

Candidates and agents Briefing

Local government elections May 2021



 **Vale
of White Horse**
District Council

 **South Oxfordshire
District Council**

Listening Learning Leading

Topics

- who's who
- key dates of the election timetable
- staying safe – Covid considerations
- qualifications
- disqualifications
- nominations **changes and new forms**
- agents
- the poll
- postal votes
- counting of votes
- police and security
- candidate spending **new rates**
- contacts



County Council Elections – who's who

- County Returning Officer – Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
- County Deputy Returning Officers – Steve Jordan (Corporate Director) and Anita Bradley (Director of Law & Governance)
- County Election Planning – Glenn Watson, Principal Governance Officer
- At South and Vale – DROs Margaret Reed, Steven Corrigan and Susan Baker
- Ensuring a safe and well run election



County Council Election

- Candidacy – one criteria = being registered elector in LA area
 - For County Election: the ‘LA area’ is the county of Oxfordshire
- Verification/count - decentralised
 - Verification – Friday 7 May
 - Count – Sunday 9 May
- Briefing – for those not already attending
 - *Thursday 18 March at 5:15 (fall-back briefing: no need to attend if already attended a District briefing)*
- Arrangements for a “Member Welcome” event for newly elected and re-elected councillors is being planned for Friday 14 May
- Annual Council meeting: 10am on Tuesday 18 May



District and parish by-elections – who's who

- **The Returning Officer** is the person responsible for running the elections. The Returning Officer is **Margaret Reed**.
- **The Electoral Registration Officer** is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists. The Electoral Registration Officer is **Margaret Reed**.
- Deputy Returning Officers:
 - Susan Baker
 - Steven Corrigan



May 2021 elections

- **Police and Crime Commissioner election**

- **County council elections**

 - South Oxfordshire (12 divisions - 13 seats)

 - Vale of White Horse (11 divisions – 12 seats)

- **District council by elections**

 - South Oxfordshire – Didcot North East

 - Vale of White Horse – Grove North

- **Parish/town council by elections**

 - South Oxfordshire – Didcot Town Council (Didcot Ladygrove) and Wallingford Town Council

 - Vale of White Horse – Abingdon Town Council (Fitzharris Ock)

- **Neighbourhood Plan Referendums**



Election timetable

Publication of Notice of Election	Not later than Monday 29 March
Nominations commence	Monday 29 March
Close of nominations	4pm – Thursday 8 April
Notification of appointment of election agents	4pm – Thursday 8 April
Publication of statement of persons nominated	4pm – Friday 9 April
Deadline for applications to register to vote	Midnight – Monday 19 April
Deadline for new postal vote applications /changes to existing postal or proxy vote applications	5pm – Tuesday 20 April
Publication of notice of poll/situation of polling stations	Tuesday 27 April



Election timetable (cont'd)

Deadline for applications for new proxy votes	5pm – Tuesday 27 April
Appointment of counting and polling agents	Wednesday 28 April
Polling day	Thursday 6 May – 7am to 10pm
Deadline to apply to vote by proxy on grounds of medical emergency or if unexpectedly called away because of employment or service Covid proxy - new	5pm – polling day
Replacement for lost/spoilt postal votes ends	5pm – polling day
Alterations to register to correct clerical error	9pm – polling day
Return of election expenses	+ 35 days from result



New county division boundaries

- The Vale of White Horse (Electoral Changes) Order 2019
- The South Oxfordshire (Electoral Changes) Order 2019

Alterations to boundaries implemented for these elections to ensure county divisions are coterminous with parish boundary changes implemented in May 2019



Staying safe – Covid considerations

General public health principles that everyone should follow in all aspects of daily life, including participating in elections:

- Maintain social distancing
- Clean hands regularly
- Avoid touching your face
- Wear a face covering where necessary
- No-one should attend any electoral events if they are unwell, symptomatic with COVID-19, a confirmed case or a confirmed contact of someone who is self-isolating



Qualifications

- Candidates must satisfy criteria on the day they are nominated **and** on polling day:
 - be at least 18 years of age
 - be a British, qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or national of an EU member state.
- Also at least one of the following:
 - Registered local government elector for local authority area
 - Occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises in the local authority area during the whole 12 months preceding nomination
 - Principal or only place of work (including unpaid) during last 12 months in local authority area
 - Lived in the local authority area during the last 12 months



Disqualifications

A person **cannot** be a candidate if they:

- are **employed by the local authority** or hold a paid office under the authority (including joint boards or committees). Candidates may be 'employed by the local authority' if they work at certain schools, fire services, police or health services
- are subject of a **Bankruptcy Restrictions Order** (or interim restrictions order) in England or Wales
- have been sentenced to a term of **imprisonment** of three months or more (inc. suspended sentence) without option of a fine, during the 5 years before polling day
- are serving a disqualification due to being found guilty of a **corrupt or illegal practice** by an election court
- hold a **politically restricted post**



Submitting nomination papers

- The documents that must be submitted by all candidates by 4pm **Thursday 8 April** to the **Council Offices, 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton, Abingdon OX14 4SB** are:
 - the nomination form
 - their home address form
 - the consent to nomination
- Party candidates will also need to submit, by 4pm – **Thursday 8 April**:
 - A certificate authorising the use of a party name/ registered description on the ballot paper
 - A written request to use one of the party's emblems on the ballot paper (optional)



Submitting nomination papers

- Take care when completing your nomination papers, as mistakes may invalidate your nomination
- Complete nomination papers early and **do** arrange for us to provide an informal check via email or by hand in advance
- The nomination form, home address form and consent to nomination **must be delivered by hand** and cannot be submitted by post, fax, email or other electronic means
- Appointment system in operation – please use
- Forms will be handed via an open window.



Nomination form

- Include your full name
- Optional: use commonly used name box(es) if commonly known by a name other than actual name and wish to use it instead. But you cannot use your first name as a commonly used name to exclude your middle name.
- Description field – 3 options:
 - leave blank
 - Independent
 - party candidates can use party name or description authorised by a certificate issued by or on behalf of the Nominating Officer



Nomination form

Changed

- Subscribers: 2 subscribers are required, **Note reduction from 10 to 2**
- Must sign and print their names. Check details of subscribers against electoral register.
- Only ask subscribers to sign **after** completing the name, address and description fields on the form.
- When collecting signatures, it is important that you follow the latest government guidelines on social distancing, face coverings and hand hygiene, as well as the latest government guidelines on local restrictions
- Data protection requirements



Home address form

Changed

- Part 1 of the home address form must state:
 - your full name and home address in full
 - your qualifying address, or, where you have declared on your consent to nomination that you meet more than one qualification, your qualifying addresses
 - which of the qualifications your qualifying address or addresses relate to (a, b, c and/or d) (you should complete all qualifications that apply).
 - the full name and the home address in full of the witness to your consent to nomination



Home address form (cont.)

Changed

- Part 2 of the home address form **must be submitted** even if your address is to be made public.
- Complete the form only if you do not want your home address to be made public
 - The name of the relevant area in which your home address is situated e.g. **South Oxfordshire or Vale of White Horse** (if your home address is in the UK),
 - if you live outside the UK, the name of the country in which your home address is situated.



Consent to nomination form

- Must include:
 - name
 - which area standing in
 - confirmation of qualification(s) that apply (at least 1, but select all that apply)
 - date of birth & signature
 - date of consent (**NOT** earlier than 9 March)
 - witness' name and signature



Certificate of authorisation

- Party candidates must have written permission to use the party name/description from the Nominating Officer (or a person authorised to act on their behalf)
- The certificate may:
 - allow the use of the party name or a particular description
 - allow candidate to choose whether to use the party name or any of the descriptions registered with the Electoral Commission
- Must be submitted by 4pm **Thursday 8 April**



Emblem request form

- Party candidates can ask for an emblem to be printed on the ballot paper
- Emblem request form must be submitted by 4pm
Thursday 8 April
- Party candidates should supply an electronic version of the emblem to the Returning Officer if required



Joint candidates

- Nominated by **more than one party**
- May use registered joint descriptions
 - must be supported by certificate of authorisation **from each party**
- May use one emblem of one of the parties but there are no joint emblems



Election agent

- Responsible for the proper management of your election campaign; particularly its financial management.
- Notification of appointment must reach the RO by 4pm - **Thursday 8 April**. Form is included in nomination pack.
- You will become your own agent by default if none is appointed.



Other agents

- Other agents can be appointed to attend postal vote openings, polling stations and the count on your behalf:
 - You must give notice in writing of any people appointed as polling and counting agents by **Wednesday 28 April**.
 - The appointment of postal voting agents attending a particular opening session must be made before the start of the session. We will give 48 hours' notice.



Access to electoral register/ absent voting lists

- Access by candidates – once you **officially** become a candidate:
 - earliest, on **Monday 29 March** if you, or others declared yourself a candidate
 - once you or others have declared yourself a candidate after this date / date you submit your nomination papers
- Make **written** request to the ERO at regrequests@southandvale.gov.uk



Access to electoral register / absent voting lists

- **Only use data for permitted purposes!**
 - to complete the nomination form
 - to help you campaign
 - to check that donations/loans are permissible



Registration

- As a candidate you are uniquely placed to encourage people to register to vote.
- You should encourage people to register as soon as possible.
- The deadline for applying for the election is **Monday 19 April**
- Individuals can apply to register online at **<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>**. It only takes a few minutes.



Registration

- When discussing registering to vote with individuals, you will need to make them aware that they will need to provide:
 - their National Insurance number
 - date of birth and address
- People who do not have / cannot retrieve their National Insurance number can still register, but they may need to provide further information. If so, they will be contacted by the ERO.



Absent voting

- If you are encouraging people who don't have a postal (or proxy) vote to apply for one, make sure you explain that they will only qualify for one in time for the elections if they are (or will be) registered in time to vote at the elections.
- Proxy voter must be a registered elector and able to attend polling station unless altered to Postal Proxy by 5pm 20 April.



Campaigning

- Guidance issued on 26 Feb
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-secure-election-campaigning-will-go-ahead>
- Individual activists able to campaign outdoors in a COVID-secure way from 8 March.
- You should continue to check the latest government guidelines on national and local restrictions, and be aware that different restrictions could apply to different parts of the electoral area



Campaigning dos and don'ts

- Do use imprints on all your campaign material, including websites.
- Do comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners.
- Do make sure outdoor posters are removed two weeks after the election.
- Do not produce material that looks like a poll card.
- Do not pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).



Code of conduct for campaigners

- Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, but their activities should not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.
- Electoral registration and absent vote applications:
 - Ensure forms fully conform to the requirements of electoral law
 - Include the ERO's address for the return of forms
 - Ensure unaltered applications are sent to ERO within **two working days**.
 - Make sure electors understand implications of applying for an absent vote.
 - Do not encourage postal ballot pack redirection.
 - Do not encourage electors to appoint a campaigner as proxy.



Code of conduct for campaigners

- Postal ballot packs:
 - Never touch a postal ballot paper
 - Never observe electors completing their postal vote.
 - Never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot pack from voters
- Campaigning outside polling stations:
 - You are allowed to put your messages to voters on polling day, including public spaces outside polling places.
 - Keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter.
 - **Standards of behaviour within the vicinity of the polling place on polling day, on Commission website, particularly in light of coronavirus (for example, maintaining social distancing).**



Polling day

- Changes to polling stations – alternatives and additions
- Voters should be encouraged to check their poll card before polling day, to see if their polling station has changed since previous elections
- We have put arrangements in place to ensure that polling stations are safe places to vote
- Most of the measures that will be in place will be familiar to us all from visiting other public places such as shops and banks, for example floor markings to ensure social distancing and the provision of hand sanitiser on entry and exit
- Voters will be encouraged to bring their own pen or pencil for use in polling stations, but pencils will also be made available for anyone who needs one
- We can provide you with a final list of polling stations.



Tellers

- Please refer to Electoral Commission guidance
- We request that all tellers are outside the building to enable social distancing (covid-19 measure)
- Please ask tellers to respect 2 metre rule when speaking to electors (covid-19 measure)
- Please be aware that doors and windows will be open in polling stations (Covid-19 measure) so please remind tellers that they must not be able to hear or see within the station
- One way systems in operation (covid-19 measure) – different entrances/exits
- Electors are not allowed to re-enter station to get elector number
- Chairs cannot be borrowed from polling stations (covid-19 measure), please ask your volunteers to bring their own if they need to sit
- Queue marshals will be assigned to many stations, please keep distance (covid-19 measure)



Polling day

- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm
- Office open 6:30am to 10pm for queries or problems relating to the administration of the election
 - for queries relating to election finance issues, contact the Electoral Commission (*contact details shown later*)
- Voters in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station at 10 pm can apply for a ballot paper
- Postal votes – can be handed into polling stations within [ward/division] or delivered to the elections office until 10pm.
- A person in a queue at a polling station at 10pm waiting to hand in a postal vote can do so after 10pm.



Postal votes

- Combined issue for PCC/County Council
- Combined issue of district/parish by elections and NPRs
- The **first batch** of postal votes will be despatched on **Tuesday 20 April/Wednesday 21 April**
- The **second and final batch** will be despatched on **Monday 26 April**
- Overseas electors' packs will be issued as soon as practicable from the printers



Postal vote opening

- All postal vote opening sessions will be at **Abbey House, Abingdon** – one room for South and one for Vale
- The purpose of agents attending is to oversee the process and **not** to tally votes cast
- Opening sessions are:
 - Monday 26 April from 10.30am
 - Tuesday 27 April from 10.30am
 - Wednesday 28 April to Friday 30 April from 9.30am
 - Saturday 1 May (provisional) from 9.30am
 - Monday 3 May (provisional) from 9.30am
 - Tuesday 4 May to Friday 7 May from 9.30am
- Depending on the number of postal votes, some sessions may finish early/late
- Immediately prior to these sessions staff will slit the outer envelopes in preparation for processing



Counting of votes

- We will be making adaptations to the verification and count in light of the public health situation.
- The anticipated duration of the count is likely to be longer than usual because of the impact of measures to ensure the safety of staff and observers.
- The verification and counts will be held at:
 - White Horse Leisure & Tennis Centre, Audlett Drive, Abingdon OX14 3PJ
 - Verification - Friday 7 May 2021
 - By-Elections and NPR Counts - TBC
 - Oxfordshire CC Count – Sunday 9 May 2021
 - PCC count – Monday 10 May 2021



Counting of votes

- Further briefing to be held on **15 April at 5pm** specifically to deal with the verification and count arrangements
- Likely to be a limit on the number who can attend the verification and counts
- Will be a need to adhere to all Covid requirements at the count venue.



Police and security

- The police will be visiting polling stations throughout polling day
- There will also be a security presence at the count venue
- Wristbands will be distributed prior to the counts and must be worn to gain entry
- Please assist with security by not bringing large bags to the verification or count – they may be searched
- Only those authorised to be at the count will be allowed entry so you must bring the relevant paperwork
- Any incidents should be reported to the police using 101 or 999 as appropriate



Police – contraventions of electoral law

- Please refer any alleged contraventions of electoral law to the police SPOC

DS Conor Breen

Economic Crime Unit – Headquarters North

Email: ECUElectoral@thamesvalley.pnn.police.uk

- Be prepared to give the police a statement and to substantiate any allegations



Spending issues



Candidate spending

New Rates

- Defined as certain expenses 'used for the purposes of the candidate's election' during the regulated period.
- Responsibility of **election agent**
- Limit on expenses:
 - £806 + 7 pence per elector in ward/division on register in force on **29 March**
 - reduced for joint candidates
- Must get and keep receipts (over £20)



Candidates' spending returns

- Returns due 35 calendar days after result of election
- Returns made public by **Returning Officer**
- Sample of returns may be reviewed by the **Electoral Commission**
- Failure to submit a spending return is a criminal offence enforceable by police
- No spending will be reimbursed



Contacts

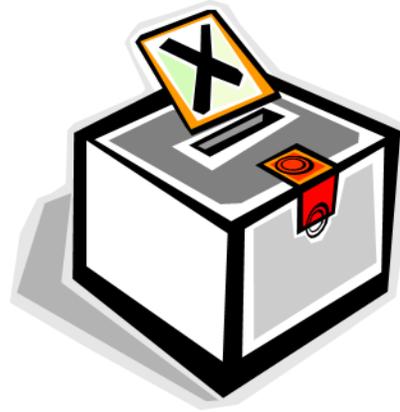


Contacts

- Elections office – elections@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422528 or visit our websites at www.southoxon.gov.uk and www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk
- Electoral Commission contacts - telephone 0333 103 1928 or website www.electoralcommission.org.uk



ANY questions?



Thank you



Listening Learning Leading