**Returning Officer Notes for Guidance in the selection of candidates of Parliamentary Candidates for Westminster seats and large single seats (Mayoral and PCC)**

**ROGN**

**Updated May 2022**

**(amendment to ROGN 10,12, 14 June 22)**

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**Introduction and Getting started**

The Rules for the selection of candidates for Westminster and for large single seats (Mayoral/PCC) are found in four documents. Two full processes, one for selecting Westminster PPC’s and one for large single seats (i.e., Mayoral and PCC) which covers where there are multiple applicants and shortlisting is required. There are also two abbreviated ”short processes” to apply when no shortlisting is required.

These notes cover guidance for all the processes including Tier 1 seats.

You will find that the examples, sample letters and forms previously included in the body of the document (ROGN) have now been moved to the end of the document to facilitate ease of use and update when that becomes necessary.

**Introduction**

This guidance provides clarification on some of the technical aspects of the rules, as well as a number of checklists, forms and templates for you to adapt and use when conducting selections using the rules for the selection of Westminster Parliamentary Candidates in England and the rules of the selection of candidates in large single posts in England. For brevity all these documents will be referred to in all RO guidance as the Selection Rules.

***The Returning Officer’s Guidance does not replace the Selection Rules***, which are the key documents in conducting selections. You should refer to the rules at all points in the selection and make sure that all Shortlisting Committee members, local Party executive members and applicants in the selection can access a copy.

The selection rules can be found on the Party website. If in doubt about any aspect of the rules, please consult your Regional Candidates’ Chair.

Where the area covered by a parliamentary constituency includes all or parts of more than one local party, the relevant local party executives shall co-operate in making joint arrangements for the selection to proceed, in accordance with section 9 of the Model Constitution for Local Parties. The term ‘local party’ then includes the area of the constituency, and ‘local party executive’ describes a joint committee the co-operating local parties may establish for this purpose.

When a local Party(s) want to start their selection process there are a number of actions they need to have taken regarding encouraging diversity in applicants/candidates. They need to have confirmed that those actions have been taken before the RCC will confirm the RO/ARO appointment.

**Getting started – initial contacts & meetings**

Once appointed, you should receive details of your local contact for the selection in the constituency concerned. Please get in touch with that person promptly to find out what stage they have reached. This will vary, some will have trained members of the party ready to serve, some will just be thinking about getting going, most will want to proceed quickly.

**Where Shortlisting Committees are required - take care!**  You may find some local parties believe they have already chosen their Shortlisting Committee members, decided on a timetable and where and when the members’ meetings will be, without consulting anyone and sometimes without a proper understanding of the rules. Make sure you meet with the Executive Committee initially (for Westminster selections or the Liaison Committee for larger single seats) to let them know how the process works and that they can’t proceed without your approval. Make sure you read the rules each time to refresh your memory.

Where Shortlisting Committee training is needed it can now be run by RO’s as a practical session about putting the rules and theory into practice. The practical session can be delivered by the Returning Officer as part of the initial selection process meeting. In addition, this can be delivered separately from the selection process as organized by the Regional Candidates’ Chair.

Details of who has completed the shortlisting training are available from the Candidates’ Office. Because of the changes to the rules and to the law since 2010 it is important that all Shortlisting Committee members are properly briefed on their responsibilities whether or not they have participated in a selection before.

If the Local Party has gone ahead and trained a team of people, before you decide on the profile of that team, you may need to make them aware that not everyone is going to be able to serve, either due to a limit on numbers or because you need to ensure that the composition of the Shortlisting Committee is appropriately representative.

**Confidentiality**

At the start of the selection process, the Returning Officer should make it clear to the Shortlisting Committee or LP Executive that discussions about applicants and their relative merits and the information applicants have supplied as part of their application are all confidential and must not be discussed with others during the selection process or afterwards. (There is a Declaration to be signed by the Committee members in the pack ROGN 7)

If either the Returning Officer, the Shortlisting Committee or the LP Executive have any queries or need to seek advice about a particular applicant the Returning Officer should speak to the Candidates’ Office at HQ.

**Media Contacts**

The Returning Officer should also remind members of the Shortlisting Committee/ Local Party Officers that they should not approach or be drawn into communication with the media (newspapers, radio, Television etc). Any approach should be referred to the Returning Officer.

**Checklists**

There are checklists and example timetables in the pack that may assist you in working through the processes. (ROGN 1,2,3,4 and 4b for Tier 1 seats)

**SECTION 1 Returning Officers and ARO’s**

This section, in the rules, covers the responsibilities of the RO/ARO and how they are appointed. (Full and Short rules 1 - 8)

It also includes reference to RO/ARO expenses – more details (ROGN 5)

After you have been appointed, and before an advert is placed, you should discuss the selection with the Local Party Officers.

Rule 8 details the requirements for the Local Party Officers to contact a number of Party Organisations. You can find a list of contact details for these groups here

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1H4dSc_GaQNFhlqjlJFOOiOP2BlKhS01kqzQYkRaK0ae/edit?usp-sharing>

**SECTION 2 Advertising (Short Process)(Short rules 9-13)**

To place an advert the RO/ARO e-mails the Candidates Office (candidates@libdems.org.uk) an example of information required for advert

ROGN 6.

In addition, applicants are required to complete and return form ROGN 6b.

Applicants may wish to complete the Diversity Section (which they must be made aware of) if they wish to use this information during the selection process.

You will need to take a note of this as it is need when you complete ROGN 35

At the same time you should copy the advert to membership services and request the appropriate membership lists. (Short rules 14-18)

**SECTION 3 Shortlisting Committees (Full process rules 9-19)**

Before you accept a member onto the Shortlisting Committee have them sign and return the Declaration to you (ROGN 7).

In addition, request a confidential e-mail address from each Shortlisting Committee member to enable you to forward the applications etc. to them.

The Shortlisting Committee are responsible for managing their selection process in an unbiased way.

The following forms/templates are available to assist you. These refer to Full Process selections with shortlisting committees.

Campaign Expenses cap (ROGN 8)

Devising selection criteria from competency framework (ROGN 9)

Examples of selection criteria – (Tier 1 ROGN 10, Non Tier 1 ROGN 11)

Note of what appears in an application pack. (ROGN 12)

Sample covering letter to accompany application pack (ROGN 13)

Example application form (ROGN 14)

Sample Constituency Profile (ROGN 15)

The shortlisting committee should agree a scoring method, allocating a mark against each practical and behavioural criteria and giving scores a weighting against importance.

This will be used later if needed for long listing.

**SECTION 4 Advertising Full Process**

It is up to the RO/ARO to collect all the relevant information from the Shortlisting Committee and submit an advert to Candidates Office (candidates@libdems.org.uk) and further advise Membership Department of the advert so they can produce the membership lists as appropriate. (ROGN 16)

In addition, applicants are required to complete and return form ROGN 6b.

Applicants may wish to complete the Diversity Section (which they must be made aware of) if they wish to use this information during the selection process.

**SECTION 5 Who can vote in the selection**

**(Short process rules 14-18) (Full Process rules 20-24)**

Eligibility is detailed in the Rules.

At the same time as you placed adverts you informed Membership who should be forwarding you the appropriate membership lists when the advert is published.

On e-mailing the advert to HQ you should also inform the local data officer and detail what is required of them (ROGN 17)

(This is to confirm that their understanding of eligible voters agrees with the HQ list and to bring any discrepancies to the attention of the RO).

To assist you to keep a record of any queries about membership there is a proforma (ROGN 18)

**SECTION 6 Shortlist (Short Process rules 19-23)**

All applicants who complete and return a cv/manifesto are to be included on the ballot paper providing they

1. Are approved Westminster candidates and, in the case of Mayoral or PCC selections have passed any required conversion tests.
2. Have signed and returned the undertaking included in the advert and detailed in the rules. (ROGN 6b)

**SECTION 7 Deciding if a selection can go ahead**

 **(Full Process rules 25-28)**

On receiving applications, under the full process, they should be entered on the tracking form (ROGN 19) and checked that they

1. Are approved Westminster candidates and, in the case of Mayoral or PCC selections have passed any required conversion tests.
2. Have signed and returned the undertaking/statement included in the advert and detailed in the rules. (ROGN 6b)
3. Meet the Parties protected characteristic requirements (rule 26). Also refer to Appendix D.
4. If appropriate/required have completed the enhanced due diligence check.

They are then forwarded to the shortlisting committee who will check that they meet the minimum standard, as previously agreed.

There is a score sheet to assist (ROGN 20)

**SECTION 8 Shortlisting Interviews (Full Process rules 29-31)**

If there is a requirement for shortlisting, either because of the Constituency or multiple applications, then there will be shortlisting interviews. The requirements for these interviews are detailed in the Rules. PLEASE READ THEM CAREFULLY.

It will be necessary to meet with the Shortlisting Committee to agree the questions and tasks if this hasn’t been done at the previous meeting. (Section 3).

There is an example of a scoring summary sheet (ROGN 21)

It is important that the RO is confident that all the candidates are being treated fairly and the rules require you to enquire into any apparent discrepancies in the way candidates are marked.

(You may find that one of the shortlisting committee marks differently, if that’s consistent across all the applicants that may be fine. But if it is just one candidate then you need to ask why and be satisfied with the answer.)

**Tier 1 selections**

Having passed this stage and being included on the provisional shortlist, Tier 1 selection applicants will then be subject to an enhanced vetting process.

Details of process in ROGN 24b

There is sample letter that can be used to

1. Invite candidates to interview (ROGN 22)
2. Advise candidates they have not been included on the shortlist (ROGN 23)
3. Confirming a candidate is on the shortlist and giving further details (ROGN 24)

**SECTION 9 Members Mailing**

 **(Short process 24-26 Full Process 32-36)**

**This section only covers physical Hustings/ballots.**

Once the shortlist is agreed it is necessary for the shortlisting committee/local Party/REA to invite the members in the constituency/REA to Hustings.

The expected contents of the mailing are included in the rules (short rule 25, full rules 35).

An example of sample members mailing (ROGN 25)

An example of a Postal Vote application form (ROGN 26)

**Members mailing - online hustings and e-ballots**

On line Hustings are covered in Section 13b

Electronic ballots are covered in Section 12

**SECTION 10 Candidates campaign**

**(Short process rules 27-34, Full process rules 37-44)**

Each candidate is entitled to a copy of the membership register.

As RO you will have received two membership registers.

One register will be complete with e-mail addresses and should be used by the data officer and yourself.

The second register, without emails, is to be made available to candidates for campaigning purposes.

The registers will be password protected; please ensure you maintain the integrity of the data.

In addition, before giving candidates access, they should complete a form confirming they will comply with the data protection rules (ROGN 27).

You will have previously agreed the expenditure cap with the Shortlisting Committee (ROGN 8).

For Physical Hustings the campaign ends at the conclusion of the Hustings.

For e-ballots the campaign continues after the Hustings. and continues until the ballot closes. This is in line with all Parties internal elections

During the campaign your responsibility is to ensure that the selection is carried out in a manner that is

Democratic, Accountable, Inclusive, Fair, Robust, Manageable.

You need to ensure that there is fair and equal treatment of applicants and ensure selection rules are followed.

However, you are not required to police the actions of candidates and their supporters.

You are required to investigate and make rulings only on those matters that are brought to your attention as detailed in Section 16.

**SECTION 11 Postal Votes – Physical Hustings**

**(short process rules 35-36, Full process rules 45-46)**

The RO is responsible for producing and issuing ballot papers for physical hustings.

Where there are less than 3 candidates then Re-Open nominations (RON) should appear on the ballot paper.

There are examples of these ballot papers and the required wording (ROGN 28, 29)

All ballot papers must be numbered and, if possible, you may print postal vote ballot papers and husting ballot papers on different coloured paper.

Mark one copy of the membership register with those that have requested postal votes to avoid confusion.

**SECTION 12 Electronic ballots**

The Rules regarding e-ballots can be found in Appendix F.

Note in particular F1 (d)

The distribution of the Members’ Mailing will be undertaken for the Responsible Committee, by a third-party professional organisation that is approved by the Liberal Democrat Party, or by someone trained by the Regional Party to use approved third-party software. The Responsible Committee will pay the costs for the Members’ Mailing.

Electronic ballots will be issued to all qualifying members with a recognised e-mail address.

Qualifying members without a recognised e-mail address or where that address is not appropriate (more than 1 member shares an e-mail, .gov accounts etc) will be able to request a postal vote from the RO/ARO

 The candidates campaign will continue until the close of the ballot.

Local Committees should be aware that they will have to pay for any E-ballot postal mailings etc

Further guidance can be found in ROGN 34 together with sample Members Meeting (Hustings) invites.

**SECTION 13 The Members Meeting**

 **Short process rules 37- 42, Full process rules 47-52)**

1. **Physical Hustings**

To be organised by the local party, shortlisting committee/ local party officers

The format will vary dependent on the number of candidates but must include an opportunity for candidates to meet members, speak to the meeting and answer questions.

When there is more than one candidate

The RO is to ensure fairness, make sure all candidates are treated equally including checking that no questions favour or disfavour one or more candidates.

Arrange to meet the candidates at the Hustings venue in advance of start time.

Outline the format to them, explain the rules and “draw lots’ to agree the order in which the candidates will speak and answer questions.

There are two normally recognised ways of organising the questions part of the meeting.

One involves each candidate making their speech in turn and then all candidates appearing together in a “Question time” format.

The second has each candidate making their speech immediately followed by questions (with the other candidates not present).

In either case you can either simply ask for questions from the floor or request questions in advance (possibly including a request for questions included in the members mailing) or as members enter the venue. They could then be composited, if sufficient numbers. These can then be asked by the Chair. This method ensures that each candidate is asked exactly the same questions and in the same way.

The conduct of the candidates and nominated supporters are detailed in the rules (short 39 full 49).

B**. On-line Hustings**

Where a selection is conducted using On-Line hustings those Hustings should, where possible, mirror the form of the physical hustings.

The local party should provide the facilities for an on line meeting/s (zoom or similar) and, where there is more than one candidate, access to break rooms for candidates when they are “out of the room!”

Where appropriate (potentially large numbers attending) members should be asked to register for the meeting in advance (as part of the members invite) to assist in speedy, controlled access to the meeting.

**SECTION 14 Vote and Count**

**(Short process rules 43-53, Full process rules 53-63)**

1. Physical Hustings

On completion of the Hustings (final hustings if more than one is held) ballot papers can be issued to those present who are on the membership register and have not requested a postal vote. The rules detail this.

Before starting the count ask the candidates/representatives if they are content with the Husting process.

Postal votes should be opened and added to those cast at the Hustings

Ballot papers should then be counted and entered on pro-forma in accordance with the voting system outlined in rules Appendix B. (ROGN 30)

There is an example of counting process (ROGN 31)

On completion of the count, you should confirm with the candidates/representatives that they accept the result and ask them to sign the ‘Acceptance of Result Form” (ROGN 32)

If one or more candidates do not accept the result refer to the rules full process rule 61, short process rule 51 applies.

If all candidates accept the result, you announce the results to the meeting. Full rule 62, short rule 52.

(Each of the candidates/representatives will have seen the actual numbers relating to the count result. It is not good practice, when announcing the result, to actually detail the numbers as you may needlessly embarrass one or more candidates.

Just announce and congratulate the winner.)

There is a sample letter for writing to all unsuccessful candidates (ROGN 33)

1. E-ballot

The e-ballot will open at the conclusion of the final Hustings. There will then be at least two weeks to close of poll. (for both e-ballots and any paper ballots).

The candidates campaign will continue until the deadline for the ballot.

Once the deadline for ballots is reached, and any paper ballots input, the ballot controller will run the programme and e-mail the provisional results to the RO/ARO.

Once received the RO will forward the provisional results to the candidates with a request that they formally e-mail their acceptance of the results or detail any objections.

Only once the RO receives acceptance from each candidate does the result become final. Once the result is agreed then the RO will write to the candidates and Local Party.

**SECTION 15 Troubleshooting**

Covers what to do if candidates withdraw and is self-explanatory.