

Candidates and agents briefing

PCC, City & Parish Elections Thursday 2 May 2024

Sharon Bridglalsingh - Returning Officer

Peter Brown - Head of Democratic Services & Deputy Returning Officer

Peter Taylor - Electoral Services Manager & Deputy Returning Officer

Topics

- who's who
- close of nominations
- key dates of the election timetable
- voter ID refresh & postal vote handling
- campaigning
- electoral integrity
- postal vote opening sessions
- polling day and polling stations
- count venue
- counting of votes
- contacts

Who's who

- **Sharon Bridglalsingh** is the **Returning Officer** and is responsible for running the election

Deputy Returning Officers are:

- Michael Bracey (Chief Executive MKCC)
 - Peter Brown (Head of Democratic Services)
 - Peter Taylor (Electoral Services Manager)
- **Sharon Bridglalsingh** is also the **Electoral Registration Officer** and is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters lists

Close of Nominations

City (19 wards & 81 candidates)

- 14 Wards with 4 candidates
- 5 Wards with 5 candidates

2 Parish areas contested

West Bletchley Council - Rivers

- Newport Pagnell Town Council - Newport Pagnell North

PCC for Thames Valley Area

- 5 Candidates
- 13 authorities in Thames Valley Area
- PARO is West Berkshire

Statement of persons Nominated available on our
website: milton-keynes.gov.uk/elections-2024

Election timetable

Part I

Full timetable with local dates available at:
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/elections-2024

Deadline for applications to register to vote	Midnight – Tuesday 16 April
Deadline for new postal vote applications / changes to existing postal or proxy vote applications	5pm – Wednesday 17 April
Initial delivery of Postal Votes	Wednesday 17 April (dispatched RM first class Tuesday 16 April)
Second Delivery of Postal Votes	Thursday 25 April (dispatched RM first class Wednesday 24 April)
Publication of Notice of Poll / situation of polling stations	Wednesday 24 April
Deadline for applications for new proxy votes	5pm – Wednesday 24 April

Election timetable

Part II

Full timetable with local dates available at:
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/elections-2024

Deadline for applications for a Voter Authority Certificate or Anonymous Elector's Document	5pm – Wednesday 24 April
Appointment of counting and polling agents	Thursday 25 April
Polling day	7am - 10pm Thursday 2 May
Deadline to apply to vote by emergency proxy	5pm – polling day
Replacement for lost/spoilt postal votes ends	5pm – polling day
Alterations to register to correct clerical error	9pm – polling day
Deadline for production of Temporary Voter Authority Certificates	10pm – polling day
Return of election expenses	+ 35 days from result Friday 7 June

More information at: www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/voter-ID, or www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id

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Voter ID refresh

- Since 4 May 2023, voters have had to show acceptable photographic ID before voting in a polling station:
 - Passport
 - Driving licence (including provisional license)
 - Blue badge
 - Certain concessionary travel cards
 - Identity card with PASS mark (includes the [All in 1 MK card](#))
 - Biometric Immigration document
 - Defence identity card
 - Certain national identity cards
- Expired documents can still be used, provided the photo remains a good likeness
- Those without ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate until **5pm on 24 April** (416 were issued for May 2023)
- A Temporary VAC (produced locally) can be issued if a VAC was applied for by the deadline and is unlikely to be received in time.

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Voter ID

- A Ballot Paper must not be delivered to a voter unless the voter produces a specified document to the PO/PC
- No other person other than the PO/PC (or RO/DRO) may inspect the ID unless permitted by the voter
- Electors may request a private area for their ID to be inspected
- A voter can return if they do not have ID, or their ID is not accepted
- Data on ballot paper refusals must be collected. No longer mandatory but to collect other info (VIDEF) but we will continue.

Voter ID Stats - May 2023	Number
The total number of polling station electors who applied for, but at least initially were not issued with, a ballot paper	428
The total number of polling station electors who were not issued with a ballot paper and who later returned with accepted ID and were issued with a ballot paper	291
% attended the polling station and were able to vote on 4 May	99.6%
% who applied for but were refused a ballot paper by the close of poll	0.4%

Campaigning dos and don'ts

[Statutory guidance on digital imprints | Electoral Commission](#)

[Imprints on printed material: Candidates at UK Parliamentary elections and elections in England, Wales and Northern Ireland | Electoral Commission](#)

- ✓ Do use imprints on all your campaign material.
 - Printed by [printer's name and address].
Promoted by [agent's name] of [agent's address], on behalf of [candidate's name] of [candidate's address]
 - ✓ Include imprints on digital campaign material (new Elections Act requirement)
 - ✓ Do comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners.
 - ✓ Do make sure outdoor posters are removed 2 weeks after the election.
-
- × Do not post items on highways or public realm – especially important as this will re-direct Council resources and could result in enforcement action.
 - × Do not produce material that looks like a poll card.
 - × Do not pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).

Postal & Proxy Application Changes

- Electors are now required to provide more information when applying for an absent vote such as NINO.
- A proxy can now only vote on behalf of no more than four electors, of which **no more than two** may be on behalf of other **domestic electors**.
- Applications for both proxy and postal vote can now be made online at www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote and www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote .
- We can accept paper forms, but this is not the preferred route.

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Postal Vote Handling (1/4)

- The provisions introduce a ban on the handling of PVs by political campaigners unless their own or close family member.
- Limits on handing in postal votes at polling stations / civic offices - no more than 5 can be handed in (plus your / their own).
- **A postal vote returned by hand that is not accompanied by a postal vote return form will be rejected.**
- Political campaigners also subject to additional restriction: (can only hand in postal votes for close relative or for someone whom they provide regular care).
- No longer possible to 'drop off' postal votes at Civic (security or letter box).
- Secrecy requirements which apply at a polling station are being extended to postal and proxy votes - offence to try to find out how someone has voted on their PV.

For staff use only	Vote and Date	Location
Postal vote return form Please read the information on page 2 before completing this form. Your postal vote (s) will be rejected if you do not complete this form in full.		
Section 1		
1. Are you handing in your own postal vote? Yes/No		
2. Are you handing in the postal votes of other electors? (if No go to question 3) Yes/No		
a. If Yes, how many other electors? (max. per poll is 5 plus your own - see note 1 on page 2)		
3. Are you a political campaigner? (see note 2 on page 2) (if No go to question 4) Yes/No		
a. If Yes, and you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, do the postal votes all belong to close relatives or to people for whom you provide regular care? Yes/No		
4. How many envelopes containing postal votes are you handing in? (including your own, if applicable)		
Section 2		
5. Name		
6. Address		
7. If you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, please provide a reason why		
8. I declare that in total I have not handed in postal votes for more than the permitted number of electors, either at any polling station or to the Returning Officer, at this/these poll(s) and that to the best of my knowledge I am (answer (a) or (b) as appropriate) (a) not a political campaigner for whom it is an offence to handle certain postal votes or (b) a political campaigner and have only handed in my own postal vote and/or that of a close relative, or someone for whom I provide regular care.		
9. Signature		10. Date
Section 3 To be completed by the Relevant Officer		
I, (insert name), being the Relevant Officer at the following location:		
A. am satisfied that this form has been completed properly and provides the information as required. I do not suspect that more than the permitted number of postal votes have been handed in, nor do I suspect that the individual named above is a political campaigner committing an offence by handing in the postal votes. Therefore the postal vote(s) handed in are to be accepted (tick if applicable for all postal votes handed in) <input type="checkbox"/>		
B. reject the attached postal vote(s) because the person handing it/them in: (tick all reasons that apply)		
i. did not fully complete the postal vote return form (incomplete) <input type="checkbox"/>		
ii. handed in postal votes on behalf of more than the permitted number of electors <input type="checkbox"/>		
iii. was a political campaigner not permitted to handle the postal votes <input type="checkbox"/>		
iv. did not complete the postal vote return form (left behind postal voting document) <input type="checkbox"/>		
Total number of postal votes rejected <input type="text"/>		
If you have accepted the individual's own postal vote(s), please tick here <input type="checkbox"/>		

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Postal Vote handling (2/4)

- The RO, Relevant Officers or Polling staff will not be checking if someone has already handed forms at a different location when they do it - there is a declaration on the form.
- The relevant officer will then decide whether to accept or reject, based on the information on the face of the form.
- The relevant officer then completes section 3 to indicate all the postal vote(s) are accepted or if some or all are rejected.
- Accepted & Rejected PVs and forms then placed in separate receptacles.
- ERO to write to voters after the election informing them that their PVs were rejected for this reason.

For staff use only: Date and Location	
Postal vote return form	
Please read the information on page 2 before completing this form. Your postal vote (s) will be rejected if you do not complete this form in full.	
Section 1	
1. Are you handing in your own postal vote?	Yes/No
2. Are you handing in the postal votes of other electors? (if No go to question 3)	Yes/No
a. If Yes, how many other electors? (max. per poll is 5 plus your own - see note 1 on page 2)	
3. Are you a political campaigner? (see note 2 on page 3) (if No go to question 4)	Yes/No
a. If Yes, and you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, do the postal votes all belong to close relatives or to people for whom you provide regular care?	Yes/No
4. How many envelopes containing postal votes are you handing in? (including your own, if applicable)	
Section 2	
5. Name	
6. Address	
7. If you are handing in the postal votes of other electors, please provide a reason why	
8. I declare that in total I have not handed in postal votes for more than the permitted number of electors, either at any polling station or to the Returning Officer, at this/these poll(s) and that to the best of my knowledge I am: (circle (a) or (b) as appropriate)	
(a) not a political campaigner for whom it is an offence to handle certain postal votes or	
(b) a political campaigner and have only handed in my own postal vote and/or that of a close relative, or someone for whom I provide regular care.	
9. Signature	10. Date
Section 3 To be completed by the Relevant Officer	
I, insert name: being the Relevant Officer at the following location:	
A. am satisfied that this form has been completed properly and provides the information as required. I do not suspect that more than the permitted number of postal votes have been handed in, nor do I suspect that the individual named above is a political campaigner committing an offence by handing in the postal votes. Therefore the postal vote(s) handed in, is/are to be accepted (tick if applicable for all postal votes handed in) <input type="checkbox"/>	
B. reject the attached postal vote(s) because the person handing it/them in: (tick all reasons that apply)	
i. did not fully complete the postal vote return form (incomplete)	<input type="checkbox"/>
ii. handed in postal votes on behalf of more than the permitted number of electors	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii. was a political campaigner not permitted to handle the postal votes	<input type="checkbox"/>
iv. did not complete the postal vote return form (left behind postal voting document)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total number of postal votes rejected	<input type="text"/>
If you have accepted the individual's own postal vote(s), please tick here <input type="checkbox"/>	

More information

Postal Vote handling (3/4)

- Where to return if not using the post:
 - Polling Stations (day of poll)
 - Civic offices for receipt by relevant officers, from 22 April – 2 May (Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm and [7am - 10pm on polling day]).
- We'll have a clear sign on the letter box at Civic to identify that postal votes posted there will be rejected
- Forms for accepted postal votes are sealed (and can only be opened by court order).
- We will have to account for all categories of rejected postal votes, including ones which were rejected under new provisions via form K1 – which is returned to EC.

Close family:

Individual's spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild. Two people living together as if they were a married couple or civil partners are treated as such.

Political campaigner:

- a candidate at the election;
- an election agent of a candidate at the election;
- a sub-agent of an election agent at the election;
- employed or engaged by a person who is a candidate at the election for the purposes of that person's activities as a candidate;
- a member of a registered political party and carries on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election;
- employed or engaged by a registered political party in connection with the party's political activities;
- employed or engaged by a person listed above, to carry on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election; or
- employed or engaged by a person within paragraph above to carry on an activity designed to promote a particular outcome at the election and includes candidates, agents and party workers.

Returned Postal Votes Civic Protocol

- Messages starting to go out on socials
- Security & Letter Box at Civic Office
 - Security will inform voters that they can't accept or use the letter box for PVs and a form is required
 - Security will call the Elections team to fill form
 - Pull up banner displayed in security area
 - A notice affixed above letter box advising that PVs will be rejected if posted here and what to do from next week.
- Internal Mail Room at Civic
 - Sorted and timed delivery from Royal Mail (RM) accepted
 - Mail room will separate internal mail from regular RM
 - Core team will have posters affixed to desks at Civic
 - Separate receptacles for accepted / rejected PVs
 - All rejections written to within 3 months of polling day



Elections Act preparations

The Electoral Commission

- It's quick and easy to register to vote, go to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote and have your national insurance number handy.
- If you move home, you need to register to vote at your new address.
- Age 17? Register to vote now so you're ready if an election is called soon after your 18th birthday.

Are you ready?
* Local elections on 2 May
* General Election later this year

Remember, you'll need to take photo ID to the Polling Station to vote.

Visit www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/voter-ID to learn:

- What ID is accepted
- How to apply for free voter ID
- How to apply for a postal vote

MK Milton Keynes City Council

Training plans

- Enhanced training for core team and polling station staff - AEA, EC, LLG
- Presiding Officers will undertake mandatory f2f training
- Updated fees for Presiding Officer / Poll Clerk

Communications Plan

- Council Tax Bills Insert
- Social Media, Posts on FB, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Press release, One Council & Councillors' News
- Civic Display Screens
- Posters, fliers social media templates for parishes to publicise

How you can help

- Communicate key messages when campaigning
- Use leaflets and fliers
- Encourage Parishes and other places to display material

Electoral Integrity

DC 6112 Stephen Perry | Thames Valley Police |
Economic Crime Unit

- Election Offences and Guidance circulated to all candidates and agents
- TVP will investigate all offences as shown in document
- Returning Officer does not have the power to investigate election offences
- Please speak to the RO or DRO if you think an electoral offence has been engaged who may refer the matter to TVP at:
ECUElectoral@thamesvalley.police.uk

Electoral
Integrity
(voter-ID
& PV
Handling)

Increased interest on Integrity

- TVP will be informed where a PO has refused a document on the basis that it is a forgery or someone trying to impersonate the person in the ID they are using
 - TVP will be informed if the RO is notified of anyone who may be handing in more PVs than they are required to at different locations
-
- If there are any voter-ID or PV Handling related issues on the day – we should be your first contact
 - Please be very clear with your teams / campaigners etc about this

Absent vote applications

- Do not encourage postal ballot pack redirection. Alternative addresses should only be used if appropriate e.g. the elector will be temporarily away during the second half of April.
- Encourage electors to explore other options for people to act as a proxy – including relatives or neighbours, for example – before a campaigner agrees to be appointed as a proxy.

Postal ballot packs

- Campaigners must never handle anyone else's postal voting documents (now a criminal offence) unless it is for a close relative or someone they provide care for.
- Campaigners must never observe voters completing their ballot paper (now a criminal offence).
- If you are asked for assistance in completing a ballot paper, you should always refer the voter to the Returning Officer's staff / the elections office.

Electoral Commission Code of Conduct:

[Code of Conduct for Campaigners at UK Parliamentary general elections in Great Britain, local elections in England and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections | Electoral Commission](#)

Postal Vote Opening

Where and when

- Chamber at Civic Offices - Sessions will commence at **2pm & 6.30pm** on Monday 22 April and run every weekday (except Friday evening [26 April]) in the run up to 2 May.

Who can attend?

- Candidate, Election Agent and one Postal Vote Agent per session (agent must be notified before session commences) by e-mailing Liz Richardson
 - ✓ Elizabeth.Richardson@Milton-keynes.gov.uk

Which wards?

- Liz Richardson / Roz Tidman will email candidates / agents 2 hours prior to session with details of what will be dealt with at each session

What else...?

- Revised layout – counters on the inside of cordon in the middle of the chamber and observers on the outside.
- DRO adjudication of provisionally rejected signatures at **6:30pm** on the day of every opening session.
- We will aim to deal with A and B envelopes for the same wards in the same session.

Postal Vote Opening

[Link to Guidance.](#)

Access

It is important that you can follow the process and see what is happening, but secrecy is important:

- Ballot papers will be handled face down
- The practice of ‘tallying’ at postal vote opening sessions is prohibited
- You will not be able to lean over tables but able to observe the full process
- You should allow space for staff to work and not attempt to look at ballot paper numbers

EC Guidance

Anyone attending an opening session must not attempt to see how individual ballot papers have been marked. It follows therefore that keeping a tally of how ballot papers have been marked is not allowed.

...anyone attending a postal vote opening must not attempt to look at identifying marks or numbers on ballot papers, disclose how any particular ballot paper has been marked or pass on any such information gained from the session. Anyone found guilty of breaching these requirements can face an unlimited fine, or may be imprisoned for up to six months.

Polling Stations

- Following a limited scope polling district review, we now have an additional new polling station at Glebe Farm School – 135 stations in total. Bear in mind PS numbers will be different from Loughton & Shenley onwards.
- 3 Portacabins - larger buildings to allow use of free-standing privacy screens.
- 3 minor changes to usual locations:
 - St Nicholas Church replaces the Old Mill in Clifton & Newton Blossomville
 - Ashland Lakeside community centre replaces Charles Warren School
 - Water Eaton centre replaces Sycamore Hall
- One ballot box for all ballot papers (some stations will have 2 ballot boxes because of volumes).
- Polling station staff – mandatory training on the new PV handling rule and a refresher on voter ID process
- VIDEF (not required this year but we will do this) and BPRL not open for public inspection but EC and DLUCh to publish local and national results
- Only an elector can request to see their own BPRL information when they are refused a ballot paper - No elector was refused a ballot paper in 2023.

Tellers – one per candidate

Tellers

- Keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter
- Tellers will not be given access to the inside of a polling station unless to cast their own vote or act as a companion for a disabled voter
- Not allowed to ask to see voters ID or check if they have it
- They may remind them Voter Id is required as they approach a polling station

Campaigning outside polling stations:

- You are not allowed to put your messages to voters on polling day, outside the polling station / polling place
- Cars should not be left in Polling Station car parks with campaign messages on
- Clearer signs displayed outside with Tellers do's & don'ts

Polling day

- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm
- Office open 6 am to 10 pm for queries or problems relating to the administration of the election
- Voters in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station at 10 pm can apply for a ballot paper, or hand in a postal vote
- Postal votes:
On polling day UNTIL 10 pm either hand in at by filling a form as discussed earlier:
 - polling stations within Milton Keynes City or
 - Milton Keynes Council Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 3EJ

Counting of votes

Friday 3 May 2023

- The verification for all contested polls (PCC, City & Parish) will be held on **from 9am** at Marshall Arena, Stadium MK, Stadium Way, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK1 1ST
- Counting of City Council and Parish Council elections from late morning.

Saturday 4 May 2023

- Counting of PCC votes from 10am at Civic Offices (Council Chamber and Councillors' Lounge).

General Info

- Candidates, election agents, counting agents appointed by the candidate are entitled to attend.
- 2 x Counting Agents per candidate
- Onsite parking is available for candidates and agents (S2 first come first served) - Please consider car sharing

The Count Venue

Layout

- Allocated tables in front of bar area
- Dedicated area / Balcony for the press
- Dedicated area for doubtful ballot adjudication sharing provisional results
- All announcements will be made from main hall and will be audible throughout the venue
- Usual wayfinding signage to help you navigate the venue
- Venue separated into 2 Zones - City & Parish

City Zone: Ward Tables

Verify MKCC postal votes and then all Polling Station ballot papers.
Then count MKCC Wards.

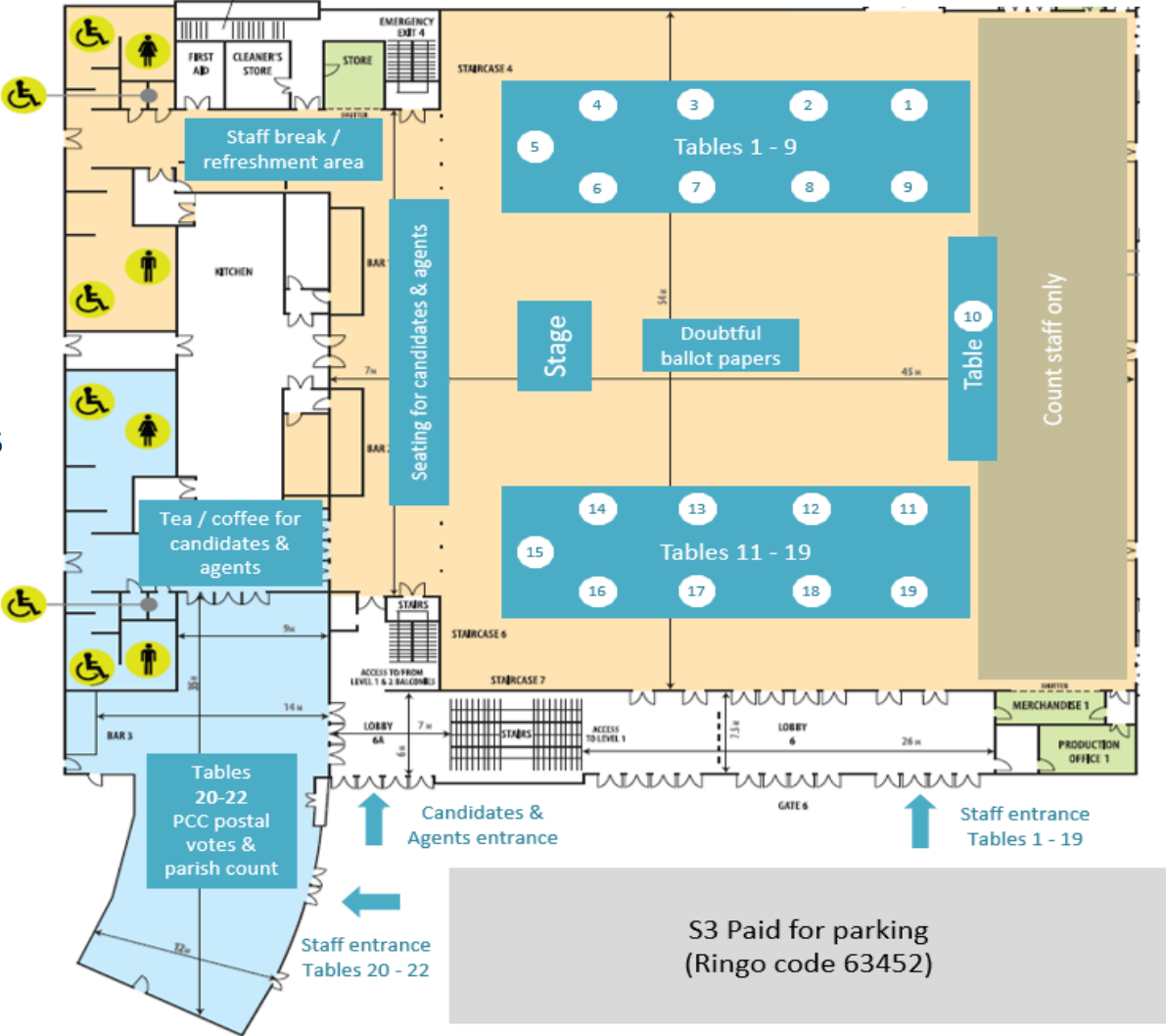
Parish Zone:

Verify PCC postal votes and then move onto Parish postal votes and then parish count (both grass skirts)

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Verification and Count Layout

Water & light refreshments – but no hot drinks



Car parking S2 for candidates and agents

(60 free unreserved spaces)



S3 Paid for parking (Ringo code 63452)

S3 Paid for parking (Ringo code 63452)



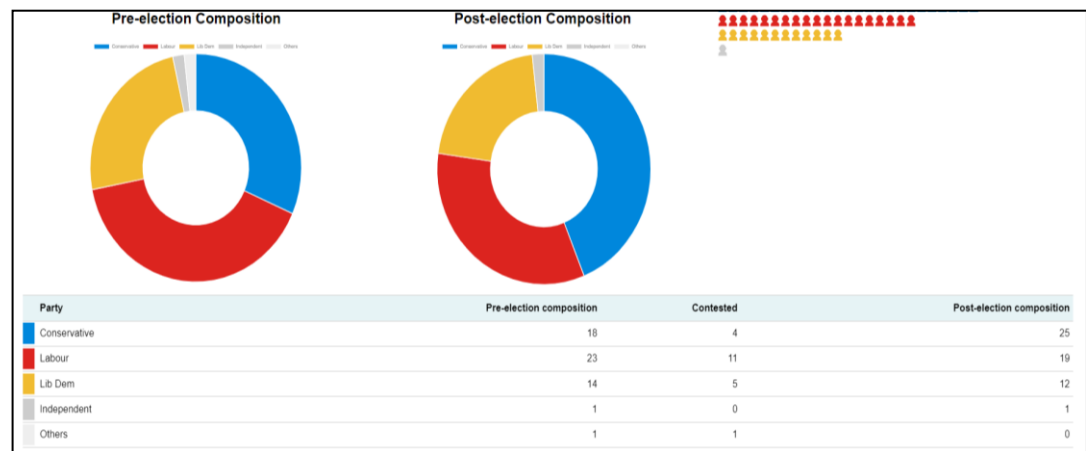
Verification & Count process

- Sealed Ballot Boxes will be stored securely at the venue overnight with SIA Arena security (TVP will also attend the site periodically on Thursday night)
- When you arrive, ballot boxes will be behind each ward table consisting of polling station boxes, postal votes for the ward.
- Each ward table has 1 count team leader and 8 counters
- Welcome announcements
- Verification of all ballot papers – from 9am. We will verify Postal Vote PCC ballot papers in the Parish area
- Estimated to start completing verification in some wards from 11.00 / 11.30 onwards
- Counting of ballot papers – to follow, different start times for each table but we expect from around 11.30 / 12 noon
- Verified PCC votes sealed and transported to Civic for Saturday count.

The Electoral Commission

Verification & Count process

- We will verify the postal votes received prior to the close of poll and then Polling Stations sequentially
- When the Ward has been verified in full, a statement of verification will be prepared, and the turnout will be announced over the PA system
- Counting on verified tables will commence shortly after completion of verification – we will make an announcement
- Doubtful ballot paper adjudication (see later slide)
- Provisional results will be shared with candidates and agents
- Results will be announced on the stage and updated online / on screen



Verification & Count process

Specifics

- Usual counting method (finger stools and flicking corners)
- However, when sorting between candidates, we will use the coloured party markers on front tables
- Supervisors will hold up and bundle flick at front table before placing on rear table
- Coloured trays for rear tables - Loughton & Shenley by-election.
- DRO will review and bundle flick again before provisional result

Recount threshold

- Decision on the day, but: <60 is likely full recount and 60-120 additional bundle flick

Count Agents

- Two per Candidate
- No guests unless permitted by RO

Verification & Count process

Doubtful Ballot Papers

- As usual, supervisors will reinsert obvious papers into the count
- Announcement of adjudication with 2 minute warning
- Adjudication will be undertaken in only one zone
- RO available for particularly sensitive adjudications
- Once adjudicated 'for' a slip will be stapled to the BP
- TV screens **will not be used** - only people permitted to be there will be spoken to by the DRO

Upcoming Events

Electoral Commission Candidates advice surgeries:

- Thursday 18 April
- Thursday 25 April
- Friday 26 April

To request an appointment, candidates and agents should complete the EC's [online form](#) and can contact Stuart Butler on sbutler@electoralcommission.org.uk if they have any further questions about the advice surgeries.

Contacts

- Returning Officer
Sharon.bridglalsingh@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk & 01908 252095
- Electoral Services Manager
Peter.taylor@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk & 01908 253930
- Head of Democratic Services
Peter.brown@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk & 01908 253671
- Electoral Commission contacts
 - For questions on election spending, contact 020 7271 0616
 - For questions on the Commission's guidance on standing for election, contact 0333 103 1928

Useful information

- [Candidates online security guidance](#)
- [Candidates and Agents physical safety advice](#)

Questions &
thank you