



Election Security for Polling Stations and Counting Offices  
Notes for Guidance  
General Election 2017

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## **Preface**

The advice contained in this document is intended to assist Returning Officers to develop a security plan to avoid major disruption to the election process. The recommendations will not be applicable in all cases and should be regarded as a menu of options that could be implemented taking into account the nature of the terrorist threat together with the type and location of building being used. It is essential, in order to adapt to local needs, that Returning Officers discuss security arrangements with police at the earliest opportunity.

Returning Officers are responsible for the safety of election staff, the voting process and the verification and the count. This guide has been formulated to assist them with the security of buildings used in the electoral process.

The document contains generic advice intended to encompass the security provisions for all elections. As such it will need to be tailored to suit the type of venue being used.

# 1. Introduction

The following guidelines are intended to reduce the opportunity for disruption of the Election process through the use or threat of terrorism. This document contains guidance in a series of checklists for Returning Officers to enable their staff to conduct their roles and responsibilities, providing safe and secure counting venues and polling stations as far as reasonably practicable.

The guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive as the premises used will vary greatly and recommendations therefore must be adapted to meet local needs. Further supporting guidance publications including 'Recognising the Terrorist Threat' are available at: [www.cpni.gov.uk](http://www.cpni.gov.uk) and [www.nactso.gov.uk](http://www.nactso.gov.uk)

The [College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice](#) (APP) have produced guidance on [Maintaining order and preventing undue influence outside polling stations](#). The APP outlines the necessity for Returning Officers and their respective Police Force to initiate early contact in planning for the Election. The Electoral Commission provide a variety of guidance products, including a handbook for Polling Station staff at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk).

Whilst the safety of staff must be part of security planning considerations, there is a high level of individual responsibility. Staff should be made aware of personal safety and security when working at and travelling to and from sites. In addition to NaCTSO and CPNI websites, a good source of personal security advice is available at [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

## 1.1 The Threat

An attack in the UK could occur anywhere and potentially with little or no warning. Terrorists are likely to favour 'soft' targets such as 'crowded places,' particularly those in easily accessible locations with little or no protective security measures. Understanding the threat facing us all is essential in order that proportionate, effective and responsive activity can take place. It is important staff ACT upon their instincts to help tackle terrorism. The message is clear 'don't worry, don't delay, just act'.

In the event of an emergency or other incident requiring urgent police attention all staff should be reminded to dial '999' immediately. They should also notify the Returning Officer as soon as possible.

## 2. Managing security

To assist in deciding what security arrangements are necessary and commensurate, consideration may be given to the following factors:

- The current threat assessment
- The venue
- Profile of candidates and
- Any other local issues that could influence security

The majority of venues used for local elections are unlikely to require any greater security arrangements than those afforded by good housekeeping e.g. physical check of building and unobtrusive access control.

In a minority of cases, locations such as counting venues or high profile polling stations may require additional security provisions. Returning Officers are encouraged to liaise with their Police single point of contact (SPOC) at the earliest opportunity to discuss policing arrangements.

## **PROTECTIVE SECURITY ADVICE**

### **3. Polling Stations**

#### **3.1 Security and Search (Polling Stations)**

- Prior to the premises opening to the public, you should conduct a search of the venue to look for suspicious items and familiarise yourself with the location; secure the premises prior to conducting the search
- Arrange for a responsible person with local knowledge of the premises to assist you to conduct a search to identify anything unusual
- Following the search ensure the building is secure and supervised until officially opened for polling. During that period no unauthorised person should be permitted entry
- Check the perimeter of the premises, particular attention being given to nearby shrubbery, outbuildings and other areas to which the public have access
- If a vehicle is parked in the proximity of a polling station and arouses any suspicions, the incident must be reported to the police. Note the location and vehicle registration mark
- Draw up a schedule for further searches to be carried out at frequent but irregular intervals throughout the day

#### **3.2 Access (Polling Stations)**

Access and egress should be restricted to the minimum number of doorways as possible. As far as fire regulations permit, all other entrances including windows of unoccupied rooms should be secured to prevent any unauthorised entry.

- Check vulnerable spaces, for example cupboards, and unoccupied rooms, on the access / egress route. Have they been searched? Can they be secured?
- The law specifically provides for certain persons to be present in the Polling Stations (in addition to staff and voters) Ensure you are aware of who is present, and for what reason. Be prepared to challenge suspicious behaviour
- Wherever possible, obtain the details of those persons, other than staff and voters present within the Polling Stations.
- Check that delivery of goods, the carrying out of maintenance work and other ancillary functions at the premises have been suspended. If this is unavoidable the Returning Officers should be given prior notification
- Compile a list of contact numbers for those normally responsible for the premises to cater for incidents which may occur on the premises
- It is recommended that staff and election officials wear identification passes
- Adopt a challenge culture to unauthorised people in restricted areas

## 4. Counting Venues

Please note that premises used for counting ballot papers may well be used for other purposes until shortly before counting commences. It is imperative therefore, that a thorough search be made as near as possible to the arrival of the first ballot box. Particular attention must be paid to the storage and delivery areas for ballot boxes, exits and other parts of the building which may be in use for purposes unconnected with the election.

### 4.1 Security and Search (Counting Venues)

- Prior to the venue receiving ballot boxes, you should conduct a search of the venue to look for suspicious items and familiarise yourself with the location; secure the premises prior to conducting the search
- Arrange for a responsible persons with local knowledge of the premises to assist you conduct a search to identify anything unusual
- Ensure the building is secure and supervised until officially opened for counting. During that period no unauthorised person should be permitted entry
- Check the perimeter of the premises, particular attention being given to nearby shrubbery, outbuildings and other areas to which the public have access
- If a vehicle is parked in the proximity of a counting station and arouses any suspicions, the incident must be reported to the police. Note the location and vehicle registration mark
- Draw up a schedule for further searches to be carried out at frequent but irregular intervals throughout the day

### 4.2 Access (Counting Venues)

- As far as possible access / egress should be limited and controlled. As far as fire regulations permit, all other entrances, including windows of unoccupied rooms should be secured to prevent any unauthorised entry
- Check vulnerable spaces, for example cupboards, and unoccupied rooms, on the access / egress route. Have they been searched? Can they be secured?
- Only certain people are entitled to attend the count. Arrange a strict ticketing system for all persons entitled to attend and ensure that staff controlling access have their names and only allow access to those with tickets
- Check that delivery of goods, the carrying out of maintenance work and other ancillary functions at the premises have been suspended. If this is unavoidable the Returning Officers should be given prior notification
- Compile a list of contact numbers for those normally responsible for the premises to cater for incidents which may occur on the premises
- It is recommended that staff and election officials wear identification passes
- Adopt a challenge culture to unauthorised people in restricted areas

## 5. Good Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is an important part of your security regime by helping to reduce the opportunity for placing suspicious items or bags and helps to deal with false alarms and hoaxes.

### Litter Bins/Receptacles

- Review use & location
- Keep litter bins to a minimum and consider use of clear bags for waste disposal as it provides an easier opportunity for staff to conduct an initial examination for suspicious items

### Public & Communal Areas

- Keep public and communal areas e.g. exits, entrances, lavatories, service corridors and yards clean, tidy and well lit
- Keep the fixtures, fittings and furniture in such areas to a minimum - ensuring that there is little opportunity to hide devices
- Lock unoccupied offices, rooms, function areas and store cupboards

### External Areas

- Keep external areas, entrances, exits, reception areas and toilets clean, tidy and well lit
- As far as possible reduce areas where items can be concealed
- Remove items that could be used as weapon such as such poles, canisters of chemicals etc.

### Mail Handling / Screening

- Ensure relevant staff are trained in mail/post-handling procedures, i.e. identifying & responding to a suspect letter/package?

### Security Awareness

- Do staff understand their role and responsibilities?
- Do staff know how to report suspicious behaviour and are they aware of incident procedures?

### Equipment

- Regularly check the content and condition of first aid kits, crisis management packs and fire extinguishers if available

### Incident Response

- Ensure staff are aware of any contingency plans in the event the premises becomes unusable

### Miscellaneous

- Ensure external activity does not impact upon evacuation routes, assembly areas, exits or entrances



## 6. Incident Procedures

### 6.1 Bomb Threats

The vast majority of bomb threats are hoaxes designed to cause alarm and disruption. As well as the rare instances of valid bomb threats, terrorists may also make hoax bomb threat calls to intimidate. While many bomb threats involve a person-to-person phone call, an increasing number are sent electronically using email or social media applications. No matter how ridiculous or implausible the threat may seem, all such communications are a crime and should be reported to the police by dialling 999. Ensure you have plans that include how the threat information is recorded, acted upon and passed to police.

Evaluating the credibility of a threat is a critical task, particularly if the attack being threatened is imminent. This is a tactic used to place additional pressure on decision makers. Police will assess the threat at the earliest opportunity.

Responsibility for the initial decision making remains with the person responsible for the polling station or counting office (i.e. the location being threatened). Do not delay your decision making process waiting for the arrival of police. Your options are to evacuate, lockdown the premises or where the threat is assessed as not credible limit your actions to informing the police and searching the venue for suspicious items.

#### Telephone Bomb Threat

- Stay calm and listen - alert a colleague to call 999
- Allow the caller to speak uninterrupted
- Obtain as much information as possible about the caller, including the caller's number if possible
- Try to get the caller to be precise about location and timing of the alleged bomb and who they represent
- Write down what is said, what location is being targeted and how. Record the message if possible
- After the call dial 1471 to obtain the caller number where possible

#### Email Bomb Threats

- Do not reply, forward or delete a bomb threat made via email
- Note the address and print off a hard copy
- Preserve all web log files - as a guide 7 days prior and 48 hours after the receipt of the threat message

#### Social Media Bomb Threats

- Do not reply, forward or delete a bomb threat made via social media
- Note which application has been used and any username/ID

#### In all cases

- Complete 'Actions to be Taken on Receipt of a Bomb Threat' pro-forma/checklist available via [www.nactso.gov.uk](http://www.nactso.gov.uk)
- Avoid revealing details about specific incidents to the media or through social media without prior consultation with police

## 6.2 Suspicious Items

### What to do

- Do not touch it
- Make immediate enquiries to trace the owner
- Did anyone see who left it?
- Can CCTV be checked?
- Does it have a label identifying the owner?

If you still think it's suspicious, use the **HOT** protocol to inform your judgement:-

Is it **HIDDEN**?

- Has the item been deliberately concealed or is it obviously hidden from view?

Is it **OBVIOUSLY** suspicious?

- Does it have wires, circuit boards, batteries, tape, liquids or putty-like substances visible?
- Do you think the item poses an immediate threat to life?

Is it **TYPICAL**?

- Is the item typical of what you would expect to find in this location?

Remember - If you think it's suspicious, **REPORT IT** - to Security, Management or the Police

Now apply the 4 C's protocol: - (consider contingency arrangements for ballot box security under evacuation protocols)

**CONFIRM** the item is suspicious

- If the item is assessed to be unattended rather than suspicious, examine further before applying lost property procedures.
- However, if **H O T** leads you to believe the item is suspicious, apply the 4Cs.

**CLEAR** the immediate area

- Do not touch it
- Take charge and move people away to a safe distance. Even for a small item such as a briefcase move at least 100m away from the item
- Keep yourself and other people out of line of sight of the item. It is a broad rule, but generally if you cannot see the item then you are better protected from it
- Think about what you can hide behind. Pick something substantial and keep away from glass such as windows and skylights
- Cordon off the area

**COMMUNICATE** – Call 999

- Do not use mobile phones or radios within 15 metres of the item

**CONTROL** access to the cordoned area

- Staff and members of the public should not be able to approach the area until it is deemed safe
- Try and keep eyewitnesses on hand so they can tell police what they saw

## 6.3 Suspicious Behaviour

### What to do

- If someone's behaviour appears suspicious, if it is not what you would normally expect - then you must act without delay.
- If you come across suspicious behaviour, you must not ignore it
- What you do will depend on many factors, but you must TELL someone
- If safe to do so, you can approach a person that has been seen acting in a suspicious manner and ask them to account for their actions - Begin with a friendly 'Can I help you'?
- Be confident, be polite but challenge them if you can – use your communication skills

**If you are not satisfied by their answers inform the police**

### Tell them the following:

**WHO** did you see, what did they look like, what were they wearing?

**WHAT** have you seen, what has happened?

**WHERE** did the situation happen and where were you?

**WHEN** did it happen – what time?

**WHY** did you think it was suspicious?

- 'Don't worry, don't delay, just act'. Have the confidence to act. Your actions could help avert an attack and save lives
- Look for suspicious behaviour
- Learn what is normal for your environment and what is not
- Learn to recognise suspicious behaviour
- Understand it, challenge it, report it
- Whatever you do, do not ignore it

**You cannot spot a terrorist from their appearance, age, ethnicity, gender or clothing. You can identify and report suspicious behaviour.**

**Always remember - Stopping a terrorist before they can carry out their plans will save lives.**

## 6.4 Stay Safe – Weapons and Firearms Attack

If you are alerted to a firearms or weapons attack, stay calm, RUN or HIDE, only when it is safe TELL the police

### RUN

- Consider your safest options
- Escape if you can
- Is there a safe route? RUN, if not HIDE
- Can you get there without exposing yourself to greater danger?
- Insist other leave with you
- Leave belongings behind

### HIDE

- If you cannot RUN, then HIDE
- Find cover from gunfire
- If you can see the attacker, they may be able to see you
- Cover from view does not mean you are safe, bullets go through glass, brick, wood and metal
- Find cover from gunfire e.g. substantial brickwork / heavy reinforced walls
- Be aware of your exits
- Try not to get trapped
- Be quiet, silence your phone
- Lock / barricade yourself in
- Move away from the door

### TELL

- Call 999 - What do the police need to know? If you cannot speak or make a noise listen to the instructions given to you by the call taker
- Location - Where are the suspects?
- Direction - Where did you last see the suspects?
- Descriptions – Describe the attacker, numbers, features, clothing, weapons etc.
- Further information – Casualties, type of injury, building information, entrances, exits, hostages etc.
- Stop other people entering the building if it is safe to do so

### ARMED POLICE RESPONSE

- Follow officers' instructions
- Remain calm
- Can you move to a safer area?
- Keep your hands in view

### OFFICERS MAY

- Point guns at you
- Treat you firmly
- Question you
- Not be unable to distinguish you from the attacker
- Officers will evacuate you when it is safe to do so

When it is safe give first aid [www.citizenaid.org](http://www.citizenaid.org)

## 6.5 Evacuation and Lockdown Procedures

When considering evacuation and the security of ballot boxes it must be noted that **the safety of all present is of paramount importance.**

- Designate specified personnel who will in the event of an evacuation be tasked with removing ballot boxes and voting forms etc. **Remember personal safety comes first**
- Prepare a contingency plan for arrangements for receiving and protecting ballot boxes in case of evacuation
- Prepare a contingency plan to identify alternate means of access and egress to the counting stations in cases of emergency
- Identify a designated evacuation rendezvous point?

### **If you are required to evacuate or lockdown the venue - use your judgement**

- Stay calm
- Assess the situation , the type of incident, its location, attackers and hazards
- Is the incident or device inside the venue or outside the venue?
- Establish where is the safest place
- If you evacuate take the safest route, do so in an orderly manner, insisting others go with you
- If you lockdown, go to a safer area, secure all entrances and exits to the premises where possible
- Communicate to all present what is happening and advise as to the most appropriate action

**Follow the RUN HIDE TELL principles – Inform the police and call 999**

## 6.6 Mail Handling

**If you receive suspicious item call 999 and ask for the police. Clear the area immediately. Do not attempt to open the letter or package. Avoid unnecessary handling. Keep it separate so it is easily identifiable.**

### **How to identify a suspicious package, indicators to suspicious deliveries/mail**

General indicators that a delivered item may be of concern include:

- Unexpected item, especially if hand delivered
- A padded envelope (Jiffy Bag) or other bulky package
- Additional inner envelope or other contents that may be difficult to remove
- Labelling or excessive sealing that encourages opening at a particular end or in a particular way
- Oddly shaped or lopsided
- Envelope flap stuck down completely (normally gummed envelope flaps leave slight gaps at edges)
- Marked 'to be opened only by...' or 'Personal' or 'Confidential'
- Unexpected or unusual origin (postmark and/or return address)
- No return address or return address that cannot be verified
- Poorly or inaccurately addressed, address printed unevenly or unusually
- Unfamiliar writing or unusual style
- Unusual postmark or no postmark
- More stamps than needed for size or weight of package
- Greasy or oily stains emanating from the package
- Odours emanating from the package

### **Explosive or Incendiary Indicators**

Rough handling through the postal system means an item received is unlikely to detonate if moved.

- Any attempt at opening it may set it off or release the contents
- Unusually heavy or uneven weight distribution
- Small hole(s) in the envelope or wrapping

### **Chemical Biological or Radiological (CBR) Indicators (see section 6.7)**

Additional indicators include:

- Powders or liquids emanating from the package
- Wrapping stained by liquid leakage
- Unexpected items or materials found in the package on opening (loose or in a container) such as powdered, crystalline or granular solids; liquids; sticky substances or residues
- Unexpected odours observed on opening
- Sudden onset of illness or irritation of skin, eyes and nose

### **Actions upon discovery of any suspicious delivered item:**

- Avoid unnecessary handling
- If you are holding the item, put it down on a cleared flat surface
- Keep it separate so it is easily identifiable
- Do not move it

### **Move away immediately – (Secure the room to prevent unauthorised access)**

- Clear immediate area and each adjacent room, including rooms above and below
- If there is any suggestion of chemical, biological or radiological materials, move those directly affected to a safe location close to the incident - keep these individuals separate from those not involved

- Prevent others approaching or accessing the cleared areas
- Do not use mobile phones or two-way radios in the cleared area or within 15 metres of the suspect package
- Communicate regularly with staff, visitors and the public

**Notify police**

- If the item has been opened, or partially opened prior to being deemed suspicious, it is vital that this is communicated to the police
- Ensure informants and witnesses remain available to brief the police, and that the accuracy of their observations is preserved
- Encourage witnesses immediately to record their observations in writing, and discourage them from discussing the incident or their observations with others prior to the arrival of the police

## 6.7 Chemical Biological Radiological Incidents (CBR)

### CBR Response

CBR attacks have the potential to cause significant harm and disruption, but they are difficult for terrorists to carry out often requiring specialist knowledge and expertise.

### CBR Recognition - First indicators include:

- Individuals showing unexplained signs of skin, eye or airway irritation, nausea, vomiting, twitching, sweating, disorientation, breathing difficulties
- The presence of hazardous or unusual materials / equipment
- Unexplained vapour, mist clouds, powder, liquids or oily drops
- Withered plant life or vegetation
- Distressed birds or animals
- Odd smells or tastes

**STEP 1, 2, 3** is a useful process to assist in recognising a CBR incident and actions to take:

**STEP 1** – One casualty / person incapacitated - no obvious reason = Proceed as normal

**STEP 2** - Two casualties / persons incapacitated - no obvious reason = Approach with caution

**STEP 3** - Three or more casualties / persons incapacitated in close proximity - no obvious reason

### Seek further guidance from police

- Do not let contaminated and uncontaminated people come into contact. Evacuate to a place of safety - away from source, ideally uphill / upwind
- Decontaminate initially by self-decontamination, using absorbent material, e.g. paper towel. Blot and rub contaminated skin. Leave used material and move away
- Only wash with water if signs of exposure to caustic substances such as itching, soreness or pain
- Do not go to hospital or leave the scene. Emergency services will come to you

### Immediate Actions - include:

- Call the Emergency services and follow their advice

### Inside a Building

- If an item or package, leave it alone, do not cover, immerse or move it
- Evacuate the affected area, do so as quickly as possible, closing doors and windows as you go, turn off any fans or air circulation systems
- Move those directly affected by an incident to a safe location, ideally outside, but as close as possible to the scene of the incident
- Separate those directly affected by an incident from those not involved so as to minimise the risk of inadvertent cross-contamination
- Disrobe, remove affected outer clothing, taking into account environmental conditions and the privacy of the affected person
- Instruct people not to wander off - though you cannot contain them against their will

### In Open Air

- Move away from the source - uphill / upwind (walk into the wind)
- Assist others who are less able / injured, if you can
- Use absorbent tissue or paper towel to blot and rub exposed skin
- Only wash with water if signs of exposure to caustic substances, e.g. itching, soreness, pain
- Do not eat, drink touch your face / eyes, or smoke
- Do not go to hospital or leave the scene, emergency services will come to you



- You do not need to make any special arrangements beyond normal first aid provision. The emergency services will take responsibility for treatment of casualties
- When the emergency services arrive act upon their instruction as you may need further decontamination and medical help

## **7. Ballot Box Security**

- Ensure systems are in place to search vehicles used for the movement of ballot boxes to or from polling stations and counting venues before the boxes are loaded or the vehicle is moved
- After searching, during the collection of the ballot boxes, at no time should the vehicle be left unattended
- Ensure full boxes are stored in a secure area under close supervision. This is of even greater importance where boxes are not likely to be opened for counting until the following morning

## **8. Cyber Security**

Cyber security advice 'Guidance for local authorities during the general election' has been produced by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). This is available from Local Authorities.

**For further advice, contact NaCTSO. This publication should be treated as confidential advice to the officials concerned. It should not be left on display for public viewing.**

For further information go to [www.cpni.gov.uk](http://www.cpni.gov.uk) and [www.nactso.gov.uk](http://www.nactso.gov.uk)