

MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

Candidates and agents briefing

15 April 2021



Introductions

- Margaret Reed is the Returning Officer for South and Vale
- Deputy Returning Officers (DROs):
 - Steven Corrigan
 - Susan Baker
 - David Garner

- Anita Bradley, DRO for Oxfordshire County council elections



County Council Elections

- County Returning Officer – Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive
- County Deputy Returning Officers – Steve Jorden (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

- Verification/count - decentralised
 - Verification – Friday 7 May
 - Count – Sunday 9 May

- Arrangements for a “Member Welcome” event for newly elected and re-elected councillors is being planned for Friday 14 May

- Declarations of Acceptance of Office etc. at Member Welcome Event

- Annual Council meeting: 10am on Tuesday 18 May



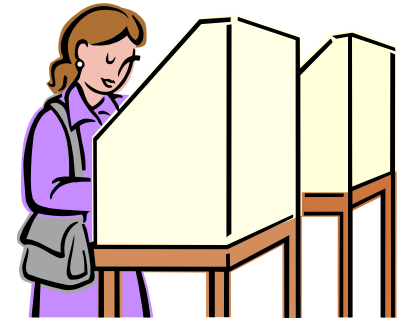
District and parish by-elections – who's who

- **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



Areas to be covered

- Timetable
- Appointments of agents
- Postal votes
- Registers
- Counts
- Security



May 2021 elections

- **Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)**
- **Oxfordshire County Council**
 - South Oxfordshire (12 divisions - 13 seats)
 - Vale of White Horse (11 divisions – 12 seats)
- **District council by-elections**
 - Grove North (Vale)
 - Didcot North East (South)
 - Forest Hill & Holton (South)
- **Parish council by-elections**
 - Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council: Fitzharris Ock ward (Vale)
 - Didcot Town Council: Ladygrove ward – two seats (South)
 - Thame Town Council: North ward (South)
 - Wallingford Town Council (uncontested) (South)
- **Neighbourhood Planning Referendums**
 - Seven in South and three in Vale



Information available

- Electoral Commission guidance for candidates and agents including
 - election timetables
 - polling agent, postal voting and counting agents' appointment forms
 - requests for electoral register and absent voters' list
 - code of conduct for campaigners – postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations
 - tellers' guidance and dos and don'ts

All are available from the Electoral Commission website

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent>

- Security guidance for candidates available at this [link](#) on gov.uk website



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 and change it regularly
- 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
- Asymptomatic rapid lateral flow testing is available at testing centres (Wantage, Oxford, Banbury and Carterton) or by ordering home testing kits from the gov.uk website



Statutory deadlines

- Electoral registration deadline is midnight on 19 April
- Postal vote application deadline is 5pm on 20 April – new applications and any changes to existing postal/proxy arrangements
- Publication of notices of poll/situation of polling stations – not later than 27 April
- Deadline for application for a new proxy vote – 5pm on 27 April
- Appointment of counting and polling agents – 28 April



Statutory deadlines contd

- Thursday 6 May – POLLING DAY
 - 5pm deadline to apply to vote by proxy on grounds of medical emergency (including self-isolation due to covid) or if unexpectedly called away because of employment or service
 - 5pm deadline for re-issue of spoilt or lost postal votes at Milton Park
 - 9pm last time to alter register due to clerical error
- Return of election expenses – the date varies for each type of election and date of poll/declaration date so please check Electoral Commission website



Access to electoral register/absent voters' list

- Available to candidates for each election provided a written request to the electoral registration officer is made
- Make **written** request to the ERO at regrequests@southandvale.gov.uk
- Registers can only be used for the following permitted purposes:
 - to assist candidates in their campaign
 - to check that any donations/loans are permissible

It is unlawful to use for other than electoral purposes



Electoral Commission 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

- **Absent vote applications:**

- make sure electors understand implications of absent vote
- do not encourage postal ballot pack redirection
- do not encourage electors to appoint a campaigner as a proxy

- **Postal ballot packs:**

- never touch a postal ballot paper or observe electors completing their postal vote
- do not encourage electors to give you their completed postal ballot paper or envelope

- **Polling stations:**

- keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter
- please do not park vehicles displaying election material outside or near polling stations



Campaigning

- Use imprints on all your campaign material, it is advisable to include it on all website and social media material
- Political signs on the highway need county council approval
- Political signs generally need approval of the landowner
- Do not produce material that looks like a poll card or ballot paper
- Do not pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business, e.g. newspapers)



Campaigning

- Guidance issued on 26 Feb <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-secure-election-campaigning-will-go-ahead>
- Individual activists have been 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



Postal votes

- Combined issue for PCC and County
- Separate issue for District / Parish / NPR, combined
- The **first batch** of postal votes due to be despatched to Royal Mail on **20 April**
- The **second and final batch** will be despatched to Royal Mail on or about **26 April**
- First date for reissue of replacement of lost postal votes **29 April**



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 may slit the outer envelopes in preparation for processing



Postal vote opening agents

The number of postal vote opening agents that can be appointed is as follows:

- Postal vote opening agents per candidate:
 - County 1 agent
 - District 1 agent
 - Parish 1 agent
- Note that not all the opening sessions may take place or may shorten due to the volumes of votes returned



Postal Vote opening – Covid measures

- Staff are in bubbles, and we ask for this to be respected and only one opening session is attended per day (no mixing between rooms)
- Masks are mandatory in Abbey House for all
- Hand sanitising is required on entry and exit
- 2 metre distancing to be maintained at all times
- To assist staff, please try and notify us of your attendance in advance



Polling day



- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm
- Anyone entering a polling station **must** follow the guidelines
- Staff instructed to show ballot box empty prior to sealing if candidates/agents are present at the opening of the poll
- All ballot papers will be posted into the same ballot box apart from at five stations which have two county divisions requiring a separate box for each division. Some stations will have up to three boxes due to electorate /ballot paper size
- Voters at the polling station in a queue in the polling station at 10pm will be allowed to vote
- Voters will not be allowed to join queues after 10pm
- Postal votes – can be handed into polling stations within area relevant to the vote or delivered to the elections office until 10pm
- Changes to polling stations have been notified on poll cards, signage sent to usual venues not being used this time and a polling station finder made available on our websites



Changes to Polling Stations - South

Reference	Designated Polling Place	Polling Place booked for May 2021	Reason
S1, S2	Benson Parish Hall, Sunnyside, Benson	Benson Youth Hall, Oxford Road, Benson	unavailable
S100, S101	Didcot Civic Hall, Britwell Road, Didcot	The Barn, Foxhall Road, Didcot	unavailable
S104	Northbourne Centre, Church Street, Didcot	Didcot Leisure Centre	not suitable, split double station
S108	St Mary's Church, Market Place	Wallingford Methodist Church,	split double station
S49	Culham School, High Street, Culham	Clifton Hampden Cricket/Social Club	unavailable
S53	Clifton Hampden Village Hall, Abingdon Road	Clifton Hampden Cricket/Social Club	unavailable
S54	Shiplake Scout Hut, Shiplake Row	Shiplake Memorial Hall, Memorial Avenue, Shiplake	unavailable
S64	Youth Centre, Lord Williams`s School, Thame	Christchurch Centre, Upper High Street, Thame	unavailable
S65	Youth Centre, Lord Williams`s School, Thame	Chinnor Rugby Club, Kingsley Road, Thame	unavailable
S70	Fox & Hounds Public House, Christmas Common	Watlington Parish Office, 1 Old School Place, Gorwell	not suitable
S74	Highmoor Cross Memorial Hall, Highmoor Cross	Stoke Row Village Hall, Main St, Stoke Row	unavailable
S87	Cholsey Cricket Pavilion, Fair Mile	The Great Hall, Fair Mile, Cholsey	not suitable
S90	The Crown, South Moreton	North Moreton Village Hall, Bear Lane, North Moreton	not suitable
S91, S92	Ladygrove Community Centre, Tamar Way, Didcot	Willowbrook Leisure Centre, Bowmont Water, Off Avon Way	unavailable
S97, S98	Didcot Civic Hall, Britwell Road, Didcot	Southern Neighbourhood Community Centre, Sorrel Crescent, Great Western Park, Didcot	unavailable
S99	Northbourne Centre, Church Street, Didcot	King Alfred Drive Community Centre, King Alfred Drive, Didcot	not suitable, split double station



Changes to Polling Stations - Vale

Reference	Designated Polling Place	Polling Place booked for May 2021	Reason
V118	The Corn Exchange, Faringdon	Faringdon Leisure Centre	split triple station
V120	The Corn Exchange, Faringdon	Dining Room, Sudbury House Hotel	split triple station
V129	Evangelical Chapel, Kingston Road, Frilford	Cox's Sports Pavilion, Abingdon Prep School	unavailable
V132	Marcham sports and social club	The Marcham Centre, Barrow Close, Marcham	unavailable
V143	Shellingford Community Hall	Stanford In the Vale Village Hall, Hunters Field,	unavailable
V154	Reading Room Littleworth	Church of The Holy Ascension, Littleworth,	not suitable
V157	The Beacon, Portway, Wantage	Wantage Baptist Church, Mill Street	unavailable
V158	The Beacon, Portway, Wantage	Wantage Methodist Church	unavailable
V159	The Beacon, Portway, Wantage	Wantage Town Football Club	unavailable
V173 & V174	St Johns Ambulance, 200 Caldecott Road	Abingdon Rugby Club	unavailable
V202	Site Office, Pebble Hill, Mobile Home Park, Radley	Radley Church Room, Church Road Radley	not suitable



Tellers

Tellers have no legal status

Please issue all tellers and campaigners with a copy of the Electoral Commission Tellers guidance and Tellers Do's and Don'ts

There should be no more than one teller at a polling station for each candidate/party at any time

Tellers **MUST**:

- always remain outside the polling station building

Tellers **MUST NOT**:

- be able to see or hear what is happening in the polling station
- impede, obstruct or intimidate voters
- demand information
- use undue influence

Tellers **MAY**:

- display a coloured rosette or badge displaying the name of the candidate, party and/or emblem or description; the rosette/badge should not bear a slogan and must not be oversized
- no political face coverings please



Tellers – Covid measures

- For this election all tellers **must** remain outside the building to enable social distancing
- Please ask tellers to respect 2 metre rule at all times when speaking to electors
- Please be aware that doors and windows will be open in polling stations so please remind tellers that they **must** not be able to hear or see within the station
- One way systems in operation – different entrances/exits - please choose entry or exit but not both
- Electors are not allowed to re-enter station to get elector number
- Chairs cannot be borrowed from polling stations for this election, please ask your volunteers to bring their own if they need to sit
- Queue marshals will be assigned to many stations, please keep distance



Verification and counts

- The venue for the verification and all counts will be:

White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, Abingdon-on-Thames OX14 3PJ

- Count centre will open at 9.45am
- ONLY Candidates, election agents and counting agents appointed by the candidate are entitled to attend – NO GUESTS
- Agents need to manage arrival time and expectations of candidates of the likely timetable
- No photography or filming (except of declaration of results)



Verification and Counts – Covid measures

- No-one should attend on any day if they are unwell, symptomatic with COVID-19, a confirmed case or a confirmed contact of someone who is self-isolating
- Wristbands must be worn to obtain entry
- One way system in place
- All attendees must wear a face mask – please appoint agents who are willing to do this
- All attendees must sanitise and keep 2 metre distance
- Candidates and Agents must remain at least 2 metres away from count staff at all times
- There are no on-site café facilities or toilets – everything is outside
- Access is restricted to the tennis hall only – it will be well ventilated so please dress accordingly
- Adjudication of doubtful papers will be centralised via a large monitor – which may take longer than usual
- Attendees are strongly requested to remain in one counting area and minimise movement around the hall – use WhatsApp or text to communicate, voice calls must be away from the counting area, ideally out of the room
- Smaller count teams which will mean counts are likely to take longer than usual



Counting agents

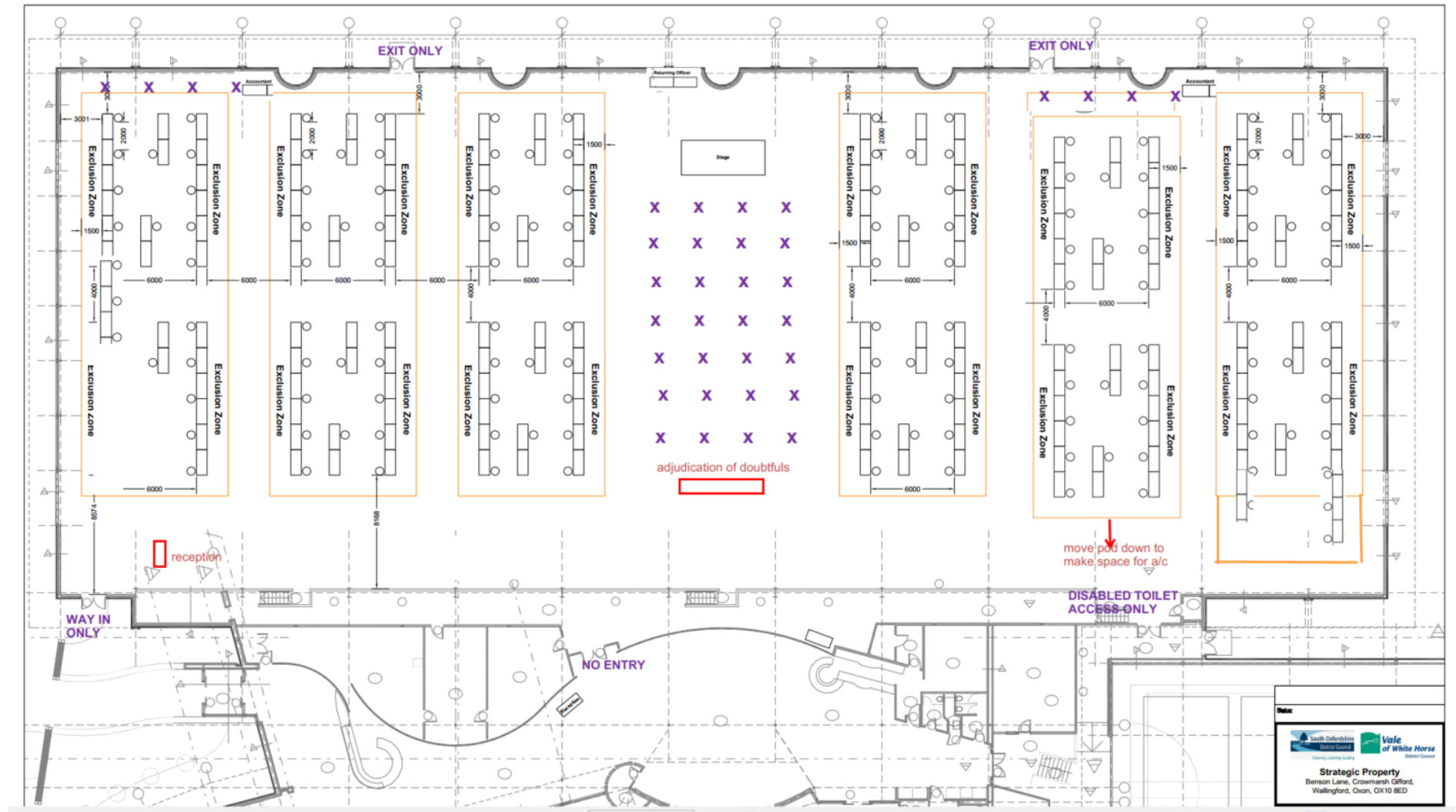
Please note these allocations are limited by the venue capacity

- **Counting agents per candidate**

- County **1 agent**
- District **1 agent**
- Parish **1 agent**
- *Please note that on completion of the verification ALL candidates and agents will be asked to leave the count venue*
- Wrist bands will be posted out to candidates/agents in advance – please distribute – no wristband, no entry



The counting hall



Verification – Friday 7 May

- Verification will start at 10am – entry from 9.45am
- At the conclusion of the verification ballot papers will be mixed for each election and all candidates and agents will be asked to leave the hall
- Once the mixing has been completed, by-elections and NPR's will be counted (from approximately 3pm on Friday)
- Please manage expectations on timings and explain that at times count staff will be awaiting clearance before going on to the next steps



By-Election counts and NPR's

- Counts will start at approximately 3pm on Friday 7 May – but could be later
- If we consider that any counts cannot be completed by 6pm, we may defer them to Sunday 9 May and give fresh notice
- Counts will start simultaneously but will take varying times to complete
- For the 2-member parish ward we will where possible block vote first then use “Kangaroo Boards”
- Adjudication of doubtfuls (based on Electoral Commission guidance) and preliminary results will be in the central area
- Candidates on marked spots in front of the stage for announcements - no winner speeches
- Results will be posted on the councils' websites and provided to the relevant parish councils



County Council counts – Sunday 9 May

- ONLY candidates, election agents and counting agents appointed by the candidate are entitled to attend – NO GUESTS
- All counts will commence at 10am – entry from 9.45am
- Counts will start simultaneously but will take varying times to complete
- Where possible we will block vote the two member divisions before using “Kangaroo Boards”
- Adjudication of doubtfuls (based on Electoral Commission guidance) and preliminary results will be in the central area
- Draft results will be shared with the county council Returning Officer and clearance awaited before they can be announced
- Candidates not invited onto the stage - no winner speeches
- Results will be uploaded to the county council’s website
- Estimated time for completion of counts is mid to late afternoon



PCC count – Monday 10 May

- First stage count to start 10am – entry from 9.45am
- Second stage count to start no earlier than 12.30pm
- Candidates and agents invited to a separate briefing by the Police Area Returning Officer (PARO)



PCC count – supplementary vote system

- All first preference votes counted
- If one candidate has 50% plus one they are declared the winner
- If no candidate has 50% plus one, the top two candidates are taken through to second stage, the other candidates are eliminated and their votes are redistributed. Any new votes for the top two candidates are added to their totals from stage one
- Whoever then has the most votes wins



PCC count for South and Vale local areas

- Adjudication of doubtfuls (based on Electoral Commission guidance) and sharing of local figures will be in the central area
- Local figures will be shared with the Police Area Returning Officer and clearance awaited
- Thames Valley result will be announced by the PARO at Spiceball Leisure Centre in Banbury
- Results will be uploaded to Cherwell District Council's website



Listening Learning Leading

Verification and Counts

- Your feedback and questions



Police and security

- The police may be visiting polling stations throughout polling day
- There will be a security presence at the count venue
- Any incidents should be reported to the police using 101 or 999 as appropriate
- Please assist with security by not bringing any bags to the verification or count
- Only those authorised to be at the verification or count are guaranteed entry so you must bring the relevant paperwork and wear the wristband that will be issued



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



Candidate spending

- 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 + £0.07 per elector in ward on register in force on **Tuesday 26 March**
 - reduced for joint candidates
- Must get and keep receipts (over £20)



Candidates' spending returns

- Please see deadlines for returns on Electoral Commission website
- 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



Candidates' spending

- Candidates' spending is regulated by the Electoral Commission and is laid out in the Candidates and Agents Guidance
- Any enquiries should be referred to the Electoral Commission
www.electoralcommission.org.uk
- Contacts at the commission:
0333 103 1928
pef@electoralcommission.org.uk



Electoral guidance

- Please use the Electoral Commission Guidance for Candidates and Agents. This guidance is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the election process
- Please download the guidance for party supporters, such as tellers, and issue copies to them.
- Electoral Commission website for candidates and agents

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent>



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?

