



## **Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee**

**Date:** 15 April 2021

**Title:** Unitary, Parish and Police & Crime Commissioner Elections May 2021 – Public Health & COVID Secure Measures

**Author:** Nick Graham, Buckinghamshire Council Returning Officer

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Recommendation:** To note the measures in place for delivering the May 2021 Elections.

### **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report provides an overview in relation to the public health and COVID secure measures that have been put in place for the delivery of the Unitary, Parish, and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) Elections scheduled for 6 May 2021.

### **2. Background**

2.1 The Unitary, Parish & PCC Elections are currently scheduled for 6 May 2021, following the postponed elections in May 2020.

2.2 The Verification for all elections will take place on Friday 7 May, with the Counts for the Buckinghamshire Council Elections and the contested Town & Parish Elections taking place on 8 May. The Police Area Returning Officer (PARO) for the Thames Valley Region has directed that the counts for the PCC Election will take place on 10 May.

2.3 A huge amount of work has been undertaken to ensure that the elections are held safely and securely. All Government and Electoral Commission guidance has been adhered to, and work has also been undertaken with colleagues in Public Health.

2.4 Attached is a document entitled “6 May Elections 2021: COVID Secure Measures”, which sets out how the elections will be delivered safely and securely. This document has been compiled in conjunction with Public Health colleagues, who fully support its contents and have approved the document. A copy is enclosed with the report as appendix ‘A’.

### **3. Public Health & COVID Secure Measures**

3.1 The overwhelming aim is to ensure that the elections are delivered safely, securely and effectively. As a result every aspect of election delivery has been considered, including the

nominations process, back office working, canvassing, postal vote return and counting, in person polling stations staff, in station voters, ballot box collection and distribution to counting centres, and Counting centres themselves.

- 3.2 The document agreed with Public Health addresses each of these aspects, setting out the infective opportunities and the key strategies to mitigate against them. An array of measures have been implemented, including face coverings, social distancing, hand hygiene, cleaning 'touch' points regularly, electors bringing their own pencil/pen to the polling stations, the use of screens for all activities including inside polling stations, rooms administering the nominations process, rooms used for postal vote opening, and at each Counting centre.
- 3.3 A number of control measures are being implemented to limit any possible transmission of the virus, and these include minimising contact between individuals and maintaining social distancing, cleaning hands thoroughly and regularly, wearing of face coverings at all times, clear communication to all, including voters, candidates and agents, enhanced cleaning of surfaces and provision of hand sanitisers, PPE for all polling stations, and keeping occupied spaces well ventilated.
- 3.4 For the postal vote opening sessions, all opening staff will wear face coverings, and will social distancing. Screens will also be used in the opening rooms. Hand sanitisers will also be in use and materials will regularly be wiped and cleaned. Attendees will be limited due to the restrictions on numbers present within certain spaces.
- 3.5 A huge amount of work has been undertaken to ensure polling stations are safe places to visit on polling day. Control measures include hand sanitisers, regular cleaning of materials, staff, candidates & agents, and electors maintaining a safe space of two metres from each other all times, where possible one entrance and a different exit from the building, and good ventilation. Face covering will be mandatory inside all polling stations and as outlined above, screens will also be in operation inside polling stations. Detailed signage and markings inside polling stations will also be displayed, with 'greeters' also managing the numbers inside a polling station at any one time, including keeping any queues to a minimum and in line with social distancing requirements. Signage will be introduced to provide clear messaging about the flow of a polling station and social distancing.
- 3.6 In relation to our counting venues, detailed planning has been carried out to manage the numbers inside a venue at any one time, to ensure all health & safety restrictions are adhered to. Due to COVID, a decision has already been made to hold Area Counts, in 4 different venues. In addition, with the statutory requirement allowing candidates and agents to be physically present at the verifications and counts, plans are in place to undertake our verification and counts in phases at each venue, so numbers attending can be managed safely and securely. At the close of nominations, all candidates will be asked to inform us in advance whether they are going to attend by informing us no later than one week before polling day, to enable me to compile a secure list of attendees for each count venue. Attendees will then be issued with a count ticket which they will be asked to produce to gain entry. I will have senior officers on the entry to each count venue, managing entrance.
- 3.7 The Verification at all our Counts venues will take place on Friday 7 May, on a two phase approach, with half of the number of 'Wards' being verified in phase 1, and the remaining number of 'Wards' being verified in the second phase. A similar phasing approach is being implemented for the Buckinghamshire Council & Parish Counts on 8 May. This approach

enables candidates and agents to be present in a safe environment. In addition, the health and safety of my staff is paramount, and this phasing approach also ensures their safety.

- 3.8 Similar principles to those in polling stations, will also apply to the Verifications and Counts. Face coverings will be mandatory, social distance rules will apply, and screens will be in place both between counters, and between count teams and the attendees in the hall. Hand sanitisers will be present on all tables, with regular cleaning of materials used in the count halls. One entrance and a separate exit from the count hall will also be put in place, with signage about flow of the halls and social distancing requirements also displayed.
- 3.9 For the PCC Election Count on 10 May, we do not have the attendance of candidates as they will be present at the PARO Count in Cherwell. The numbers therefore in each of the 4 Count venues will be made up by my staff and Count teams. There is no requirement for any phasing requirement. The measures outlined above in terms of social distancing, screens, face coverings, hand sanitisers, cleaning, and flow of the count halls will all be evident.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A - Document entitled "6 May Elections 2021: COVID Secure Measures"

