

By: Ben Watts, County Returning Officer

To: Electoral and Boundary Review Committee – 18 March 2021

Subject: Kent County Council Election Update – May 2021

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary This report asks the Committee to note the update about the Kent County Council election.

1. Introduction

1. The Kent County Council (KCC) election will be taking place on Thursday 6 May 2021. It will take place in parallel with the Police and Crime Commissioner election and other types of local elections. It is recognised that these will be a very challenging set of elections to administer in Kent due to the continuing complications from COVID-19 and the number of additional elections taking place following the postponement of the scheduled 2020 polls.
2. The County Returning Officer (CRO), Ben Watts, who is personally responsible for the conduct of the KCC election, has been working in partnership with the 12 borough, city and district councils who will be administering the KCC election in their area on behalf of the CRO. The CRO has appointed a Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) in each borough/city/district council within the county to carry out his functions.
3. The CRO has also been working closely with the Police Area Returning Officer (PARO), Sarah Martin, who is responsible for the Police & Crime Commissioner election. As both the PCC & KCC elections are countywide, the PARO & CRO have issued joint directions relating to the discharge of their functions in each council area. The CRO has regularly attended meetings of the Joint Kent Chief Executives to provide updates about the election in addition to meetings of the Kent Association of Electoral Registration Officers and Staff (Kent AEROS).

2. Delivery Plan for May 2021 Election

1. On 5 February 2021, the Government published its [Delivery Plan for the May 2021 Elections](#) and confirmed that the polls scheduled for 6 May 2021 will be going ahead. The Delivery Plan covers the electoral process, public health and social distancing, nominations and campaigning, voting and the delivery of polls.
2. The CRO presented an election update to KCC's Selection & Member Services Committee on 25 February 2021. A recording of the presentation can be viewed [here](#) between 05:05 – 27:55. The slides can be viewed [here](#). The presentation covered the Government's Delivery Plan for the May 2021 Elections which is appended.

3. KCC Election Notices

1. The CRO is responsible for the publication of the following statutory notices for the KCC election:

Notice of Election	Friday 19 March
Statement of Persons Nominated	Friday 9 April
Notice of Election Agents	Friday 9 April
Notice of Poll & Situation of Polling Stations	Monday 26 April
Declaration of the Result	Friday 7 May

2. These notices will be published at www.kent.gov.uk/elections and displayed outside the relevant borough/city/district council office.

4. Nominations

1. To reduce the travel and contact involved in completing a nomination paper, the number of subscribers required has temporarily reduced from 10 to 2.
2. Nomination papers for the KCC election can only be submitted between Monday 22 March – Thursday 8 April on working days between 10:00 – 16:00 to the relevant DRO's election office. Nomination papers will be available from local election offices, who will be able to advise about:
 - The arrangements for informal checks.
 - Whether an appointment is required to submit a nomination.
 - The dates of candidate and agent briefings to outline the election process.

5. Voting

1. Local government electors must be registered to vote by midnight on Monday 19 April to vote in the KCC election. Electors will be able to cast their vote in person, by post or by proxy.
2. Measures are being put in place so that polling stations are safe places to vote during coronavirus including:
 - Social distancing (inside and outside venues).
 - Limited number of people inside polling stations.
 - Face coverings worn by staff and voters.
 - Voters bringing their own pen or pencil.
 - Maximum ventilation.
 - Plastic screens.
 - Hand sanitiser.
 - Regular cleaning.
3. The deadline to apply for a postal vote is 17:00 on Tuesday 20 April. The deadline to apply for a proxy vote is 17:00 on Tuesday 27 April. In certain circumstances, an emergency proxy vote can be applied for; applications can be made up to 17:00 on polling day. Secondary legislation is being

amended to further support emergency proxy voting for people affected by coronavirus without having to find someone to attest their application.

6. Verification and Count

1. The CRO & PARO have directed the DROs that verification must be completed by 12:30 on Friday 7 May. There is flexibility for verification to be completed overnight on Thursday 6 May.
2. The CRO has directed that the KCC count must start by 13:00 on Friday 7 May. It is at the discretion of the DRO to confirm the start time of the KCC count in their area and how the KCC divisions are counted (e.g., all divisions are counted at the same time, done in groups or individually) to enable the count to be conducted in a Covid-secure way.
3. The results from the counts will be displayed on an interactive election map on KCC's website.

7. PPE & Other Protective Equipment

1. The CRO, through KCC, is coordinating the supply and distribution of PPE and Other Protective Equipment required for the elections in Kent & Medway.

8. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report.

Appendix

Delivery Plan for May 2021 Elections

Background Documents

Kent County Council (2021) '*Selection & Member Services Committee (25/02/21)*'

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=143&MIId=8548&Ver=4>

Cabinet Office (2021) '*Delivery Plan for the May 2021 Elections (05/02/21)*'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan>

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