

electoral administration bulletin

The
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Commission



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Contents

May 2021 polls: update

An update on the Commission's plans for supporting the May 2021 polls, including an overview of the discussions at the 8 September meeting of the Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board.

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May 2021 polls: update

The Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB) - which brings together Regional Returning Officers from across the UK, as well as representatives from the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments, the SAA, AEA and Solace - met on 8 September with an agenda focussed on preparations for the May 2021 polls.

The Board discussed a draft set of high-level objectives for what well-run elections in the current public health context would need to be able to deliver. The intention is that these objectives, which we aim to finalise by the end of the month following further consultation, would be used to assess and test policy options and implementation approaches to make sure that whatever proposals are brought forward – whether legislation, policy, guidance or voter information – will be capable of delivering for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators.

The Board also considered what work would need to be delivered to help ensure voters understand how they can cast their vote safely at the May 2021 elections. The outcomes of the discussion will be used to inform our consideration of options for activity that could be delivered during autumn 2020 to spring 2021, and we will provide more information on this work in a future bulletin.

More generally, we are also continuing to work with the Convener of the Electoral Management Board (EMB), Scottish Government and other stakeholders to help ensure the safe delivery of the Scottish Parliament elections.

Guidance

ECAB also discussed the Commission's proposed approach to supporting electoral administrators with responding to the particular challenges created by Covid-19.

Further to this, we can now provide you with more information on how we will support you with preparing for and delivering the May 2021 elections.

Our core guidance for the May 2021 polls, which is being developed in consultation with the EMB, will be made available by early

October. Reflecting our established approach to the production of core guidance for electoral administrators in advance of scheduled polls, the core guidance will continue to be available in its current (non-date specific) format, and will not be amended to reflect specific considerations to address the challenges of Covid-19.

Instead, to support administrators with preparing for and delivering the polls in the context of Covid-19, and building on the approach we took to providing additional guidance for the management of the 2020 canvass, we will provide supplementary guidance and resources that reflect the specific requirements of managing the 2021 polls in a Covid-19 secure way, which are informed by both the requirements of administrators and the latest expert advice from public health bodies across Great Britain.

This approach will allow supplementary guidance to be made available more quickly and will be easier to update and add to as the public health situation continues to evolve. It should also be easier for you as electoral administrators to navigate and to find the new information you need.

We recognise, however, that there are some exceptions where the nature of the product requires the Covid-19 specific guidance to be embedded throughout, principally the polling station handbook, and we will update that important resource accordingly and provide more information on the order process in the usual way in a future bulletin.

ECAB agreed that the supplementary guidance should cover the key parts of the electoral process such as planning, the management of nominations and absent voting arrangements, as well as the conduct of polling day and the verification and count.

We have now begun our focussed work with the EMB and public health bodies in Scotland to develop the detail of this guidance. Further discussions are also due to take place with the UK-wide Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group (ERRWG).

We will be publishing planning guidance at the end of September, covering areas such as the importance of risk assessments, the identification and booking of suitable polling station and count venues, and addressing the challenges relating to staffing requirements.

The remainder of the supplementary guidance will follow on a rolling basis over the course of the next three months, with a focus on addressing the parts of the process in the order that administrators will need to manage them.

It may be the case that these resources will need to be amended or added to further to their initial publication, particularly should there be further legislation or if the public health context or advice were to change. This is unavoidable if we are to provide as much guidance and support as we can as early as we can, but we will take steps to ensure robust version control and to communicate to administrators where any amendments have been made so you are clear as to what has changed and why.

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The Electoral Commission
City Chambers, High Street, Edinburgh,
EH1 1YJ
Tel: 0333 103 1928

Textphone: 18001 020 7271 0500
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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