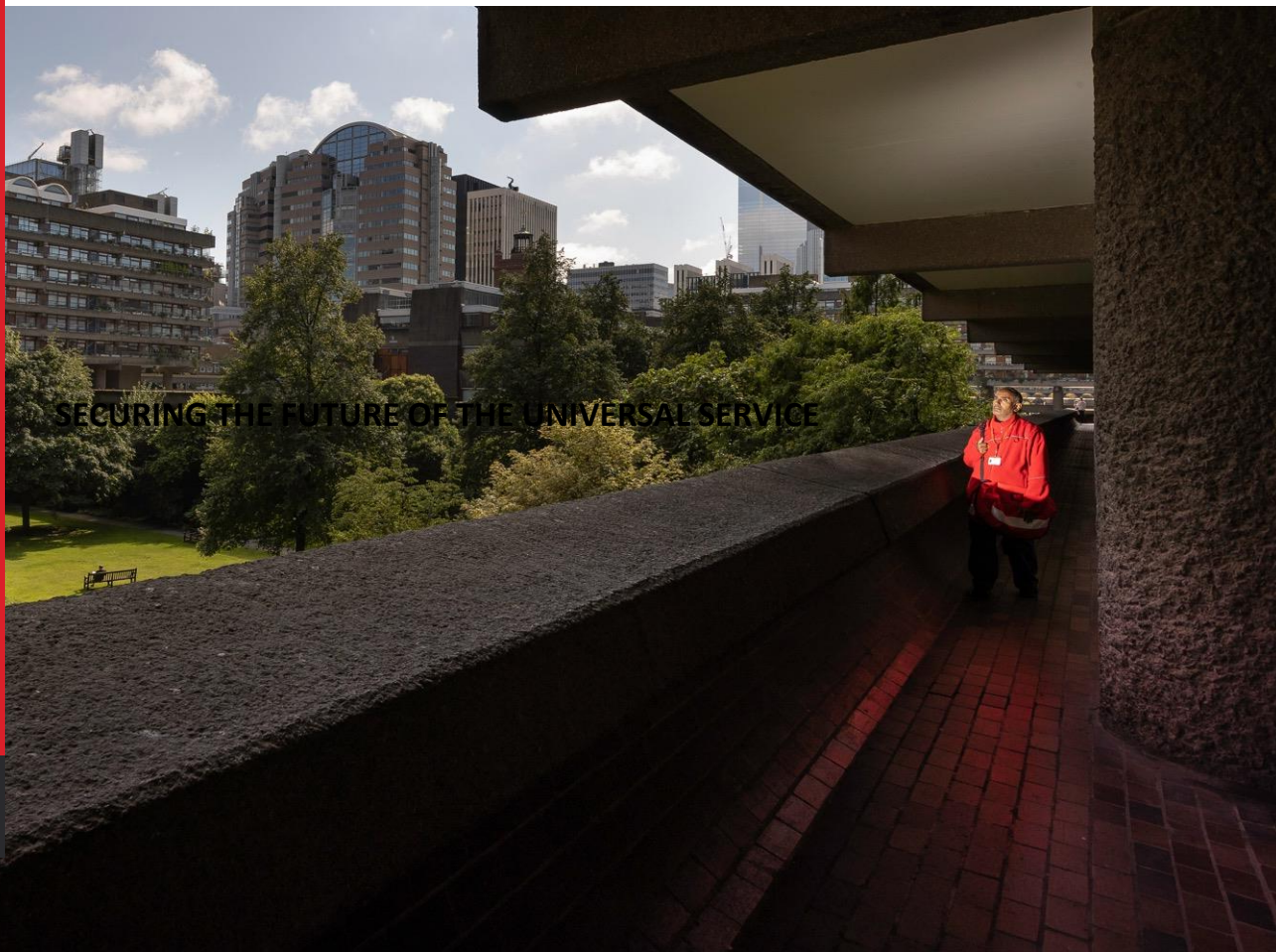
Securing the Future

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED CHANGES?

The core principles of the USO remain unchanged.
- The one-price-goes-anywhere service to all parts of the UK
- First Class letters delivered daily (D+1), six days a week, Monday to Saturday
- The option of First Class and Second Class, giving people the choice of price and speed

However, the reform includes vital changes to deliver a modern and more financially sustainable Universal Service.

Key changes to Letters services include:

- Second Class, would be delivered **Monday to Friday** within 3 working days (D+3)
- Economy, would be delivered **Monday to Friday** within 6 working days (D+6)

Quality of Service – 1st April 26
- 1st Class 93% to 90% - New reliability target 9% within 3 working days
- 1st Class 98.5% to 95% - New reliability target 9% within 5 working days

Royal Mail

Securing the Future

WHAT ARE THE PROPOSED CHANGES?

Election Products

Candidates Mail
Addressed
- Changes to a 4-day delivery window, Monday – Friday

- This is a move from a 3-day delivery window, Monday – Saturday

Unaddressed
- no change
- 7-day delivery window, which already excluded Saturday

Poll Card Mailing Option

- Changes to a 4-day delivery window, Monday – Friday

- This is a move from a 3-day delivery window, Monday – Saturday

Practical actions for ROs and EROs

- **Communications with voters**

  - Key deadlines

  - Proxy options

- **Supplier engagement**

  - Capacity

  - Early communications

  - Royal Mail – Mail mark

- **Contingency plans**

  - Replacement of lost /spoilt

Contingency Plan by Nick Youngson CC BY-SA 3.0 Alpha Stock Images

Questions

Communication and awareness for stakeholders

Sarah Mackie - Head of Electoral Commission, Scotland

Natalie Mauchline – Senior Communications and Engagement Officer, Electoral Commission

Your strategic role

Providing information & explanation

Supporting stakeholder knowledge & understanding

Enabling transparency in the face of scrutiny

Creating confidence

Promoting trust

Communication themes

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1. Public awareness & engagement

Ongoing, planned & targeted

Promotes participation

Clear and timely

Accurate

Key messages / info

Accessible / Inclusive

Responsive

Manages expectations

2. Supporting candidates & agents

Early communication

Supports informed participation

Legal requirements

Campaigning rules

Briefing & Signposting

Upholding conduct

Maintains integrity

3. Stakeholder & media communication

Strong relationships

Effective

Supportive

Tailored to audience

Planned & managed

Accurate reporting

Promotes public confidence and trust

Considerations

Legal obligations

Strategy & plans

Lessons, risks & issues

Data & demographics

EMB Directions

Consistency / Region

Performance Standards

Feedback & evaluation

Supporting candidates & agents

- **Signpost to right place**

  - Electoral Commission guidance and advice

  - Access to Elected Office Fund

  - Regional Returning Officer

  - Imprint breaches and reporting

  - Police Scotland

Public awareness & engagement

- You must take steps to encourage participation of electors in the election. ROs and EROs should liaise about plans to maximise impact ahead of the voter registration deadline.

- Any public awareness activity and messaging should aim to ensure that everyone who wants to vote has the information they need to be able to do so and can vote using their preferred method.

- Working with local partners can boost engagement with under-registered groups.

Key messages

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- You can vote in the Scottish Parliament election if:

  - you are 16 or over on polling day, and you're a British, Irish or Commonwealth citizen

  - a qualifying foreign national who is living in Scotland and has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need such permission, including EU citizens.

- If you've never registered, moved house, or changed your name, you need to register to vote.

- You can register online at gov.uk/register-to-vote or by contacting your local electoral registration office.

- You can vote in person, by post, or by proxy.

Key messages

- You **do not** need to show photo ID to vote in person at this election.

- You will receive two ballot papers at the polling place – one is for your constituency MSP and the other is for the regional MSP. **You must place one X on each ballot**.

- Boundaries Scotland has carried out a review of constituencies and some will now look different.

Help with voting

- Election staff are there to support voters who need assistance.

- Councils will provide equipment to assist disabled voters at the polling place.

Voter registration campaign: 'Show it off'

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- Our voter registration campaign features a diverse group of people in different everyday scenarios showing off being registered to vote in unique and personal ways.

- It will run on various channels including TV, radio, video on demand and out of home advertising.

Voter registration: Resources

We provide:

- Social media graphics and template posts

- Posters

- Email signatures

Undated versions you can use at any time are already available.

Versions with the **20 April registration deadline** will be published in time for the campaign launch.

Register to vote today.
It's quick and easy,
swipe up to register now.

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Voter information

We also provide resources which share key information that helps people cast their vote, including:

- Household voter booklet in various formats

- Video content on the voting system

- Social media graphics and template posts

- Posters

These resources include information on the whole voting process, including assistance for disabled voters.

Further resources will be available, including information in alternative languages.

Do you know where your polling station is?

To find yours, visit
electoralcommission.org.uk/voter

The Electoral Commission

YOUR VOTE MATTERS
DON'T LOSE IT
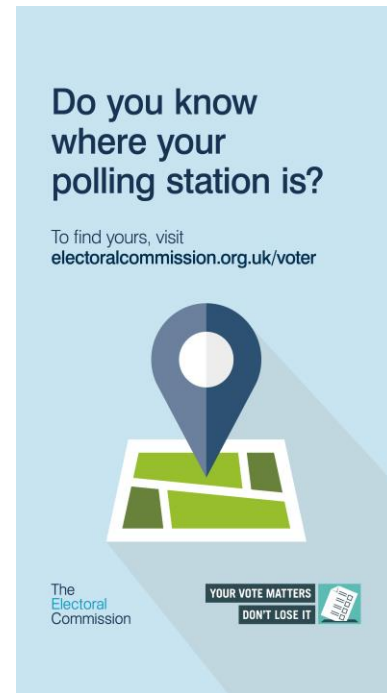
Other resources for partners

Stakeholder & media communication

- Proactive communications
  - Tailor to the stakeholder
- Media queries
- Reactive handling
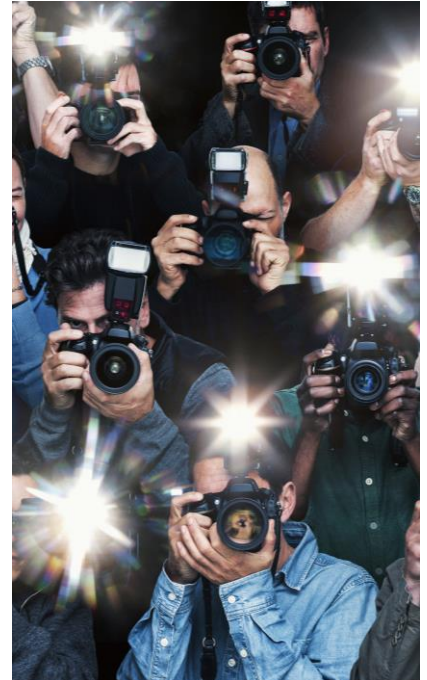- Maintaining public confidence

Questions

Management and delivery of a safe election

Peter Hessett -   Returning Officer, West Dunbartonshire Council & Member of EMB

Risks

- Political tension

- New political parties

- Contentious election

- Boundary and seat changes

- Campaigning strategies

- Close results

Parties, candidates & agents

- Know your stakeholders, new to process

- Understand the local context, local constituencies

- Support and inform:

  - Build knowledge

  - Briefing and information

  - Local election arrangements

  - Regional differences

- Expectations, behaviour and codes of conduct

- Signposting / reporting of intimidation, harassment and threats

Campaigning and Polls

- Voter intimidation

- A-Boards, banners and flags

- Station curtilages

- Campaign vehicles

- Polling staff safety

- Vandalism

- Routes of escalation, scenario planning

- Support contingencies, response

The Telegraph, 2014

Your Count

- Public event safety

- Security, control & access vs. transparency & scrutiny

- Liaison and communication

- Conduct of agents, conduct & exclusion

- Close results and challenge

- Incident management, staff plan & resource

- Communicate risk / delay to regional result


Rob Curtis, Tower Hamlets

Cybersecurity

- National picture

- High on risk register

- Impacts ERO > RO > RRO > Nationally?

- Third party/suppliers

- Practical contingencies:

  - incident response, communication protocols

  - paper processes, staff implementation

  - E.g. secure external hard drives

Mis / Dis information and confidence

- Channel monitoring

  - Address process misinformation

  - Public correction

  - AI / Deepfake

- Your communications

  - Maintain integrity and uphold confidence

Truth   Belief

Knowledge
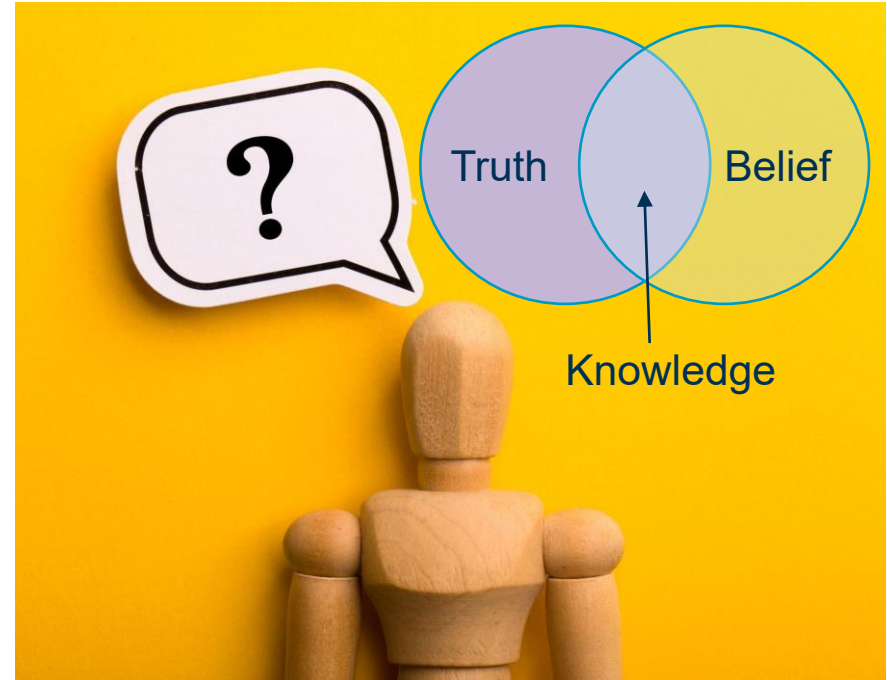
Support from Police Scotland

- Command Structure

- SPOCs

- Operation Sandbed

- Safety and Security of Candidates

- Policing Style

Questions

Funding the Election

Maria McCann, Elections team, Scottish Government

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

RO charges

- History and context

- Fees and Charges

- SG approach to:

  ◦ Allocations for ROs

  ◦ Guidance and RO Claims

- RO Fees

ERO new burdens

- OAVA

- New Burdens

Questions

Looking ahead

Chris Highcock – Secretary, Electoral Management Board for Scotland

What else is in the pipeline?

- **Dual mandates**
- **Local government elections 2027**
  - eCounting
  - Draft LGE conduct order
- **Future UK reform strategy includes:**
  - Automated Registration
  - Improving Voter ID
  - Changes to deadlines / absent voting
  - Changes / work on Candidate harassment and intimidation
- **UK Modernisation Pilots**

Questions

Closing remarks

Yes, this is the last slide…..

✓ Key actions and takeaways

🖥 Slides will be available at www.emb.scot

👤 Cascade to your teams

💬 Event feedback

📚 Support, guidance and resources

Contact

The Electoral Commission

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