

Counting of votes at the UK Parliamentary election: statement by (Acting) Returning Officer

Please complete and return this statement to [your](#) local Commission team if you did not start the UK Parliamentary election count within four hours of the close of poll. Please submit the statement within 30 days after the close of poll.

Constituency name:	Arbroath & Broughty Ferry
Date of election:	4 July 2024
(Acting) Returning Officer's name:	Kathryn Lindsay, Returning Officer
Required information	
Time counting of votes began: (hh/mm)	02:20 (5 July 2024)
Describe the steps you took to start counting the votes before 2.00am:	<p>The Returning Officer and team for the Arbroath and Broughty Ferry constituency is also responsible for the Angus and Perthshire Glens constituency. Combined, the total electorate for the two areas is 152,817. (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry 76,149/ Angus and Perthshire Glens 76,668).</p> <p>The count centre for this constituency is the Saltire Centre, Arbroath which was identified due to the size of the Centre and because it has been used successfully for numerous counts in the past. The Saltire Centre provides accommodation and facilities including a large sports hall used as the count centre, with numerous other areas used for the registering and receipt of ballot boxes and other materials, opening of accepted postal votes and the verification of unused ballot papers. The Centre also provides a public gallery overlooking the sports hall which is used as the media gallery, sufficient floor space for candidates and agents to view proceedings and an area for candidates and agents outwith the count hall, and a separate area for staff. Colleagues managing the centre have proven experience of delivering the necessary facilities and support. Concentration of resources and experience in one venue enables resource and expertise to be re-directed wherever most required. The advantages of using this location far outweigh the use of multiple locations as the logistics of getting people, equipment and stationery in the right quota to a number of venues is far more problematic, as is the issue of maintaining security.</p>

As part of the project planning, it was considered necessary, due to a significant number of changes being implemented at this election, for some areas of consistency with past arrangements to be retained. The count being undertaken in Arbroath was a necessity for staff members and the smooth running of the election day.

The benefits to retaining the past arrangements were considered necessary to ensure that the new election team and those staff employed previously at the count venue were comfortable with proceedings.

Mini-Count

As part of the project planning and risk assessments, consideration was given to the possibility of undertaking a mini-count given the Returning Officer was responsible for two large constituencies. The Returning Officer, together with the election team determined that due to a number of factors, including a new election team, new constituency boundaries, staffing resource and the time constraints in terms of making the necessary arrangements for this election, not to commence a mini-count on this occasion but to consider this for future parliamentary elections.

Staffing Resources

As the Returning Officer was responsible for two large constituencies, it was necessary to employ more staff than ever before to assist with the run up to and the day/night of the election.

On this occasion around 80 enumerators undertook the verification and counting of votes cast with additional support staff on hand to assist where required. Following conclusion of the opening of postal votes, staff were utilised to assist with the counting of votes, increasing the staff by a further 10 people.

Many of the staff employed on this occasion were new and had not worked at an election before. The date of the election coincided with Scottish school holidays which resulted in many experienced staff being on annual leave. It is therefore the case that for the count to be successful, staff required to take time to complete the tasks before them in a methodical manner to prevent errors occurring, ensuring accuracy at every stage of the process.

<p>Explanation of why the counting of the votes did not start by 2.00am:</p>	<p>Angus Council was responsible for two new large constituencies This is the first election to take place in this new boundary area. Counting of votes did not commence by 2am. For the Arbroath & Broughty Ferry constituency, the counting of votes was delayed as a result of the increase in the number of postal votes handed in to polling stations. Angus Council completed a sweep of polling stations across the area to collect postal votes handed in and commenced an opening at 8pm. This did not include the area of Broughty Ferry from which there was a high return of postal votes handed in to polling stations. There was also a delay in the receipt of some of the ballot boxes, these not being received until 11.30pm. Therefore a delay occurred in the final opening of postal votes for this constituency and a resultant delay in the completion of the verification process and the start of the counting of votes.</p> <p>Staffing for the Parliamentary election has been challenging with many late call offs. The staff used were fully briefed with detailed instructions. The Returning Officer also briefed staff on the evening of the Count. The impact of using new staff combined with the requirement to complete two large counts concurrently in the same venue contributed to the counting of votes at a later than expected timeframe. On this occasion the opening of a large number of postal votes was the main factor in concluding the verification process and ultimately the counting of votes commenced just after 2am.</p> <p>A full review of the count and lessons learned, will be undertaken and will provide useful information in planning for any future parliamentary election.</p>
<p>Date of this statement:</p>	<p>2 August 2024</p>