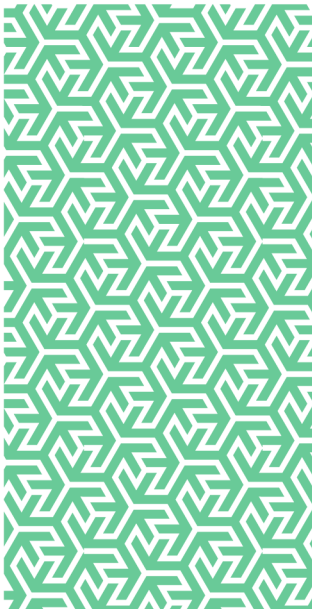


rmp

**Risk control**  
COVID-Secure Elections



In partnership with



# COVID-Secure Elections

## Introduction

Elections are fast approaching in parts of England, Scotland and Wales.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May, millions of people within the UK will be afforded the opportunity to vote for thousands of positions of power<sup>1</sup>.

As many elections scheduled for May 2020 were significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, an unusually large number of positions are up for election on this occasion as last year's scheduled elections will be run in conjunction with the 2021 election schedule.

While data produced by the UK Government has indicated that people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK has fallen significantly since the latest peak of January 2021<sup>2</sup>, the COVID-19 virus is still present within British society.

Despite the continuing threat caused by the COVID-19 virus, the UK Government's stated position is that "democracy should not be cancelled because of COVID-19"<sup>3</sup> and has published the 'May 2021 Polls Delivery Plan'<sup>4</sup> to determine how elections will proceed safely. The Scottish Government<sup>5</sup> and the Welsh Government<sup>6</sup> have also produced relevant guidance to support Council's and candidates.

Councils must ensure that the elections can take place safely within the context of the continuing public health concerns.

## Protecting Public Health

Voters have access to three methods of voting:

- in person at a polling station
- by postal vote
- by proxy vote

As voting in person will still be available for all those who would like to attend a polling station, protecting staff, volunteers and members of the public during the local elections has to be a priority for Councils through the creation of COVID-Secure polling stations.

Once the polling stations are closed, votes must be counted and results announced as efficiently as possible. These processes must also be COVID-19 secure.

In order to achieve COVID-Secure polling stations and processes and control the risk of virus transmission, Councils must start by completing or updating their COVID-19 risk assessments to include all activities associated with the local elections.

The COVID-19 risk assessments must consider the risk of direct human-to-human virus transmission as well as indirect transmission via infected surfaces. Control measures will then need to be identified and implemented.

Control measures should include:

- Effective social distancing measures (inside and outside venues)
- Limiting the number of people inside polling stations
- The requirement for the wearing of masks / face coverings by all persons inside the polling station\*
- Encouraging voters bring their own pen or pencil
- Achieving maximum ventilation
- The provision of plastic screens and distance markers (where appropriate)
- The provision of hand sanitiser throughout the polling station
- Regular cleaning of touch points after use and throughout the day

\* Masks and face coverings are not required for those people who are medically exempted, or for staff who are located behind individual screens

The Electoral Commission<sup>7</sup> also suggest some practical measures for implementation, including:

- Ensuring that all relevant staff have been fully trained and briefed to understand the requirements for the layout and management of the polling station
- Employing 'greeters' to control queues and manage entry to the polling station
- Ensuring that polling station staff are able to take regular breaks (particularly if wearing masks / face coverings)
- The provision of floor markings inside and outside the polling station to manage queues, and maintain social distancing between staff and voters
- Establishing a one-way system to assist in maintaining social distancing standards
- Providing additional signage to remind voters of the need to follow public health guidelines such as social distancing, the wearing of face-coverings and only entering the polling station if symptom-free
- Ensuring the appropriate layout of desks and polling booths to help maintain distance between the polling staff, and between polling staff and voters at all times. Hand sanitiser will also need to be provided on all desks

## Summary

The United Kingdom maintains a proven track record for running successful elections to the highest standards.

To run successful elections, the electorate must maintain confidence in the ability of Councils to run elections in a way that meets the highest standards of democratic integrity.

In today's public health context, Councils must also ensure that the health and wellbeing of voters, staff and candidates are protected from the risks presented by COVID-19.

Councils are now be well-versed in the implementation of COVID-secure measures within their workplaces and so should consider the forthcoming elections as a natural extension of these measures.

The electorate should have confidence that the right precautions are in place.

## References

1 BBC, 2021, Local elections 2021: A simple guide to English council elections. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-56562354>

2 Gov.uk, UK Summary. Available at: <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

3 Gov.uk, The Government's approach to elections and referendums during COVID-19: additional information for electoral administrators, candidates, campaigners and voters. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-governments-approach-to-elections-and-referendums-during-covid-19/the-governments-approach-to-elections-and-referendums-during-covid-19-additional-information-for-electoral-administrators-candidates-campaigners-a>

4 Gov.uk, May 2021 Polls Delivery Plan. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan/may-2021-polls-delivery-plan>

5 Scottish Government, Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scottish Parliament Election 2021 - campaign activity. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scottish-parliament-election-2021/>

6 Welsh Government, Elections: coronavirus guidance. Available at: <https://gov.wales/elections-coronavirus-guidance>

7 Electoral Commission, Guidance to support May 2021 elections during the coronavirus pandemic. Available at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/guidance-support-may-2021-elections-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

## Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

## Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

[contact@mpartners.co.uk](mailto:contact@mpartners.co.uk)



### **Risk Management Partners**

The Walbrook Building  
25 Walbrook  
London EC4N 8AW

020 7204 1800  
[mpartners.co.uk](http://mpartners.co.uk)

This note is not intended to give legal or financial advice, and, accordingly, it should not be relied upon for such. It should not be regarded as a comprehensive statement of the law and/or market practice in this area. In preparing this note we have relied on information sourced from third parties and we make no claims as to the completeness or accuracy of the information contained herein. It reflects our understanding as at 30 April 2021, but you will recognise that matters concerning COVID-19 are fast changing across the world. You should not act upon information in this bulletin nor determine not to act, without first seeking specific legal and/or specialist advice. No third party to whom this is passed can rely on it. We and our officers, employees or agents shall not be responsible for any loss whatsoever arising from the recipient's reliance upon any information we provide herein and exclude liability for the content to fullest extent permitted by law. Should you require advice about your specific insurance arrangements or specific claim circumstances, please get in touch with your usual RMP Risk Control consultant or account director.

Risk Management Partners Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Registered office: The Walbrook Building, 25 Walbrook, London EC4N 8AW. Registered in England and Wales. Company no. 2989025.