



**Chief Executive & Corporate Resources**

Mr Joel Benjamin  
Request-338870-  
a8cd59f0@whatdotheyknow.com

Date: 4 August 2016  
Our Ref: FIDP/007495-15  
Enquiries to: Customer Relations  
Tel: (01454) 868009  
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**Sent via email to:**  
request-338870-  
a8cd59f0@whatdotheyknow.com

Dear Mr Benjamin

**RE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUEST**

Thank you for your request for information received on 07 June 2016. Further to our acknowledgement of 7<sup>TH</sup> June 2016, I am writing to provide the Council's response to your enquiry. This is provided at the end of this letter.

***The following information is sought in relation to communications, briefings, warnings and complaints issued by council Returning Officer & associated staff to prospective MP candidates, political parties and police in the lead up to, and conduct of, and subsequent enquiries into, the 2015 General Election.***

**FOIA Questions:**

- 1) Were all GE2015 MP Candidates issued with written guidelines including election procedures and spending rules, in line with Electoral Commission guidance? (see below for details)***

Yes all parliamentary candidates were issued with a copy of the Electoral Commission guidance on spending.

- 2) Please provide copies of GE2015 briefing sheets and written guidance provided by the Returning Officer (RO) or Acting Returning Officer (ARO) to prospective MPs.***

Information issued and a copy slides used in the presentation to candidates and agents (and which was sent to those candidates and agents who did not attend the training session) are attached to this email response.

- 3) What procedures and processes did the RO or ARO have in place to identify and manage issues threatening the legitimacy of the electoral process relating to MPs expenses? How were they implemented?***

All candidates/agents at the parliamentary election were provided with a copy of the full Electoral Commission guidance booklet which included information on spending returns, candidates and agents were invited to attend a briefing session which included information on spending for the short and long campaigns, candidates or their agents were provided with a copy of this information if they did not attend the meeting, as part of additional information provided candidates (or their agents) were given a set of the forms and declarations they needed to return to record expenses along with the Electoral Commission guidance information on completing the returns.

A process was in place for any candidates, agents or members of the public that contacted the elections office with concerns about any aspect of the election including election expenses to have their concern recorded and either responded to by the ARO or forwarded to the appropriate agency for further investigation (e.g. The Electoral Commission or the Police). Elections staff were instructed to forward any such concerns to a single point of contact within the team who was responsible for liaising with the ARO over responses and escalating actions.

In the week before the deadline for receipt of election expenses forms any candidates/agents who had not yet submitted returns were contacted with a reminder of the deadline. When expenses returns were delivered to the office they were checked for completeness, photocopied and scanned and forwarded to the Electoral Commission as per requirements. If the returns were incomplete, for example if forms for only one part of the campaign had been submitted, the person submitting was advised of what was missing so that they could rectify the error.

As per requirements the election expenses are available for public inspection by anyone for a period of two years. This inspection can be in person or on the payment of a fee set in legislation the expenses can be copied and sent to any person. Any queries raised by a person inspecting the returns would be forwarded to the Electoral Commission as they oversee compliance with election donations and spending.

***4) What complaints were lodged with the RO and ARO regarding electoral integrity and spending issues for GE2015?***

No complaints were lodged with the ARO regarding electoral integrity and spending issues for the Parliamentary General Election in 2015.

***5) What documented action did the RO or ARO take to address these complaints?***

Please see answer 4 above.

***6) What formal or informal warnings were issued to candidates or political parties?***

No formal or informal warnings were issued to candidates or political parties.

**7) What complaints were referred to local police?**

None as no complaints were made to the ARO.

**Background:** [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/175363/Part-A-Returning-Officer-role-and-responsibilities-UKPGE-LGEW.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/175363/Part-A-Returning-Officer-role-and-responsibilities-UKPGE-LGEW.pdf)

I trust that your questions you been satisfactorily answered. If you have any questions about this response then please contact me again via [FOI@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:FOI@southglos.gov.uk) or at the address below.

If you are not happy with this response you have the right to request an internal review by emailing [FOI@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:FOI@southglos.gov.uk). Please quote the reference number above when contacting the Council again.

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or via their website at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)

Yours sincerely

Natalie Carr  
Democratic and Member Services Manager  
cc CECR – Freedom of Information

FOI request reference: FIDP/007495-15	Request Title:
Date received: <(FOI)Request start date>	Service areas: Council & Democracy
Date responded: <DATE>	

FOI Request Questions	Responses
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