

Item

REVIEW OF ELECTIONS

- 2 MAY 2019 & 23 MAY 2019



To:

Civic Affairs Committee 24/07/19

Report by:

Returning Officer (Chief Executive), Antoinette Jackson

Tel: 01223 - 457003 Email: antoinette.jackson@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

All

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the City Council elections held on 2 May 2019 and the European Parliamentary election held on 23 May 2019.
- 1.2 The report will deal with the 2 May elections and the 23 May election in turn. The City Council elections were scheduled but the Government did not confirm the European election would go ahead until 5 April. This meant that the planning for both elections overlapped.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes this report and provides feedback to the Returning Officer on issues it would like to be considered in the management of future polls.
- 2.2 That the Returning Officer sends this report to the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission highlighting the issues experienced by EU electors in Cambridge in connection to EU Parliamentary elections on 23 May.

Cambridge City Council elections – 2 May 2019

3. Background

- 3.1. On 2 May 2019 elections were held for 16 City Council seats comprising 14 seats scheduled for re-election, plus two by-elections: in King's Hedges and Trumpington. A County council by-election was also held in the Trumpington division. A total of 90,575 electors were registered to vote in this election.
- 3.2 At all elections, the Returning Officer appoints deputies with full powers to ensure that all legal aspects of the polls are covered and to allow them to act in the event the Returning Officer becomes unavailable. The Head of Corporate Strategy, the Democratic Services Manager and the Electoral Services Manager were appointed as deputies for this election. Additionally, a deputy is appointed to run the postal vote opening process.
- 3.3 An Election Steering Group is chaired by the Returning Officer and attended by the deputies and relevant election staff. The Election Steering Group's remit is to review progress against the project plan and advise the Returning Officer on matters arising.
- 3.4 The Electoral Services team was supported by officers from across the authority who have specific roles within their service area, for example; Customer Services, 3CICT and the Facilities team.
- 3.5 Externally, communication is also maintained with the Police, Royal Mail, the printing company and other relevant parties in order to ensure successful delivery of the poll.

Candidates and Agents

- 3.6 Communication with agents was regular and a face to face briefing was held on 21 March. Feedback had been requested and overall it was very positive.

Promotional Activity

- 3.7 Promotional/proactive registration activity included:
 - website & social media channels

- contact by e-mails to all students via the communications officer at Anglia Ruskin University and accommodation officers at each University of Cambridge College
- letters to students at ARU prior to term ending
- bicycle seat covers promoting registration placed on bikes throughout the city centre
- promotional banner on the Guildhall balcony for the 2 weeks prior to registration deadline,
- two contact days at Anglia Ruskin University,
- empty property notification cards (a pink postcard sent to each property which had no persons registered).

Correspondence

3.8 Contact from customers was greater than the previous two years. The chart below compares contact levels for the five weeks leading up to, and including, polling day against previous polls. It should be noted that during the five weeks prior to the 2 May elections, contact was also received regarding the European election, so the figures below are not wholly in relation to the City Council elections.

Contact Method	2 May 2019 City	3 May 2018 City	4 May 2017 County and Combined Authority
E-mails to election team	2,395	976	1,730
Telephone contact to Customer Service Centre	1,054 (109 on polling day)	710	1,173

3.9 The Council provided polling station data to Democracy Club which is a non-partisan organisation that collects data from various local authorities to create an easy postcode look-up tool for electors to find information about elections taking place in their area, candidates and polling station locations.

Staffing and Training

- 3.10 Every person working at a polling station was required to receive training – if they did not attend the training, they were not employed. Training was developed locally based on previous sessions and using local experience as learning points. Five face-to-face training sessions were delivered, and some experienced polling station staff used an online learning module.
- 3.11 Poll cards were hand-delivered in all wards by those staff usually employed as electoral canvassers during the annual audit.

Voter Registration

- 3.12 For the May polls, a total of 2,738 electors were added to the register in advance of the poll.
- 3.13 A total of 90,575 electors (down from 91,155 in May 2018) were eligible to vote in Cambridge on 2 May.

Absent Voting

- 3.14 Postal vote packs were issued in-house. A total of 11,661 (12.9%) electors registered for a postal vote. 1,062 packs were combined with ballot papers for the County council by-election. The total number re-issued due to being reported as lost or not received was 10 (7 in 2018).
- 3.15 The vast majority of postal votes are issued as soon as possible after the deadline for applications, which was 15 April and were handed to Royal Mail on 17 April.
- 3.16 Current legislation requires that electors added to the register at the final deadline and who have also made an application for a postal vote, must wait until they are included on the register before the postal vote can be issued. The date of the final update to the register before 2 May was 25 April, when 94 postal votes were issued.
- 3.17 Six postal vote opening sessions were conducted with 8,052 (69.1%) postal votes returned for inclusion in the count (69.7% in May 2018). Signature and date of birth checking was carried out on all returned postal votes, and the following numbers were rejected:

- 71 (0.9%) were rejected because either the date of birth and/or signature was absent from the security statement.
- 74 (0.9%) were rejected due to either an invalid signature and/or date of birth (0.8% in 2018); these personal identifiers on the security statement did not match the original postal vote application.
- 28 (0.3%) were rejected due to either the ballot paper or security statement not being returned in the envelope.

A total of 173 (2.1%) postal votes were rejected, compared to 1.7% at the May 2018 poll.

3.18 There were 160 electors who voted by proxy and 5 emergency proxies were issued.

Polling Stations

3.19 There were 51 polling stations, staffed by 51 Presiding Officers and 118 poll clerks. Two stations were temporarily moved due to unavailability of the usual stations: ICI, usually Fisher Hall was relocated to St. Columba's Hall and NDG, usually Milton Road Library was again located in Arbury Court Library.

3.20 There were no reported queues at polling stations during the day.

3.21 Four polling station Inspectors were responsible for overseeing station progress and visited each station at least twice during the day. This was in addition to the Returning Officer visiting all polling stations.

The Count

3.22 We had 84 count staff and 14 supervisory staff working across the 14 wards, with both the large and small halls in use. Verification was completed just after midnight and the final declaration was made at 02:57 am. Turnout was 36.6%, compared to 37.8% in 2018.

Other

3.23 Prior to the poll, the Returning Officer was approached by the National Election Commission of South Korea, who were planning to come to the UK to observe the election. They were hosted the day before the poll with a question and answer session with the Returning Officer and the Electoral Services Manager. They visited polling stations in the city and

attended the count, having been accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe proceedings.

Complaints

3.24 No complaints were received about the local elections.

European Parliamentary Election – 23 May 2019

4. Background

4.1 For this election, 83,120 electors were registered to vote in the Cambridge City Council area.

4.2 Following the 'leave' result of the national referenda in 2016, there was no expectation that the European Parliamentary election would be required to be held in 2019.

Timeline leading up to the decision to run the European Election in the UK

4.3 Appendix A details the chronology of communication regarding whether councils needed to prepare for holding a poll on 23 May 2019. Despite the Chief Executive and other ROs asking for clearer guidance on the issues, it was not until March 2019 that the government began to acknowledge that contingency planning might be needed for the European elections. It was 1 April before they confirmed Returning Officers could incur expenditure on the election; and not until 7 May 2019, that they finally confirmed that the poll would definitely go ahead.

4.4 Attached at appendix B is a combined election timetable used by the election team for planning the 2 May and 23 May elections, which outlines the challenges the council had planning for elections with two overlapping timelines

4.5 Despite the lack of clear steer from the government the council began contingency planning in early March. From early March there was active communication between the electoral services team and their print company, Royal Mail, polling station sites and casual staff, in order to

ascertain requirements and availability of premises, print materials and staffing numbers, etc. This all took place in the lead up to the 2 May City council elections.

- 4.6 On 5 April, communication was received from the Council's software provider Idox, the largest electoral services software provider in the UK. They informed users across the country that the functionality allowing communication with registered EU citizens to amend their franchise had previously been removed from the software and work was in urgent development to restore this. The update to the software was released to all users on Thursday 11 April and following internal process testing by 3C ICT was installed in Cambridge on Monday 15 April.
- 4.7 The 15 April was therefore the earliest date that the city council was able to contact EU electors.

Registration of EU Citizens

- 4.8 Since 1994, UK legislation has required EU citizens living in the UK to register separately in order to vote from the UK in European Parliamentary elections. This is done in the form of a declaration called an EC6 form (previously called a UC1) whereby the elector states they intend to use their vote from the UK. This information is collated by the Council's Electoral Registration Officer and passed on to designated contacts in each of the EU countries. Each country has different registration deadlines, e.g. in 2019 the deadline in Luxembourg was 28 February and in Hungary it was 23 May. A similar file is received by the ERO regarding British nationals who have declared they will vote in their country of residence and not the UK. Information on this process and contact details for each member state was only received from the Cabinet Office on 30 April and by which point, the registration deadline for fifteen Member states had already passed.
- 4.9 In advance of previous EU elections, this process for registration EU citizens would have started in the December preceding the poll and allowed time for reminders and follow-ups to take place. Given the late confirmation of the 2019 EU election, coupled with delays in software

capability, EU electors were contacted on 15 April, just three weeks before the deadline to register on 7 May.

- 4.10 Given the short timescales involved, coupled with a need to communicate quickly the decision was taken to e-mail those electors where an e-mail address was held and to send letters to the remainder. Of the 11,188 electors registered at that time, 8,070 (72.1%) were e-mailed on 15 April and 3,118 (27.9%) were sent letters on 17 April via a hybrid-mailing system. This system sends mail out using 2nd class postage as the default. With hindsight this should have been overridden but this was not picked up at the time of mailing.
- 4.11 E-mails sent in bulk are released from the system five at a time. This is to ensure receiving mailboxes do not regard the e-mail as spam when many recipients are e-mailed together. E-mailing letters and forms to electors is common practice and no issues have been reported in the two previous years when this method has been used.
- 4.12 Completed forms and queries to the e-mails were received back into the office within half an hour of the outgoing e-mails, so there was no reason to believe that e-mails were not being received. Likewise, completed forms were received in the post within two days of their distribution again this was no indication of an issue with the communication of EC6 forms.
- 4.13 A further 305 EC6 forms were issued to EU citizens added to the register after 15 April. However, a number of people registered using the Government's register to vote website on the deadline of 7 May and because these applications were not received into the electoral office until the morning of 8 May, it was impractical to issue these people with EC6 forms when in practice they could not have legally submitted them.
- 4.14 As previously mentioned, EU citizens can choose to vote in either their country of birth or their country of residence. Given the expectation that the UK would leave the EU by 29 March 2019 and there would be no elections in this country, some may have already made the decision to vote elsewhere in the EU long before the government began to acknowledge an election might happen in the UK. For those EU

citizens who might choose to register to vote here, there was also a risk up until 7 May, that the election would then be cancelled and they would have no vote in either place.

4.15 A total of 112 EC6 forms were received after the 7 May deadline, 69 of which were received on 8 May. Half of these were postmarked 7 May, which was the Tuesday after the early May Bank Holiday. Three were paid-for next day delivery that did not arrive the day after they were posted. It is clear that the bank holiday contributed to delays in the postal system.

4.16 The following table compares EC6 responses at previous elections:

EU Election year	Registered EU electors in Cambridge	EC6 forms received	% received
2019	11,895	1,825	15.3%
2014	10,767	2,177	20.2%
2009	7,730	923	11.9%

In line with other registration rates, these disparities are not unusual. Combined with anecdotal evidence that EU nationals were registering to vote from their country of birth, there was again no reason to believe in the run up to the election that return rates were abnormal.

Candidates and agents

4.17 As the EU election is managed on a regional basis, the responsibility for candidates and election agents lies with the Regional Returning Officer at Chelmsford City Council.

Promotional Activity

4.18 There was little opportunity to generate much publicity ahead of this election, given the overlap with the local elections in the three weeks prior to the deadlines. National media coverage along with the Electoral Commission's publicity campaign was relied upon to inform electors about the upcoming poll. The Council did issue informational press

releases and some social media was used. In hindsight, this is the one area where perhaps that council could have done more local promotion, albeit that resources were stretched thinly in the run up to the deadline also running the local elections.

Print Supplier

- 4.19 The Council's electoral print supplier, Print UK, are one of only a few specialist electoral print suppliers and provide printing to several councils across the UK. Communication with them was ongoing in the lead up to the poll being confirmed. On 9 April, Print UK requested that poll cards be posted direct from their print facility as this would aid their production timescales. Production of all print materials would be delivered on a 'first-come, first-served' basis, which differs from the usual practice of an agreed timetable with built-in contingency.
- 4.20 The delays confirming polling stations led to a delay in data being handed to the printer to produce poll cards. The printer was asked to go ahead with printing cards for those areas where polling stations had been confirmed but would only take one whole data file and not several separate ones. The final polling station location was confirmed on Thursday 25 April and the data to the printer was transmitted that day. Proofs were received back and signed-off on Monday 29 April and it was confirmed that they had been delivered into the postal system on Thursday 2 May.
- 4.21 Despite the above difficulties, it should be made clear that the print company did everything they could to deliver materials to the very tight timescales created by an election called at extremely short notice and which affected all their local authority clients simultaneously.

Polling Stations

- 4.22 A total of 51 polling stations were in operation for this election, staffed by 49 Presiding Officers and 98 Poll Clerks. Two of the Presiding Officers were responsible for two polling stations each in some smaller polling districts. Four Inspecting Officers were responsible for overseeing stations.

- 4.24 As is usual when an election is called at short notice, not all polling stations sites were available. Some sites were slow in responding to the request to book premises and where replacement sites were required, approaching new premises and agreeing terms was time consuming. Because Arbury Community Centre was not available for GBG polling district, there was a delay in confirming arrangements with North Cambridge Academy in Arbury Road because of their availability during the Easter school holiday. Furthermore, finding a replacement for St. Matthew's Church Hall took longer than expected due to establishing a suitable location within the JAJ polling district. Cherry Trees Day Centre on the same road was eventually used as the alternative site.
- 4.25 The Returning Officer is always grateful for the cooperation of premises for the use as a polling station, especially when such short notice means disruption to other community users.

Staffing

- 4.26 A total of 357 people were employed to work across the election, on polling stations, postal vote issuing/opening sessions and at the two count sessions: verification and counting into favour.
- 4.27 Given the late notice of the election and its proximity to the late May Bank Holiday, recruiting staff was more difficult. We could not recruit the usual numbers of poll clerks and count staff for the Thursday night verification.
- 4.28 Given the slightly reduced polling staff a few queues were reported at a small number of stations for short periods of the day. However, the Thursday night verification was not noticeably delayed with fewer staff.

External agencies

- 4.29 Given the high-profile nature of the election and some candidates, Cambridgeshire Police were keen to understand the risks and mitigations in place to ensure the smooth running of the poll. The Electoral Services Manager attended an emergency services scenario planning exercise on 15 May, along with the five other Cambridgeshire districts. In the event, no issues occurred on polling day.

Absent Voting

4.30 For this election, 11,700 postal votes were issued, of which 8,323 (71.1%) were returned in time to be included in the count. A total of 156 postal votes were received in the ten days after the poll, including three that were posted after polling day.

4.31 The following postal votes were rejected:

- 49 (0.6%) were rejected because either the date of birth and/or signature was absent from the security statement.
- 51 (0.6%) were rejected due to either an invalid signature and/or date of birth, i.e. the personal identifiers on the security statement did not match the original postal vote application.
- 12 (0.1%) were rejected due to either the ballot paper or security statement not being returned in the envelope.

4.32 There were 597 proxies appointed for this election and 16 emergency proxies granted.

The Count

- 4.33 As the election was taking place across the whole of the EU area, counting of the votes could not commence until the evening of Sunday 26 May and so the count was conducted on two separate dates.
- 4.34 After the close of poll, ballot papers were brought to the count venue and verified against the ballot paper accounts from the Presiding Officers. At this point the postal votes were mixed in with the polling station votes. Verification was completed at 00:50 am and turnout was 48.0%.
- 4.35 On Sunday 26 May, the ballot papers were counted for each party and the local totals for Cambridge were transmitted to the Regional Returning Officer in Chelmsford at 8.25pm. Totals for Cambridge could not be published until after 10pm, given that other parts of Europe were voting until that time.

Correspondence

- 4.36 Contact from customers in the lead-up to polling day was not noticeably greater than previous national polls. Given the overlap between the two elections, the following breakdown is unreliable in terms of assessing which contact was purely in relation to the EU election. The table below shows contact made in the five weeks before poll, with caution that there were two weeks prior to 2 May when both polls were running in tandem.

Contact Method	23 May 2019 <i>EPE</i>	2 May 2019 <i>City</i>	22 May 2014 <i>EPE & City</i>
E-mails to election team	3,548	2,395	654
Telephone contact to Customer Service Centre	1,666 <i>(429 on polling day)</i>	1,054 <i>(109 on polling day)</i>	1,525

Complaints

4.37 The following complaints have been received:

- 38 EU nationals who could not vote because they said they had not received the EC6 form. There is an audit trail to show these electors were either e-mailed or posted the EC6 form. Using e-mail to correspond with electors has been successfully used by electoral services for two years without issue so it is not clear why there appeared to be a problem this time for these electors.
- Four EU nationals whose completed form was received after the 7 May deadline. These were date-stamped on receipt and the post-marked envelope retained.
- Seven from EU nationals who had submitted the EC6 form on time by e-mail, but this had been missed during processing. These electors were all re-enfranchised on polling day and had either contacted the election office or were proactively contacted by the election team to inform of the error and that they could vote. We are looking at how e-mail submissions can be better managed in future.
- Six from non-EU citizens who were upset at the fact some EU citizens were unable to vote.
- Four from electors (3 overseas) whose postal vote had reached them close to polling day and so could not have been returned in time to be counted.

- Three from electors whose poll card had been received close to or on the deadline for requesting a postal vote. Two of these complaints came via Daniel Zeichner, MP for Cambridge.
- One from an elector who objected to the way that a staff member in a polling station had spoken to them. It is not clear which member of staff the complaint was about, but the Electoral Services Manager has spoken with all staff at that polling station.
- There were several complaints from electors regarding issues that are not within the scope of the Returning Officer and fall within the scope of current legislation:
 - Several electors objected to their personal information being used by the political parties.
 - Some electors were unhappy with tellers outside polling stations on polling day.
 - One complaint from an elector unhappy with political party campaigning on polling day.

Conclusions

4.38 There are several external issues that exacerbated the EU citizen registration difficulties across the country:

- The confused messages from central Government as to whether the election was happening or not significantly contributed to insufficient time to follow up non-responders to the EC6 form or properly organise promotional activity surrounding the poll.
- Delays with the poll being confirmed meant that the software company and print company were unprepared and this delayed processes in the office from taking place swiftly, contributing to the overall slowness at the start of the election timetable.
- The Government's register to vote website did not carry any messages to alert EU citizens that there was a further process after their initial

registration (the EC6 form) that would allow them to vote in the UK on 23 May. This meant people thought they were registered to vote on 23 May when they were not.

- Delays in the postal system, caused by the early May Bank Holiday, meant that receipt of application forms into the office and poll cards delivered to electors were delayed.
- There is an underlying legislative discrepancy for all elections which allows very late applications from overseas electors for postal votes, which means in practice that postal votes going overseas do not have enough time to be returned. Despite strong messages to overseas voters regarding the potential for delays in overseas postal services and advising they appoint a proxy; many still chose to receive a postal vote that then does not arrive in time.

4.39 Elections in the UK are increasingly complex and challenging to organise. Preparation for scheduled elections such as the local elections in May, begin six months in advance. Organising elections in six weeks is not practical and contributes to an extremely compacted timetable that does not serve the elector in the best way.

4.40 The number of EU citizens who arrived to vote at a polling station but couldn't was not officially recorded. Presiding Officers were not instructed to keep a record but of the seven who did, ten EU electors were recorded as not being able to vote across seven polling stations. Anecdotal feedback from PO's suggests that the overall numbers affected were small, but understandably caused significant disappointment and anger for those voters affected. We apologise to all electors who wanted to vote and found they could not.

4.41 Given the number of telephone calls received on polling day regarding the inability of EU citizens to vote, the Electoral Services Manager telephoned the Electoral Commission. Reports had been received that some local authorities were accepting EC6 forms at the polling station and allowing people to vote. The Electoral Commission confirmed that this was not a legal practice and there was nothing that could be done to assist those who had not submitted the form in time.

Lessons Learnt

4.42 While a number of the issues highlighted above were not within the council's control, there are lessons we can learn to assist with future polls in Cambridge:

- Applications returned by e-mail will be automatically filtered into a specific and relevant folder. This should help when officers are scanning the inbox to find types of application and reduce the chance of applications being missed. Application forms will be updated to request the sender use specific keywords in the e-mail subject heading to ensure they stand out and can be filtered appropriately.
- Where application forms are issued by e-mail, a further paper form will be posted if no response is received within an agreed timescale, if the statutory timetable permits.
- We will send post out first class where there are tight deadlines.
- All types of registration letters will be reviewed to ensure any appropriate election messaging is included.
- The issue of postal votes will be reviewed and the potential to out-source the issue of postal votes investigated. The need to send postal votes quickly will be balanced against the accuracy and security of any processes available.

4.43 The Chief Executive, in her role as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, will continue to press the Electoral Commission, the Cabinet Office and Government to carry out a review of electoral legislation. The current statutory timetable is unsustainable and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

5. Review of Polling District Boundary

5.1 Following the review of ward boundaries by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, a review of polling districts will be carried out during summer/autumn 2019. A six-week consultation began

on 16 July, which all Members have been informed of. Draft recommendations will be brought to this Committee for determination at its 9 October meeting.

6. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

(b) Staffing Implications

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

(d) Environmental Implications

(e) Procurement Implications

(f) Community Safety Implications

None

7. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

8. Queries

If you have a query on the report please contact Vicky Breading, Electoral Services Manager, tel: 01223 457057, email: vicky.breading@cambridge.gov.uk.

Timeline leading up to the decision to run the European Election in the UK

May 2018	<p>The Minister for the Constitution makes a Statement on the Government's position:</p> <p><i>"... the Government does not consider it is necessary or a prudent use of taxpayers' money for Returning Officers and electoral administrators to make the usual preparations for the conduct of a European Parliamentary poll in 2019. The Government does not intend to make an Order setting the date of the poll for the European Parliamentary elections in 2019. We also do not intend to undertake the usual preparations for Information Exchange between the UK and the Member States in respect of EU citizens (including UK citizens) living in another Member State."</i></p>
January 2019	<p>The Chief Executive seeks guidance from Cabinet Office on contingency planning for the European Election. The reply says that Chloe Smith's statement of May 2018 (above) remains the Government's position.</p>
February 2019	<p>Local authorities make regular risk returns to Government on Brexit planning. These highlight the risks of the requirement to hold a European election at short notice and the uncertainty that Councils face over election planning and communication with EU residents.</p>
13 March 2019	<p>The Prime Minister makes a statement:</p> <p><i>"The House has to understand and accept that, if it is not willing to support leaving without a deal on 29 March, then it is suggesting that there will need to be a much longer extension to Article 50. Such an extension would undoubtedly require the United Kingdom to hold European Parliament elections in May 2019. I do not think that would be the right outcome."</i></p>

<p>14 March 2019</p>	<p>An e-mail is received from the Association of Electoral Administrators:</p> <p><i>“In light of (last night’s vote in Parliament), I have written to the Minister for the Constitution to formally request that Cabinet Office officials be authorised to speak to us and the Electoral Commission to contingency plan the possibility that such elections will be required.</i></p> <p><i>I have stressed our deep concern that significant risk would be introduced to the successful delivery of such polls, were they to be required, if steps are not taken now - particularly in areas where local government elections are taking place on 2 May.”</i></p> <p>The e-mail goes on to say that they strongly advise Council’s to start making contingency plans but not to incur any costs, as this would not be reimbursed by the Government if the poll did not go ahead.</p>
<p>1 April 2019</p>	<p>An e-mail is received from the Electoral Commission, confirming that the Cabinet Office will now reimburse spending on contingency planning for a poll on 23 May:</p> <p><i>“Returning Officers will want to be particularly mindful of the need to use public money appropriately. This is particularly the case in the current circumstances. For example, thought should be given to what actions are strictly necessary ahead of the start of an election timetable and what can be undertaken on a contingency basis given that circumstances may continue to change.”</i></p>
<p>2 April 2019</p>	<p>The Electoral Commission write to Electoral Registration Officers (ERO’s) with advice not to write to EU citizens yet, and that this will be reviewed on 4 April.</p>
<p>4 April 2019</p>	<p>The Electoral Commission write to ERO’s advising that as the poll is not yet confirmed, they may want to wait until the Order to hold the poll has been laid before sending out any declarations.</p> <p><i>“Whilst this would lead to a shortened timescale for this</i></p>

	<i>activity, it does avoid committing significant resource without certainty that the work is needed, and most importantly would limit the risk of confusion for EU citizens if the poll is not held in the UK. In any case, you should look now at what preparatory steps you will need to take in order to be able to send the declaration forms out at short notice if required.”</i>
10 April 2019	The European Parliamentary Elections (Appointed Day of Poll) Order 2019 comes into force.
11 April 2019	Further statement made by the Prime Minister: <i>“We want to leave the EU with a deal as soon as possible. The extension that has been agreed can be terminated when the Withdrawal Agreement has been ratified, which retains our ability to leave the EU without having to hold European Parliamentary elections on 23 May. If a Brexit deal is able to pass in the first three weeks of May, we will not have to take part in European elections and will officially leave the EU on 31 May 2019 at 11pm”.</i>
15 April	The Notice of Election for the European Parliamentary Elections is published
7 May 2019	Minister for the Cabinet Office, David Lidington confirmed in a statement that the election would now have to go ahead: <i>“It is not going to be possible to finish the process of agreeing a Brexit deal before the date of the elections. Given how little time there is, it is regrettably not going to be possible to finish that process before the date that's legally due for the European Parliamentary elections.”</i>