

Dear clerk

### **Important: your parish council's elections: Thursday 4 May 2023**

I am writing to the clerks of all town/parish councils in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse about the parish elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

Please read the content of this letter carefully as it contains updated information for 2023. Throughout I have indicated whether the responsibility for a particular function rest with us - the district councils, or with you.

We are providing this information in conjunction with advice provided by the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils. I hope you will find it useful, especially those of you who have not experienced such elections before.

### **Candidates' guide**

1. Comprehensive guidance on parish council elections is available on [the Electoral Commission website](#).
2. 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**

3. You must publish the "notice of election" no later than Monday 20 March 2023. We will provide a copy in the week commencing 13 March for display in your parish. Nominations may be submitted from that date (including Saturday 25 March and 1 April but not Sundays). The final date and time for their receipt of nominations by the elections team will be 4pm on Tuesday 4 April 2023.
4. Nomination papers must be delivered to the council offices at Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE. Full details of the relevant room for the delivery of nomination forms will be provided on the notice of election. Please note that as parish clerk you are under no obligation to deliver nomination papers.
5. You can find a comprehensive parish nomination pack and helpful guidance on [the Electoral Commission website](#).
6. You must use this updated nomination form and not any old forms which will be rejected. All pages of the nomination pack (including those left blank) must be submitted.
7. Candidates can also find examples of completed nomination forms on our [South](#) and [Vale](#) websites which they may find useful to help them complete their nomination forms.
8. I do not plan to send out nomination papers as a matter of course but if you have difficulty accessing them from our website or the Electoral Commission website, please let our Elections office know – [elections@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:elections@southandvale.gov.uk) or telephone 01235 422528.

9. We can only accept complete and accurate forms. Nominations must be delivered by hand, they cannot be submitted by post, email or other electronic means.
10. Non-receipt of sufficient valid nominations can result in the necessity of running an additional, separate election after 4 May 2023 at cost to the parish council and will result in a period during which no parish council will exist.
11. The deadline referred to in paragraph 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 as early as possible before the deadline so that candidates will have the opportunity to resolve any problems which may arise.

### **Verification and count**

12. In the event of the election being contested, the poll will take place on Thursday 4 May 2023, 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 Tennis Hall, White Horse Leisure & Tennis Centre, Audlett Drive, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3PJ on Friday 5 May 2023.
13. 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 the same day from approximately 2 pm. Further details will be provided after 4 April.

### **Cost of elections**

14. 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.
15. Parish clerks have been provided with details of the fees and charges and invited to contact [Susan Baker, Electoral Services Team Leader](#) for an estimate of the likely cost of a contested election.

### **Withdrawal of candidature**

16. The Returning Officer must receive any withdrawal of candidature no later than 4pm on Tuesday 4 April 2023, the same deadline as that for delivering a nomination.
17. Please download, complete and return the correct candidate withdrawal form:
  - [Notice of withdrawal – parish council elections](#)

### **Insufficient nominations**

18. Following the deadline for the withdrawal of candidature, if the number of candidates remaining validly nominated is less than the quorum of the parish council (i.e. one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of three) then a further election shall be held within 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.

### **Further notices**

19. In addition to the "notice of election" mentioned in paragraph 3 above, we will supply for display in the parish the "statement of persons nominated" on 5 April and "notice of poll" (for district and/or parish elections, as the case may be) in the week commencing 24 April. You will be required to display all these notices without delay in your parish.

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

20. 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.

21. Before the election we will supply you with a declaration form that you can copy and ask your councillors to complete. You should retain the completed forms. Please notify the district council's monitoring officer when all the forms have been signed – [monitoringofficer@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@southandvale.gov.uk)

22. 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 9 May 2023.

23. The chair 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 chair 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 chair and, in the event of an equality of votes for the new chair, "shall give a casting vote".

24. The Annual meeting of the Parish Council should be held between 9 May and 24 May 2023. Additionally, the annual parish meeting has to take place between 1 March 2023 and 1 June 2023.

### **Registration of interests**

25. All members of the parish council have to register interests as specified in your council's code of conduct and the relevant regulations. The district council's monitoring officer should receive completed forms within 28 days of a councillor coming into office.

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

### **Election timetable and applications to vote by post or proxy**

27. I 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**

28. 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 midnight on Monday 17 April 2023.

### **Photo ID**

29. At these elections, voters will need to bring photo ID with them to be able to vote at a polling station.

30. A wide range of photo ID will be accepted, including passports, driving licences, a disabled parking blue badge and proof of age PASS ID cards. You can still use your photo ID if it's out of date, as long as it looks like you. If an elector does not have an accepted form of photo ID, they can apply for a free voter ID document known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

31. The deadline to apply for voter ID for this election is 5pm on Tuesday 25 April. Information in respect of this requirement is available on our [South](#) / [Vale](#) websites and via the [Electoral Commission](#).

### **The role of the parish clerk**

32. 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. To let us know, please email [democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk)

### **Poll cards for parish council elections**

33. 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.

### **Please help to spread the word**

34. Please help to spread the word locally by sharing information about the requirement for Photo ID.

35. You can find lots of useful resources to help raise awareness about the requirement for Voter ID, including social media posts, booklets and posters, on [the Electoral Commission's website](#).

36. Any local publicity you could also give to our elections' information, including deadlines for registration and postal and proxy voting, would be much

appreciated. The key information can be found on our [South flyer](#) and [Vale flyer](#) which you are welcome to share with residents.

37. Please also encourage people to visit [southoxon.gov.uk/elections](https://southoxon.gov.uk/elections) / [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/elections](https://whitehorsedc.gov.uk/elections)

#### **Find more information on our website**

38. Information and links for candidates and agents can also be found on our websites at:

- [South Oxfordshire - information for candidates, agents and parish clerks for elections](#)
- [Vale of White Horse - information for candidates, agents and parish clerks for elections.](#)

39. Residents can find information about the local elections by visiting:

- [southoxon.gov.uk/LocalElections2023](https://southoxon.gov.uk/LocalElections2023)
- [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/LocalElections2023](https://whitehorsedc.gov.uk/LocalElections2023)

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

Mark Stone

Returning Officer

Copied to Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils