

Key considerations for May 2021 polls: Nominations

Updates to this document

Updated	Description of change
April 2021	Amended to include expanded advice on the management of paper

Purpose

The coronavirus pandemic is continuing to impact how we live in Great Britain and will present particular challenges for Returning Officers (ROs), Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and their teams in preparing for and delivering the May 2021 elections. To support you in planning for and delivering the polls, the Commission has issued supplementary guidance documents that focus on specific key parts of the electoral process.

The purpose of this document, which has been developed in close consultation the AEA, EMB, SAA and Scottish Government as well as our national public health bodies is to support you with the decisions you may need to take to manage the particular challenges faced locally and nationally as a result of the current public health situation in relation to delivering the nomination process for the May 2021 polls. It should be read alongside our [core guidance for electoral administrators](#).

Guidance on the nomination process is covered in [Part C of the RO guidance](#) for each set of polls.

This guidance is a living document in recognition of the changing landscape and ongoing developments in public health advice. We will update this document as and when we have further detail to add.

We have also produced [guidance for candidates and agents](#) to help them understand the changes to the election process that they can expect to see as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and to give them the information they need to be able to participate in the elections safely and with confidence.

There are general public health principles that everyone should follow in all aspects of daily life to help mitigate the risk of the spread of coronavirus, and these should underpin all aspects of your preparations for the elections:

1. Maintain social distancing
2. Clean hands regularly
3. Avoid touching your face
4. Limit your number of contacts
5. Wear a face covering where necessary
6. Self-isolate and get a test where necessary

Nominations

Communication

How will you...?

ÿ Communicate information about nominations to candidates, agents and parties?

- You will need to communicate your plans for the management of the nominations process and the rationale for your approach to parties, candidates and agents at an early stage. Providing early clarity on any adaptations to your usual processes for managing nominations in light of coronavirus will help to manage expectations and provide reassurance that your arrangements will support them to be able to participate safely and easily while reflecting national and local public health advice. Due to the changing nature of the impact and response to coronavirus nationally and locally, it will be important that your plans for communication about nominations are flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances.
- You will need to provide clear and specific information about what they can expect in relation to the different parts of the process: for example, how you will deliver briefings, carry out informal checks and manage the delivery of nomination papers. As always, it will be important to ensure that all candidates, agents and political parties receive the same information in the interests of fairness and consistency.
- You should also provide information on how you will manage the supply of copies of the electoral register in a timely and safe way. For example, you could encourage those entitled to a copy of the electoral register to request to receive the register in electronic format and send it securely via encrypted email or using a secure data transfer site. If you are not also the ERO for some or all of the electoral area, you should liaise with the ERO(s) to determine the arrangements for supply so that you can provide early advice to candidates and agents on how registers will be supplied.
- You should seek to provide reassurance that the current circumstances will not affect anyone's ability to obtain the information they need to be able to stand for election, and emphasise that although the nominations process may feel different to previous years, the processes in place are robust and have been designed to support them to participate safely.

Briefings for candidates and agents

How will you...?

ÿ Deliver your briefings?

- Briefings provide one of the most important opportunities for direct communication to candidates and agents about the nominations process. For the May 2021 elections, they will be a key tool to ensure that they understand how the process will be managed in light of the coronavirus pandemic.
- It is important that you hold briefings which are accessible to all candidates and agents to support them with participating in the process.
- In light of the current public health situation and associated coronavirus restrictions, there are clear benefits of holding virtual online briefings using video calling and other technology:
 - Online briefings allow a large number of participants to hear the briefing at the same time, without needing to attend the same venue. To help all participants get the most out of the online sessions, you will need to put in place processes to facilitate the asking and answering of questions during the sessions.
 - Due to the impact of the pandemic, the use of video calling has become commonplace and is relatively simple to set up and manage, which should mean that this is an accessible medium for the majority of candidates and agents.
 - You can record your briefing and make this available online for candidates and agents to watch on demand at their convenience, with details of how they can ask any follow up questions afterwards included.
- However, you will also need to consider how you will offer briefings to those who are unable to or uncomfortable with, accessing such information online, which may require you to provide some in-person briefings.
- Where briefings are to be held in person, you will need to put appropriate measures in place, informed by [risk assessments in line with government guidelines](#) to ensure the safety of your staff and attendees. For example:
 - Holding multiple, smaller in-person briefing sessions with numbers limited in line with current restrictions
 - Using larger venues for briefing sessions to ensure that distancing can be maintained between staff and those attending, in line with the latest public [health advice on running events](#)
 - Reviewing the lay-out of your briefing sessions, to encourage staff and attendees to maintain social distancing. For example, you could use floor tape to mark distancing requirements, and you should look to adopt a one-way system in and out and around the room.
 - Providing access to hand washing facilities and have hand sanitiser available for use on entry to and exit from the venue, as well as reminding attendees of good hygiene practices and social distancing by displaying notices which encourage observance of the public health guidelines.
 - Reminding staff, candidates and agents to be aware of the symptoms of coronavirus and that they should not attend a briefing session if they are unwell, symptomatic with COVID-19, a confirmed case or a confirmed contact who is self-isolating.

- In response to government guidelines and public health advice, you may need to require attendees to wear face coverings during briefings. You should consult the [latest government guidelines](#) on the wearing of face coverings which apply for your area in confirming your arrangements.
 - The Scottish government has issued guidance on the [Test and Protect](#) system, which is mandatory in certain sectors. Although the use of QR codes and the NHS COVID-19 app is not officially required for all venues, they provide an easy way to support public health efforts to manage the virus. Regardless of whether or not you decide to use QR codes and the app, you should ensure that you record the contact details of all those present at each briefing session to maintain a clear audit trail of attendance wherever you have visitors on your premises for a sustained period of time, both for your own records and for any requirements to support Test and Protect.
- You should inform candidates and agents of your proposed approach early to assist with your planning and preparation. Those interested in receiving a briefing should be asked to register in advance so that you can track numbers as well as accessibility requirements, which will enable you to tailor your approach and put the appropriate arrangements in place.
 - We have updated our template presentations for parties, candidates and agents to reflect the changes they can expect to see to the election process as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. As always, you will need to adapt the template briefings to reflect the specific arrangements for the nomination process in your area.

Provision of nomination packs

How will you...?

ÿ Make nomination packs available?

- You should have procedures in place to ensure that, despite the impact of the pandemic and any current national or local restrictions, any person expressing an interest in standing at the election is able to access a nomination pack.
- Wherever possible, you should encourage contact with the elections office directly via telephone or email to make a request for a pack, which will enable you to determine the most appropriate method of providing access to a pack on an individual basis.
- To help manage the process you could encourage access to nomination packs electronically wherever possible and practicable, such as via your website and through social media or press releases.
- However, you should also take into account the varying access needs of parties, candidates and agents when making decisions about the ways nomination packs will be made available. Not all candidates may have internet access or access to a printer, for example, and you will need to consider the needs of those who are clinically vulnerable or self-isolating due to infection or contact with someone who is infected.

- You should include details of all of the options for accessing a nomination pack in your briefings and through other key communication channels, such as the notice of election.
- You should also consider what additional information it may be helpful to include with the nomination pack to inform candidates about any specific arrangements or amendments to processes you will have in place in light of coronavirus. For example, you could include a hard or electronic copy of any candidate and agent briefing presentations. We have produced a separate piece of [supplementary guidance for candidates, agents and political parties](#), which addresses considerations for the nominations process from their perspective.

ÿ Manage the collection of hard-copy nomination packs in person?

- Your decision on the appropriate location(s) for the collection of hard copy nomination packs will need to take into account the following:
 - The estimated number of candidates or parties you expect will want to collect a hard copy nomination pack from you. Early engagement with, and feedback from, prospective candidates and political parties, will help you to develop this estimate.
 - Whether your office is currently, or likely to become closed, or subject to local lockdown restrictions. You could mitigate this risk by having a contingency plan including an alternative venue available and communicating this well in advance.
 - How will you be able to safely facilitate collection in line with public health guidelines in your preferred location(s)? For example, will there be sufficient space to enable social distancing? It might be that usual collection options, such as from your office, are not practical in the circumstances and so you may need to explore alternative collection points such as a reception area in your building, or a separate room where those collecting papers could attend and await assistance.
- You will need to put in place appropriate measures [informed by your risk assessments](#) to ensure the safety of any candidates and agents who are collecting nomination packs in person, as well as that of your staff who are managing the process.
 - You should provide hand cleaning facilities at the entrance and exit of the venue being used for the collection of nomination packs and next to any desk where people may be handing over documentation. You should also ask candidates, agents and your staff to follow [guidelines on the wearing of face coverings](#).
 - You should ask candidates, agents and your staff to maintain social distancing, and could put in place physical markers to support this. You should also establish a one-way system to the place used for collection wherever possible.
 - You may need to provide additional training to staff dealing with candidates and agents collecting nomination packs in person, reminding them to clean surfaces regularly, maintain social distancing, minimise physical contact, and clean their hands before and after any contact, including when handling paper.
- You should provide your staff with hand sanitiser, advising on its [correct and regular use](#).

- You should continue to consult the [government guidance](#) on this for your area regularly including in the run-up to and during the period in which nomination packs can be collected to inform your approach and ensure your plans remain appropriate.

Informal checks of nomination papers

How will you....?

ÿ **Make candidates and agents aware of options for informal checks?**

- You will need to ensure that you provide candidates and agents with information on the options available to them for accessing informal checks as early as possible in advance of start of the nominations process, and also make the arrangements for checks and how to access them clear at your briefings. This should include information on how the process will work in practice, including on any appointment system that you will be operating for any checks to be offered in person.

ÿ **Carry out informal checks electronically/remotely?**

- You should where possible encourage candidates and agents to scan and email their forms to you for an informal check wherever possible to reduce the need for face to face contact. You could then provide feedback from the informal check to the candidate by email, phone or video call.
- You should keep in mind that nomination forms contain personal information and take steps to ensure that emails are sent and received securely. Our [data protection resource](#) contains advice about ensuring the security of personal data.

ÿ **Carry out in-person informal checks?**

- Where candidates and agents wish to attend your offices for in-person informal checks, you will need to put appropriate measures informed by risk assessments in place to ensure their safety as well as that of your staff. For example:
 - You should look to implement an appointment system for informal checks, to help minimise contact between individuals and to reduce the likelihood of queues forming.
 - All venues used for carrying out in person informal checks should enable compliance with the public health recommendations on social distancing and the cleaning of hands, and should be well ventilated wherever possible.
 - You should provide hand cleaning facilities at the entrance and exit of your offices and next to any desk or table where people may be handing over paper documentation.
 - Candidates, agents and staff should be asked to maintain social distancing. You should put in place markers that allow for socially distanced queues, and establish a one-way system for access to the office space where informal checks will take place.
 - You may need to provide additional training to staff carrying out in person informal checks, reminding them to clean surfaces regularly, maintain

social distancing, minimise physical contact, wear face coverings where appropriate, and clean their hands before and after any contact, including contact with paper. You should provide them with hand sanitiser, advising on its [correct](#) and regular use.

- You should ensure that everyone working with shared documents and papers take care to only be present if well, avoid touching their faces, regularly and frequently clean their hands and seek to minimise the number of people touching any single document.
- You should continue to consult the [government guidance](#) for your area regularly, and especially in the run-up to and during the period in which informal checks take place, to inform your approach and ensure your plans remain appropriate.

Delivery of nomination forms

How will you...?

ÿ Decide on the location(s) for the delivery of nomination papers?

- Your decision on the appropriate location for taking delivery of nominations will need to take into account the following:
 - The estimated number of nominations papers you are expecting to receive.
 - Any adaptations that could be made to your workspace that could allow a drop off desk/point for nomination papers so that the number of people entering the building is minimised and that they are physically separated from each other and from receiving staff.
 - Whether your venue for receiving nominations is currently, or likely to be become, closed or subject to local lockdown restrictions. You could mitigate this risk by having a back-up venue available as detailed below. If your usual venue is unavailable or unusable, consider any other innovative measures that have been put in place at your local authority for the management of similar interactions with the public, for example the use of temporary structures in car parks to manage specific activities. You could make use these areas to facilitate the safe delivery of nominations.
- You will need to mitigate the risk of not being able to access your usual venue(s) at short notice. In doing so, you may wish to identify a back-up venue for the delivery of nominations. As part of this, you should consider how you will communicate any changes of venue. As well as contacting prospective candidates and political parties directly, you could put signage in place and inform reception staff of any changes, to ensure that people are directed to the correct location.
- In light of all of the above, when including details of where nomination papers should be delivered on the notice of election, you may on this occasion wish to list the primary location in the usual way, but also include a secondary location too as a contingency should your primary venue not be accessible for any reason at short notice.

ÿ Manage the delivery of nomination papers in practice?

- You will need to ensure that anyone who is delivering nomination papers or who is entitled to attend the delivery of other candidate's nomination papers is able to do so safely. For example:
 - All venues used for the delivery of nomination papers should enable compliance with the public health recommendations on social distancing and, wherever possible, should be well ventilated.
 - You should provide hand cleaning facilities at the entrance and exit of your offices and next to any desk or table where people may be holding or passing over paper documentation and ask visitors and your staff to maintain their distance.
 - To help manage this efficiently you should put in place markers that allow for socially distanced queues, and establish a one-way system for access to the office space where delivery of nomination forms will take place.
 - You may need to provide additional training to staff taking delivery of nomination forms, reminding them to maintain social distancing, minimise physical contact, and clean their hands before and after any contact, including contact with paper. You should provide them with hand sanitiser advising on its correct and regular use. You should continue to consult the [government guidance](#) on this for your area regularly and especially in the run-up to and during the period in which nomination papers are delivered to inform your approach.
 - You should ensure that everyone working with shared documents and papers take care to only be present if well, avoid touching their faces, regularly and frequently clean their hands and seek to minimise the number of people touching any single document.
- You should take steps to minimise the risk of numerous candidates and agents delivering nomination papers to the same place at the same time. This will help to limit the number of contacts and will assist you and your staff in managing the process efficiently and safely. You could:
 - Operate and encourage an appointment system for the delivery of nomination papers to help limit the number of contacts those delivering the nomination papers will make and also to reduce the likelihood of queues forming. However, you should keep in mind that an appointment is not required by law and you cannot refuse to take delivery of nomination papers on the basis of a candidate not having made an appointment.
 - Request that, where possible, only one person should deliver the nomination paper. It will be important for you to cover the rationale for this approach at your briefings and in the information you provide to candidates to build support for such a request.
 - Consider extending the hours that you receive nominations, for example by continuing to receive nominations for a longer period extending after 5pm. The times during which nominations papers can be delivered must be stated on the notice of election in the usual way.

ÿ **Ensure you are appropriately staffed to manage the process?**

- You will need to ensure that you have appointed and trained a sufficient number of deputy ROs (DROs) to support the effective management of the nominations process. This will be particularly important should you need manage the delivery

of forms across multiple sites, or should the RO or any DRO with the powers to determine nominations become unavailable at short notice.

- You may need additional staff, particularly in the run up to close of nominations, to help manage the arrangements you've put in place to address the public health risks, such as to manage queues or to remind candidates and agents of the public health advice on the cleaning of hands and the wearing of face coverings as appropriate.
- Our supplementary guidance on [planning for the 2021 polls](#) contains more information on staffing considerations for the management of specific events and venues. This includes thinking about any additional roles you may need for managing processes in a COVID-19-secure way, the use of team 'cohorts' or 'bubbles' to minimise the amount of staff who would need to isolate should a member of staff contract coronavirus, and the creation of reserve lists of staff who have been suitably trained to call on at short notice, in case staff drop out due to illness or the need to self-isolate.

ÿ Manage the payment of deposits?

- You should encourage the payment of deposits by alternative methods, such as by card or electronic transfer, wherever possible in order to minimise the risks of handling cash. Explaining the safety benefits of avoiding the use of cash may help to ensure as many deposits as possible are paid using alternative methods. However, you cannot refuse to take payment of the deposit in cash, and you should ensure that staff are reminded to clean their hands and avoid touching their face after handling any notes or coins.

Inspection of nomination and home address forms after the close of nominations

ÿ Communicate information about the arrangements for inspection to candidates, agents and parties?

- You will need to communicate information about the arrangements for inspection of nomination and home address forms and the rationale for your approach to parties, candidates and agents. Providing early clarity on any adaptations to the usual process in light of coronavirus will help to manage expectations and provide reassurance that your arrangements will allow inspection while reflecting national and local public health advice.

ÿ Manage the inspection of nomination papers and home address forms?

- You will need to ensure that anyone who is inspecting nomination papers or home address forms is able to do so safely. For example:
 - You should ensure that everyone working with shared documents and papers take care to only be present if well, avoid touching their faces, regularly and frequently clean their hands and seek to minimise the number of people touching any single document.

- The space used for inspection should enable compliance with the public health recommendations on social distancing and should be well ventilated if possible.
- You should provide hand cleaning facilities at the entrance and exit of your offices and next to any desk or table where people may be holding paper documentation, and ask visitors and your staff who are supervising to maintain their distance.
- You should establish a one-way system for access to the office space where inspection will take place.
- You should also look to implement an appointment system for inspection, to help avoid the risk of candidates and agents coming into contact with others.