
STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

2001 No. 341

**The Representation of the People
(England and Wales) Regulations 2001**

Receipt of Postal Ballot Papers

Alternative means of returning postal ballot paper or declaration of identity

79.—(1) For the purposes of rule 45(1B) of the rules in Schedule 1 to the 1983 Act⁽¹⁾ the manner in which a postal ballot paper or declaration of identity may be returned to a polling station is by hand.

(2) For these purposes, the manner in which such a paper or declaration may be returned to the returning officer is by post or by hand.

(3) The presiding officer of the polling station shall deliver, or cause to be delivered, any postal ballot paper or declaration of identity returned to that station to the returning officer in the same manner and at the same time as he delivers, or causes to be delivered, the packets referred to in rule 43(1) of the elections rules.

Notice of opening of postal ballot paper envelopes

80.—(1) The returning officer shall give to each candidate not less than 48 hours' notice in writing of each occasion on which a postal voters' ballot box and the envelopes contained in it is to be opened.

(2) Such a notice shall specify—

- (a) the time and place at which such an opening is to take place, and
- (b) the number of agents a candidate may appoint under regulation 69(1) above to attend each opening.

Postal ballot boxes and receptacles

81.—(1) The returning officer shall provide a separate ballot box for the reception of—

- (a) the covering envelopes when returned by the postal voters (“postal voters' ballot box”), and
- (b) postal ballot papers (“postal ballot box”).

(2) Each such ballot box shall be marked “postal voters' ballot box” or “postal ballot box”, as the case may be, and with the name of the constituency or electoral area (or areas) for which the election (or elections) is held.

(3) The postal ballot box shall be shown to the agents present on the occasion of opening the first postal voters' ballot box as being empty.

(4) The returning officer shall then lock the ballot box and apply his seal in such manner as to prevent its being opened without breaking the seal; any of the agents present who wish to add their seals may then do likewise.

(5) The returning officer shall provide the following receptacles—

(1) Rule 45(1B) was inserted by paragraph 10(4)(a) of Schedule 6 to the 2000 Act.

- (a) the receptacle for rejected votes;
- (b) the receptacle for declarations of identity;
- (c) the receptacle for ballot paper envelopes; and
- (d) the receptacle for rejected ballot paper envelopes.

(6) The returning officer shall take proper precautions for the safe custody of every ballot box and receptacle referred to in this regulation.

Receipt of covering envelope

82.—(1) The returning officer shall, immediately on receipt (whether by hand or by post) of a covering envelope (or an envelope which is stated to include a postal vote) before the close of the poll, place it unopened in a postal voters' ballot box.

(2) Where an envelope, other than a covering envelope issued by the returning officer—

- (a) has been opened, and
- (b) contains a ballot paper envelope, declaration of identity or ballot paper,

the first-mentioned envelope, together with its contents, shall be placed in a postal voters' ballot box.

Opening of postal voters' ballot box

83.—(1) Each postal voters' ballot box shall be opened by the returning officer in the presence of the agents.

(2) So long as the returning officer ensures that there is at least one sealed postal voters' ballot box for the reception of covering envelopes up to the time of the close of the poll, the other postal voters' ballot boxes may previously be opened by him.

(3) The last postal voters' ballot box and the postal ballot box shall be opened at the counting of the votes under rule 45 of the elections rules.

Opening of covering envelopes

84.—(1) When a postal voters' ballot box is opened, the returning officer shall count and record the number of covering envelopes, and shall then open each covering envelope (including any envelope described in regulation 82(2) above) separately.

(2) The procedure in regulation 85 below applies where a covering envelope (including an envelope to which regulation 82(2) above applies) contains both—

- (a) a declaration of identity; and
- (b) a ballot paper envelope, or if there is no ballot paper envelope, a ballot paper (or ballot papers).

(3) Where the covering envelope does not contain the declaration of identity separately, the returning officer shall open the ballot paper envelope to ascertain whether the declaration of identity is inside.

(4) Where a covering envelope does not contain both—

- (a) a declaration of identity (whether separately or not), and
- (b) a ballot paper envelope or, if there is no ballot paper envelope, a ballot paper (or ballot papers),

the returning officer shall mark the covering envelope “provisionally rejected”, attach its contents (if any) and place it in the receptacle for rejected votes.

Procedure in relation to declarations of identity

85.—(1) The returning officer shall satisfy himself that the declaration of identity has been duly signed by the voter and authenticated by a witness who has signed the declaration and given his name and address (referred to as a “valid declaration of identity”).

(2) Where the returning officer is not so satisfied, he shall mark the declaration “rejected”, attach to it the ballot paper envelope, or if there is no such envelope, the ballot paper (or ballot papers), and, subject to paragraph (3) below, place it in the receptacle for rejected votes.

(3) Before placing the declaration in the receptacle for rejected votes, the returning officer shall show it to the agents and, if any of them object to his decision, he shall add the words “rejection objected to”.

(4) The returning officer shall then examine the number (or numbers) on the declaration of identity against the number (or numbers) on the ballot paper envelope and, where they are the same, he shall place the declaration and the ballot paper envelope respectively in the receptacle for declarations of identity and the receptacle for ballot paper envelopes.

(5) Where there is a valid declaration of identity but no ballot paper envelope, or where the envelope has been opened under regulation 84(3) above, he shall place—

- (a) in the postal ballot box, any ballot paper the number on which is the same as the number (or one of the numbers) on the declaration of identity;
- (b) in the receptacle for rejected votes, any other ballot paper, to which shall be attached the declaration of identity marked “provisionally rejected”; and
- (c) in the receptacle for declarations of identity, any declaration of identity not disposed of under sub-paragraph (b) above.

(6) Where the number (or numbers) on a valid declaration of identity is not the same as the number (or numbers) on the ballot paper envelope or where that envelope has no number on it (or only one number where the declaration of identity has more than one), the returning officer shall open the envelope.

(7) Where an envelope has been opened under regulation 84(3) above or paragraph (6) above, the returning officer shall—

- (a) place in the postal ballot box any ballot paper the number on which is the same as the number (or one of the numbers) on the valid declaration of identity;
- (b) place in the receptacle for rejected votes any other ballot paper, to which shall be attached the declaration of identity marked “provisionally rejected”;
- (c) place in the receptacle for rejected votes any declaration of identity marked “provisionally rejected” in respect of a ballot paper envelope—
 - (i) which does not contain a ballot paper; or
 - (ii) which does not contain a sufficient number of ballot papers if more than one number appears on the declaration,

and shall indicate the missing ballot paper, where that is the case; and

- (d) place in the receptacle for declarations of identity, any such declaration not disposed of under sub-paragraph (b) or (c) above.

Opening of ballot paper envelopes

86.—(1) The returning officer shall open separately each ballot paper envelope placed in the receptacle for ballot paper envelopes.

(2) He shall place—

- (a) in the postal ballot box, any ballot paper the number on which is the same as the number (or one of the numbers) on the ballot paper envelope;
- (b) in the receptacle for rejected votes, any other ballot paper which shall be marked “provisionally rejected” and to which shall be attached the ballot paper envelope; and
- (c) in the receptacle for rejected ballot paper envelopes, any ballot paper envelope which shall be marked “provisionally rejected” because it does not contain either a ballot paper or, where more than one number appears on the ballot paper envelope, a sufficient number of ballot papers (and indicating, in such a case, the missing ballot paper).

Lists of rejected postal ballot papers

87.—(1) In respect of any election, the returning officer shall keep two separate lists of rejected postal ballot papers.

(2) In the first list, he shall record the ballot paper number of any postal ballot paper for which no valid declaration of identity was received with it.

(3) In the second list, he shall record the ballot paper number of any postal ballot paper which is entered on a valid declaration of identity where that ballot paper is not received with the declaration of identity.

Checking of lists kept under regulation 87

88.—(1) Where the returning officer receives a valid declaration of identity without the postal ballot paper (or papers or, as the case may be, all of the papers) to which it relates, he may, at any time prior to the close of the poll, check the list kept under regulation 87(2) above to see whether the number (or numbers) of a postal ballot paper to which the declaration relates is entered in that list.

(2) Where the returning officer receives a postal ballot paper without the declaration of identity to which it relates, he may, at any time prior to the close of the poll, check the list kept under regulation 87(3) above to see whether the number of that ballot paper is entered in that list.

(3) The returning officer shall conduct the checks required by paragraphs (1) and (2) above as soon as practicable after the receipt of packets from every polling station in the constituency or, as the case may be, electoral area under rule 43(1) of the elections rules.

(4) Where the ballot paper number in the list matches that number on a valid declaration of identity or, as the case may be, the postal ballot paper, the returning officer shall retrieve that declaration or paper.

(5) The returning officer shall then take the appropriate steps under this Part of these Regulations as though any document earlier marked “provisionally rejected” had not been so marked and shall amend the document accordingly.

Sealing of receptacles

89.—(1) As soon as practicable after the completion of the procedure under regulation 88(3) and (4) above, the returning officer shall make up into separate packets the contents of—

- (a) the receptacle of rejected votes,
- (b) the receptacle of declarations of identity,
- (c) the receptacle of rejected ballot paper envelopes, and
- (d) the lists of spoilt and lost postal ballot papers,

and shall seal up such packets.

(2) Any document in those packets marked “provisionally rejected” shall be deemed to be marked “rejected”.

Abandoned poll

90.—(1) Where a poll is abandoned or countermanded after postal ballot papers have been issued, by reason of the death of a candidate, the returning officer—

- (a) shall not take any step or further step to open covering envelopes or deal with the contents in accordance with the provisions of this Part of these Regulations; and
- (b) shall, notwithstanding regulations 84 to 86 above, treat all unopened covering envelopes and the contents of those that have been opened as if they were counted ballot papers.

(2) Paragraph (1) above shall not apply where postal ballot papers for more than one election have been issued together under regulation 65 above.

Forwarding of documents

91.—(1) The returning officer shall forward, in the case of a parliamentary election to the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and, in the case of a local government election, to the officer determined in accordance with paragraph (2) below, at the same time as he forwards the documents mentioned in rule 55 of the elections rules—

- (a) any packets referred to in regulations 75, 77(6) and 89 above, subject to regulation 90 above, endorsing on each packet a description of its contents, the date of the election to which it relates and the name of the constituency or electoral area (or areas) for which the election (or elections) was held, and
- (b) at a parliamentary election, a completed statement in Form K of the number of postal ballot papers issued.

(2) In the case of a local government election, the documents to be forwarded under paragraph (1) above shall be forwarded to the proper officer of the local authority for which the election was held except that, in the case of a parish or community council election, the documents shall be forwarded to the proper office of the council of the district in England or county or county borough in Wales, in which the parish or community is situated.

(3) Where—

- (a) any covering envelopes are received by the returning officer after the close of the poll (apart from those delivered in accordance with the provisions of regulation 79(3) above);
- (b) any envelopes addressed to postal voters are returned as undelivered too late to be readdressed, or
- (c) any spoilt postal ballot papers are returned too late to enable other postal ballot papers to be issued,

the returning officer shall put them unopened in a separate packet, seal up such packet and endorse and forward it at a subsequent date in the manner described in paragraph (1) above.

(4) Rules 56 and 57 of the elections rules shall apply to any packet or document forwarded under this regulation.

(5) A copy of the statement referred to in paragraph (1)(b) above shall be provided by the returning officer to the Secretary of State.