

TELLERS AT POLLING STATIONS

A GUIDE FOR (ACTING) RETURNING OFFICERS, CANDIDATES AND ELECTION AGENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. It is common practice for candidates at elections to appoint 'tellers' or 'checkers' to stand outside polling stations and identify electors who have voted. This is a well established practice, but the activities of tellers can sometimes be confusing or even intimidating so far as the voters are concerned, and do lead to complaints and disputes.
2. The purpose of these guidance notes is to help ensure that the activities of tellers remain within the bounds of what is acceptable. The guidance is not mandatory, but following it will be of mutual benefit to all concerned: candidates, agents, returning officers, presiding officers, the voters and tellers themselves.
3. The broad terms of the guidance have been agreed with the main national political parties in England and Wales, the Association of District Secretaries, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives.

THE LEGAL POSITION

4. Tellers have no status so far as electoral law is concerned. They should not be confused with Polling Agents, whose appointment and duties are prescribed in the Representation of the People Acts. Tellers, unlike polling agents, are NOT among the categories of people admitted to the polling station.

TELLERS ACTIVITIES

5. Tellers must not give the impression that they are employed by the Returning Officer. Tellers should concern themselves ONLY with checking who has voted. Anything else could give rise to allegations of undue influence or simply antagonise voters. In particular, tellers must not hand out election material or otherwise try to influence the way someone will vote. Nor should they ask voters who they intend to vote for or how they have voted.
6. The usual means of telling is to ask voters for their poll card or electoral number. If a voter does not have a poll card, then he or she may be asked to give his or her name and address. Voters should not be asked to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their electoral number. In any event, tellers must not in any way impede or obstruct voters on their way into or out of the polling station or the building in which it is situated.
7. Tellers should bear in mind that voters are not obliged to hand over their poll card or comply with any request for information. If they decline, they must not be pressed. No impression should be given that the information must be provided for official purposes.

TELLERS LOCATION

8. The polling station is the self-contained area containing the polling booths, ballot box and the presiding officer's and poll clerk's desk. **Tellers must not enter the polling station** under any circumstances except for the lawful purpose of casting their own vote, voting as a proxy or accompanying a blind voter.
9. Tellers should normally remain outside the building in which the polling station is situated. At the presiding officer's discretion, tellers may be allowed inside the building (but not the polling station) in bad weather if this is practicable, provided they do not position themselves in such a way that the secrecy of the ballot might be compromised. Tellers must comply with any instructions as to their location given by the presiding officer or returning officer.

WEARING OF ROSETTES

10. There is no objection to tellers wearing coloured rosettes in order to make it clear to voters that they are party workers and not polling station officials. However the name of the candidate they support should not be worn.

LIASON WITH THE RETURNING OFFICER

11. These notes should be read in conjunction with any guidance or instructions given by the returning officer. It is recommended that the (acting) returning officer and the candidates and their agents should liaise at an early stage on the subject of tellers, particularly as to their location with respect to particular polling stations.

Prepared by the

RETURNING OFFICER