

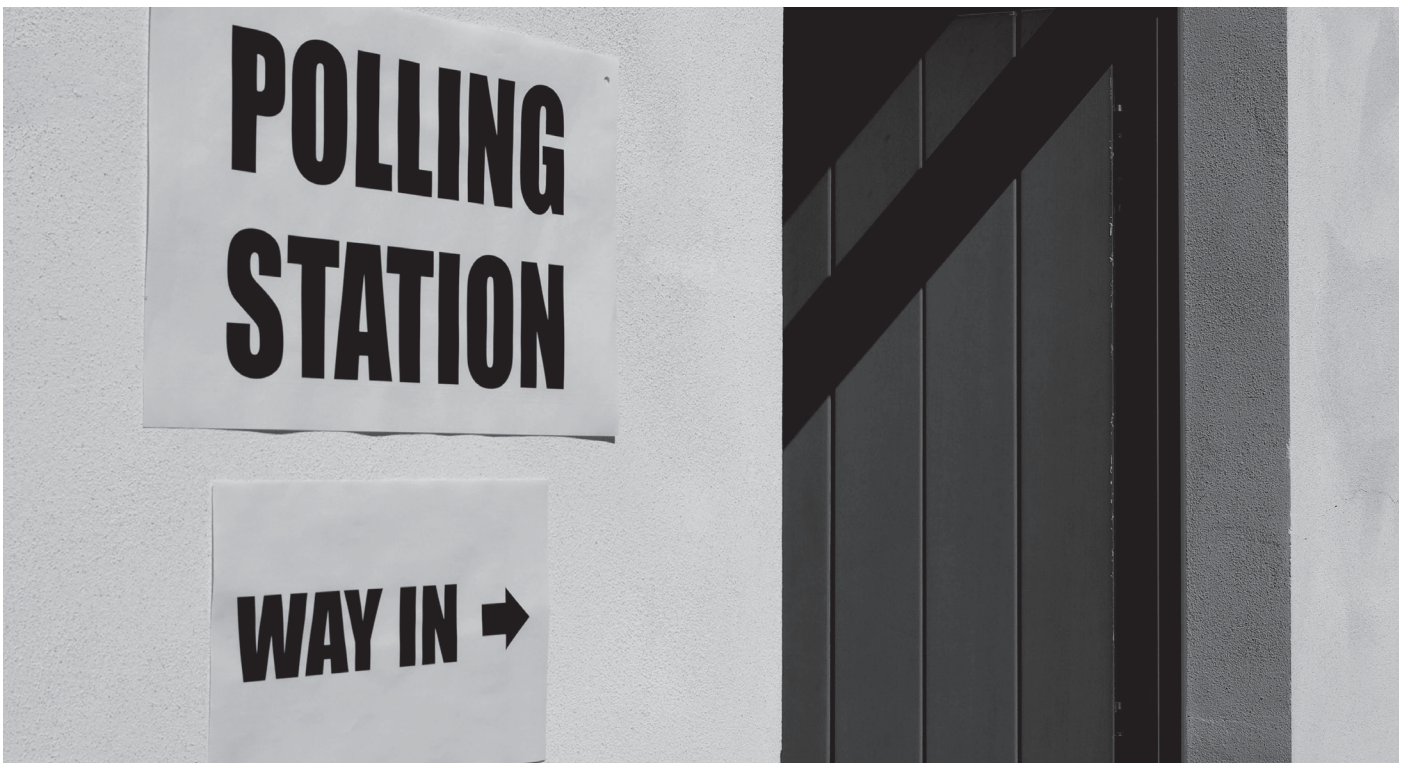


South Staffordshire Council

Candidate and Agent Guide

Police, Fire and Crime
Commissioner Election

May 2024



Further information can be found at
www.sstaffs.gov.uk/elections



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Introduction

This guide has been developed to support Candidates and Agents through the Verification and Count process.

East Staffordshire Borough Council is responsible for leading the election, with Andy O'Brien as the Police Area Returning Officer (PARO). This means overall responsibility for the conduct of all aspects of the election for the Staffordshire Force Area (this covers all district council areas in the county: including Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Newcastle Under Lyme, Stafford, South Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-On-Trent, and Tamworth).

Dave Heywood, Chief Executive of South Staffordshire Council has the role of Local Returning Officer (LRO), which means being responsible for all arrangements for the running of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner election within South Staffordshire and reporting directly to the PARO.

Key information

Thursday, 2 May, 2024

Voting

Voting will take place throughout South Staffordshire on Thursday, 2 May, 2024.

Polling stations will be open from 7am-10pm.

A detailed breakdown of the location of all polling stations can be found at www.sstaffs.gov.uk/our-council/voting-and-elections/polling-stations

Ballot box receipting

Ballot box receipting will begin at the close of poll (10pm).

All ballot boxes will be receipted at South Staffordshire Council, Codsall Community Hub, Wolverhampton Road, WV8 1PX.

Friday, 3 May, 2024

South Staffordshire Council, Codsall Community Hub, Wolverhampton Road, WV8 1PX

Verification

Verification for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) will commence at 10am with all verification figures sent to the PARO by 1:30pm. Just before before 10am, the office space on the second floor will be opened up to allow entrance for Candidates, Agents and guests.

Count

The count will then commence at 2pm.

You will be able to enter the Community Hub from the main entrance by the doctors.

Free parking will be available in the Codsall Community Hub car park.

Candidates, Agents and guests will only be permitted entry by showing their count letter at the welcome desk and will be provided with a badge that must be worn at all times.

Candidates, Agents and guests can stay for the duration of the verification and count.

Mobile phones must be set to silent. No photographs or filming of the proceedings is allowed on the count floor whilst the verification and count is in progress.

Refreshments will be provided in the member's lounge on the ground floor. No food or drink is allowed on the count floor. There will be signs placed throughout the count venue to direct you.

Every person in attendance at the verification and count has a legal duty to maintain the secrecy of voting. They will be required to sign to say that they have read and understood the provisions.

There will be staff members on hand to guide you around the building and it will be sign posted accordingly.

If you need any help prior to the count, please contact the elections office.

If you need help during the verification and count, please speak to the floor supervisor.

PARO contact Details

Email: **PARO@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk**

Phone: **01283 508332**

Website: **www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/elections/upcoming-elections**

South Staffordshire Council contact details

Email: **elections@sstaffs.gov.uk**

Phone: **01902 696000**

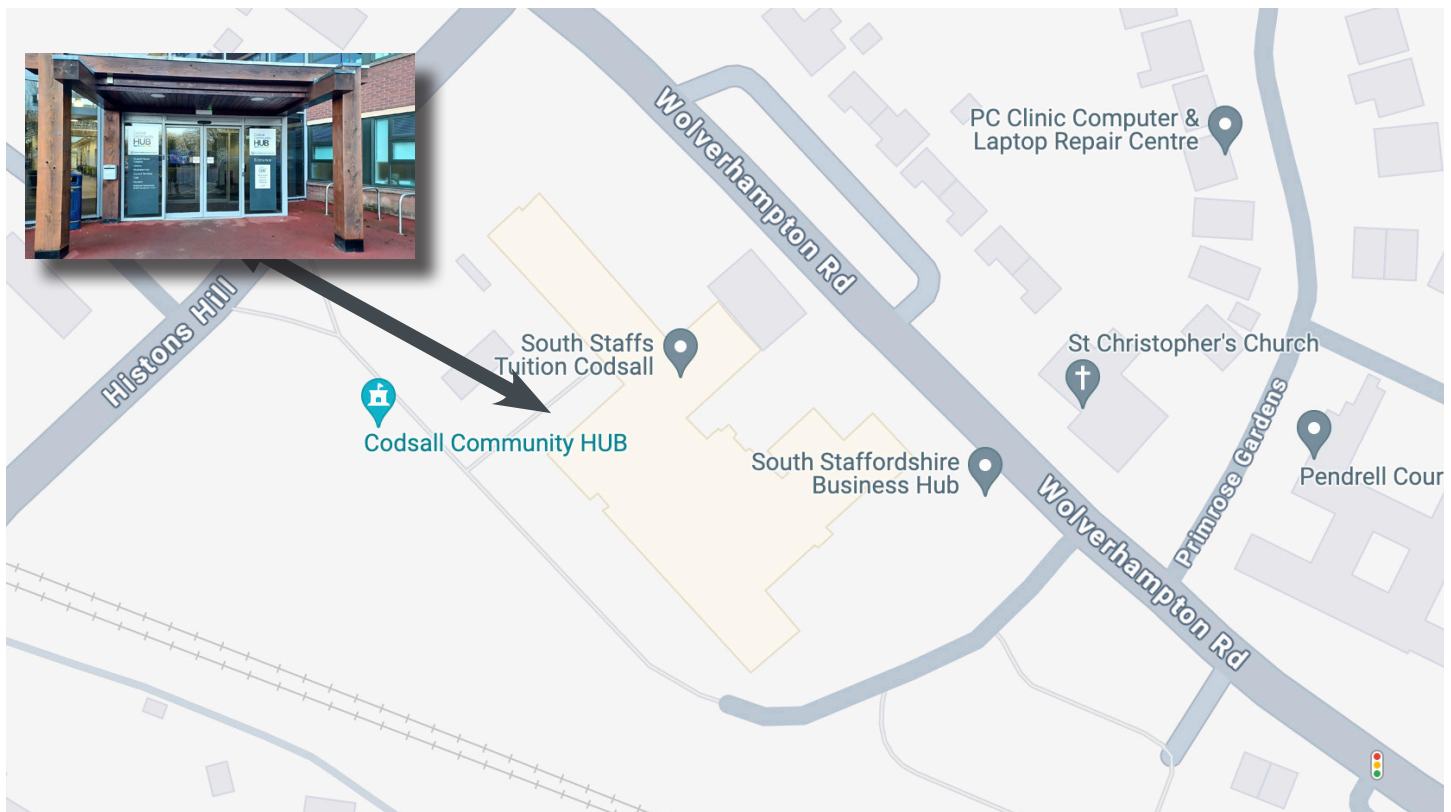
Website: **www.sstaffs.gov.uk/our-council/voting-and-elections/police-fire-and-crime-commissioner-2024-election**

Address: **South Staffordshire Council, Council Offices, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, WV8 1PX**

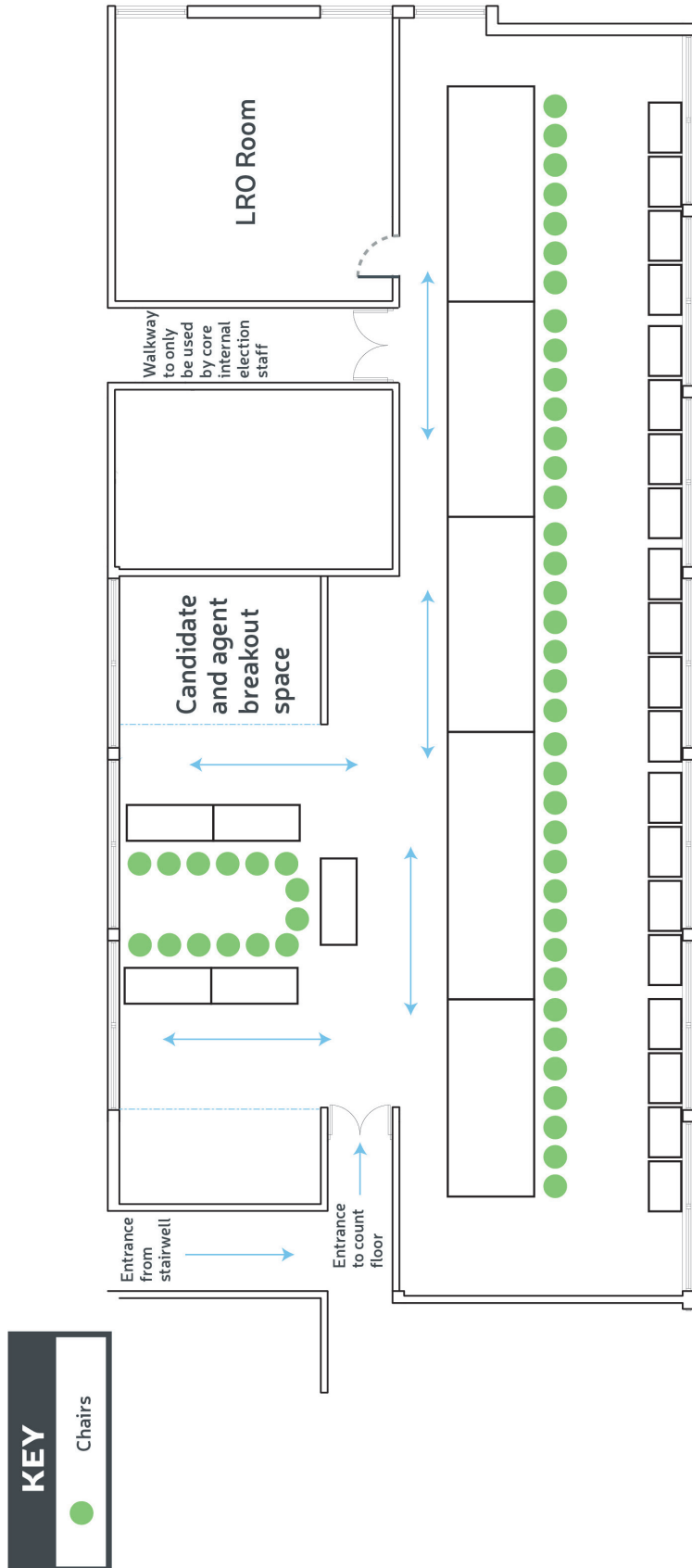
Main entrance of the Codsall Community Hub



Venue: South Staffordshire Council, Codsall Community Hub, Wolverhampton Road, WV8 1PX.



Count Floor Plan:



Receipt of ballot boxes

The receipt of the ballot boxes and stationery commences immediately after 10pm on Thursday, 2 May, 2024.

1. A ballot box receipting team will be appointed to receipt the paperwork and equipment from the polling stations. The delivery and receipt of ballot boxes will have been explained in detail to the Presiding Officers to ensure they are familiar with what will be required of them when they arrive at the venue.

All boxes will arrive with the Presiding Officer.

The team will be split into two sub teams to manage the process.

2. Each ballot box arrives through the main entrance next to the GP surgery, the following will be receipted from the Presiding Officer:

- The ballot box(es)
- The ballot paper account(s)
- Any postal votes handed in at the polling station (these will be in a labelled envelope)
- The assorted bags of stationery including the unused ballot books.

It is at this point that the ballot receipting team will ensure that all of the stationery is provided by the Presiding Officer, and they will not be permitted to leave unless all the items expected are receipted.

Another team will then start to open the unused ballot books and stationery and complete a set of paperwork. This is an important unseen part of the verification, as if there is a later problem with the figures on the ballot paper account, it can be compared against the unused paperwork. A visual plan of the drop-off route is out below:

3. The ballot boxes will then be securely transported to the second floor to be stored overnight until the count begins. Overnight security will be on hand to ensure the ballot boxes are secure. Motion sensor cameras will also be placed on the count floor overnight.

Verification

Verification will start at 10am. Verification is where the LRO has to ensure that the ballot papers returned from the polling stations tally with the return provided by the Presiding Officer responsible for the ballot box throughout polling day; and also, to double check the number of ballot papers received from the postal vote opening sessions. PFCC ballot papers will be on yellow paper.

The verification stage does not consider how the voters have completed their ballot papers. It is purely a numerical process but is very important because it establishes what has been received at each polling station throughout polling day, providing us with a clear audit trail.

Consequently, establishing the exact number of ballot papers is of paramount importance because these figures will underpin the actual count itself.

There will be seven experienced Head Counters who will each have an assistant and their own team of counters to manage, with the clear message that we want accuracy over speed. There will be two Zone Supervisors who will oversee the proceedings.

Stage 1

- The first exercise the Head Counter will be asked to do is to verify the postal vote ballot papers already received by the LRO prior to and including polling day. The postal vote ballot boxes will have been distributed to the teams following the postal vote opening session undertaken prior to the close of poll. As the poll has now closed all ballot papers will be dealt with face up.
- Once the figures tally, the Head Counter retains the postal votes in a clear box, and they will be added to the rest of the ballot papers received from the polling station as the verification and count commences.

Very important

1. The Head Counter has to record the number on the postal vote verification paperwork.
2. Once the postal votes are verified the team moves onto the polling station boxes allocated taking each box in turn emptying the contents carefully and slowly onto their table.
3. The teams carefully unfold the papers, turning them around so that they are all the same-way up and placed into neat piles. The ballot papers must be sorted face up.
4. Once arranged into neat piles, the teams then count the number of ballot papers and band into batches of 10. Remember, this is not a vote count, merely a count of the number of ballot papers received in the box. This must be completed carefully.
5. Once double checked the papers are further banded into packs of 10 to make 100. This may seem very simple, but it is this that causes the most problems in a count when trying to marry figures.
6. There may be on occasion the wrong paper in the wrong box for example from a double station. If this is the case the Head Counter will extract the paper from those in the box, make a record that they have extracted the paper and place in into a clear box so that it can be placed in the correct box.

7. Once counted the supervisor completes the verification slip for each ballot box received with the number counted.
8. It is hoped that at this stage the totals will agree with the ballot paper account received from the polling station.
9. If the figure does not tally, the Head Counter will recount the papers and the process is repeated until the LRO is satisfied that any disparity is or is not acceptable.
10. It is this tallying of the totals that is so important because it ensures a strict audit trail from the polling station through the verification to the count.
11. Once completed, a formal verification statement will be compiled and produced for the Candidates and Agents and displayed on the verification board. The verification statement details the returns from the polling stations and the postal vote returns. A calculation of the turnout will also be made. These figures will be formally recorded by the top table and declared by the LRO.
12. The figures will then be submitted to the PARO.

It is then extremely important that when the clear verified boxes are due to be moved away from the counting tables that they are sealed, the numbers recorded, and the box moved to the secure area ready for the count. This process is to be carried out in full view of any scrutineers and can only take place when instructed by the LRO. The process is repeated for all the boxes received.

Count

The count will commence at 2pm on Friday, 3 May, 2024.

This will be the first PFCC election to use the 'first-past-the-post' voting system where voters will be asked to vote for a single candidate. Previous PFCC elections have used a supplementary vote system where voters were asked to vote for a first and second choice. This election, and all future PFCC elections, will now use the 'first-past-the-post' method.

The PARO will collate all the totals from the authorities in the Staffordshire police force area and ascertain the winning candidate.

Count Assistants will be sorting the ballot papers into the candidates and taking out any doubtful ballot papers which will be passed to the Head Counter.

Once all the ballot papers have been sorted, they will be instructed to Count into 10s and then 100s for each candidate with the totals passed to the Head Counter. All doubtful papers are filtered, and the Head Counter ensures that these are kept in a separate tray for the Local Returning Officer to go through with the Candidates and Agents present. The legislation provides that you must reject a ballot paper which:

- does not bear the official mark (not the unique identifying mark)
- votes are given for more than one candidate
- on which anything is written or marked by which the voter can be identified (except the printed ballot paper number or other unique identifying mark)
- is unmarked or void for uncertainty

However, the legislation states that unless the way the ballot paper is marked identifies the voter, a ballot paper on which the vote is marked in the following ways must not be rejected if the voter's intention is clear:

- elsewhere than in the proper place
- otherwise, than by means of a cross, or
- by more than one mark

In addition, ballot papers may require further consideration where there is:

- anything unusual about it (for example, any ballot paper that appears to have been altered, either with a clearly different writing instrument or with correction fluid)
- any tears or damage to the ballot paper

Ballot papers that are torn or damaged are able to be accepted as a valid vote as long as the paper still contains the official mark, and the intention of the voter is clear and none of the other grounds for rejection apply.

Those votes considered valid for a candidate are added to the totals and the result compiled.

Further information and examples of doubtful ballot papers have been issued by the Electoral Commission www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-candidates-and-agents-police-and-crime-commissioner-elections/verification-and-count/how-votes-will-be-counted/doubtful-ballot-papers

Once all the tables have completed the count the provisional result will be shared with the Candidates and Agents and then sent to the PARO (Para 57(1) Sch 3 Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012)

The Result

At this stage there will be some waiting time whilst the PARO collates all the totals from the Staffordshire police area (Para 59, Schedule 3, Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012). Once the PARO has accepted our local figures, our Count Assistants will be allowed to leave.

Notification of secrecy requirements - the count

The Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012 Article 22 (3), (4) and (8)

- (3) Every person attending at the verification of the ballot paper accounts or the counting of the votes must maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and must not:
 - (a) ascertain or attempt to ascertain at the counting of the votes the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper;
 - (b) communicate any information obtained at the counting of the votes as to the candidate for whom any vote is given on any particular ballot paper.
- (4) No person attending at the verification of the ballot paper accounts may express to any person an opinion based on information obtained at that verification as to the likely result of the election.
- (8) A person who acts in contravention of this article is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months.

FAO The Local Returning Officer, South Staffordshire Council, Council Offices, Council Offices, Codsall, WV8 1PX

Email: elections@sstaffs.gov.uk

These conditions are accepted and understood on behalf of:

.....

The member of staff designated with in accordance with para.3 above is:

Name (please print)

Position

Signature

Date



South Staffordshire Council

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