

TO: All (Acting) Returning Officers

10 September 2009

Dear Returning Officer

### **Timing of the count at the next UK Parliamentary General Election**

You may be aware that there has recently been some speculation in the press as to the timing of counts at the forthcoming UK Parliamentary general election. I am writing to make clear the Commission's position on this issue.

As you will be aware, as (Acting) Returning Officer you are required to make arrangements for the counting of the votes at the election as soon as practicable after the close of poll. However, it is for you to decide whether to count on Thursday evening or on Friday morning taking into account local circumstances.

The most important thing is that the count is accurate and that voters have confidence in the election result. We all enjoy the excitement of election night and we understand the natural wish of candidates to know the result as soon as possible. But your responsibility is to make sure the results are accurate and accepted. Nothing is more important than that. It is entirely appropriate for you to decide to count on Friday if you think this is necessary to ensure an accurate result.

We recognise that managing an election count is a complicated task, and in making this decision you will have a number of issues to consider including geography, availability of staff and venues, the security of ballot boxes, and the volume and management of postal votes returned across the constituency.

Although many aspects of the forthcoming UK Parliamentary general election will be the same as previous general elections, there will also be significant differences including:

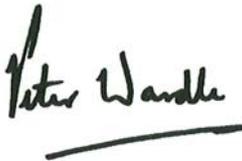
- This will be the first UK Parliamentary general election at which the legislative requirement to check the signatures and dates of birth on postal voting statements accompanying postal ballot papers will apply.

- (Acting) Returning Officers responsible for constituencies that contain more than one council area will not only be responsible for verifying signatures and dates of birth on postal voting statements returned by electors from their own council area, but will also be responsible for verifying those from the other constituent council areas. In such cases there may be logistical difficulties in getting postal votes, received on polling day, to the count venue.

You should be able to provide the reasons for any decision regarding the timing of the count and explain these locally. We will make clear our views on this issue publicly.

I hope that this is helpful to you in taking this crucial decision.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Wardle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

**Peter Wardle**  
**Chief Executive**