

Dear clerk

Important: your parish council's elections: Thursday 2 May 2019

1. I am writing to the clerks of all town/parish councils in Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire districts about the elections on 2 May 2019. I hope you will find the following information and comments useful, especially those of you who have not experienced such elections before. Please familiarise yourself with the content of this letter in conjunction with advice provided by the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils. Throughout I have indicated whether the responsibility for a particular function rests with us, the district councils, or with you.

Candidates' guide

2. Comprehensive guidance is available from the Electoral Commission at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/parish-and-community-council-elections-in-england-and-wales>
3. The guidance is divided into six sections, and candidates are strongly recommended to make use of it as necessary and, in particular, Parts 1 and 2 relating to qualifications and disqualifications for being a candidate and the submission of nominations.

Notice of election, submission of nomination papers and date of poll

4. You must publish the "notice of election" no later than Tuesday 26 March 2019. We will provide a copy in the week commencing 18 March for display in your area. Nominations may be submitted from that date (but not on Saturdays or Sundays). The final date and time for their receipt in the elections office will be 4 pm on Wednesday 3 April 2019. Nomination papers must be delivered to the council offices at 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Milton OX14 4SB. Please note that you as parish clerk are under no obligation to deliver nomination papers.
5. A comprehensive nomination pack is available on the Electoral Commission's website from the link below, which also contains helpful guidance:
https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0020/141806/Nomination-pack-incl-election-agent-notification-form-P-and-C.doc
6. Please ensure you use the above updated nomination form and not any old forms which will be rejected.
7. I do not plan to send out nomination papers as a matter of course but if you have difficulty accessing them from the council's website and the Electoral Commission website please let the elections office know – elections@southandvale.gov.uk or tel no. 01235 422528.
8. We can only accept complete and accurate forms. The requirements are that nominations must be delivered by hand. They cannot be submitted by post, fax, email or other electronic means.

9. Non-receipt of nominations can result in the necessity of running an additional, separate election after 2 May 2019 at cost to the parish councils and will result in a period during which no parish council will exist.
10. The deadline referred to in 4 above is absolute and we are prohibited from accepting nominations after that time. Also, although we can receive nominations up to the deadline, it is in everyone's interests to submit papers at least a couple of days before the final time so that candidates will have the opportunity to resolve any problems which may arise.

Verification and count

11. In the event of the election being contested, the poll will take place on Thursday 2 May 2019, between the hours of 7am and 10pm. Town/parish council elections will be held with district council elections for the relevant ward. The verification of the ballot paper accounts (which is the first stage of an election count) will take place at the Sports Hall, White Horse Leisure & Tennis Centre, Audlett Drive, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3PJ immediately after the close of polls on Thursday 2 May 2019.
12. The counting of the votes for Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils will take place after the verification process with the count for parish/town council elections taking place on Friday 3 May 2019 from 12 noon. In 2015 we ran two devolved counts on the Saturday following the combined district, parish and parliamentary elections. In light of the experience gained I have decided to hold a centralised count for all contested parish and town council elections at the White Horse Leisure & Tennis Centre. We will advise you and all candidates where there are contested elections of the arrangements.

Cost of elections

13. The cost of the elections will be shared with the district council, if both the district and parish council elections are contested. There is also a charge for uncontested elections. Parish clerks have been provided with an indication of the likely cost of a contested election which are set out below. We will invoice parish councils following the election.

Size of Electorate	Estimated banding cost
150 - 1000	£2500 - £3500
1001 - 3500	£3500 - £4500
3501 - 5000	£4500 - £6000
5001 - 6500	£6000 - £7500

Insufficient nominations

14. The law provides that if, following the last day for the withdrawal of candidature, the number of candidates remaining validly nominated is less than the quorum of the council (i.e. one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of three) a further election shall be held within a period of 35 days of the date of the original

election (not including Saturdays, Sundays or Bank Holidays). If, however, the number remaining validly nominated is at least equal to the quorum, the newly elected members may co-opt to fill the vacancies.

Withdrawal of candidature

15. Please note that the deadline by which the Returning Officer must receive any withdrawal of candidature is no later than 4pm on Wednesday 3 April 2019, which is the same deadline as that for delivering a nomination.

Further notices

16. In addition to the "notice of election" mentioned in paragraph 4 above, we will supply for display in the parish the "statement of persons nominated" on 4/5 April and "notice of poll" (for district and/or parish elections, as the case may be) in the week commencing 22 April.

Declaration of acceptance of office and annual meeting of the parish council

17. All elected parish councillors must complete a "declaration of acceptance of office". Successful candidates must make this declaration before or at the first meeting of the parish council after their election. It must be made in the presence of either a member of the parish council or the parish clerk. Failure to make the declaration will result in a vacancy, unless the parish council agrees at its first meeting following the election to permit the making of the declaration at a later date.
18. Before the election we will supply you with a declaration form that you can copy and ask your councillors to complete. You should retain completed forms. You should notify the district council's monitoring officer when all have been signed – monitoringofficer@southandvale.gov.uk
19. Legislation says that the membership of the parish council shall retire on the "fourth day after the ordinary day of election" and that the "newly elected councillors shall come into office on the day that their predecessors retire" – Tuesday 7 May 2019.
20. The chairman of the parish council remains in office until his/her successor is elected under the first item of business at the annual meeting of the council, which is required to be held "on or within fourteen days after the day on which the councillors elected take office". If the chairman would otherwise have retired either because they did not stand for election or because they were not elected, they still preside over the election of the new chairman and, in the event of an equality of votes for the new chairman, "shall give a casting vote".
21. Additionally, the annual parish meeting has to take place between 1 March 2019 and 1 June 2019.

Registration of interests

22. All members of the parish council have to register interests as specified in your council's code of conduct and the relevant regulations. The monitoring officer

should receive completed forms within 28 days of a councillor coming into office, i.e. by no later than Wednesday 5 June 2019.

23. We will supply a sample form for all councillors (whether newly elected or returning).

Elections timetable and applications to vote by post or proxy

24. We have included a copy of the statutory elections timetable. In addition to the information about nominations etc, you may be interested to note the specified date by which any applications to vote by post or proxy have to be received.

Persons not included in electoral register

25. Any person not included in the register of electors cannot vote at elections. Applications to register have to be received in the elections office by no later than Friday 12 April 2019.
26. Any local publicity you could give to this and to the deadlines for postal and proxy voting would be much appreciated.

The role of the parish clerk

27. Because we communicate with clerks frequently during the elections period, it is essential that we know about any changes, or likely changes in the clerk or changes to contact details as a matter of urgency. It is also very helpful to know if a clerk is going to be away during the election period.

Poll cards for parish council elections

28. Poll cards giving the address of the polling station, the date of the district polls and the hours of the polls, will automatically be issued, including to all electors eligible to vote at a town or parish election.

Website

29. We will ensure that the district council's website is up to date and includes useful and relevant information about the elections. Our websites are at:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/local-democracy/elections-0>

<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/local-democracy/elections-0>

I trust the information in this letter is useful. If you do have any queries concerning it, or regarding any other elections issues, please do not hesitate to contact the elections office.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Reed

Returning Officer

Copied to Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils