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Contact:/Cysylltwch a: Michelle Morris

Dear Sir/Madam

Senedd Cymru Election – 6 May 2021
Blaenau Gwent Constituency and South East Wales Region

For the Senedd Cymru Elections being held on 6 May 2021, I am the Constituency Returning Officer for Blaenau Gwent and the Regional Returning Officer for the South East Wales Region.

INTRODUCTION

In Wales there are five regions and the Senedd Cymru Elections will be combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections.

At the beginning of April, the Electoral Commission will be sending a booklet to every household in Wales explaining the combination of election, highlighting important registration and absent voting deadlines, what to expect in the polling station and also explaining the different voting systems.

As Constituency Returning Officer for Blaenau Gwent, I am responsible for giving notice of the election; the nomination procedures; publication of the statement of persons and notice of poll; counting the Constituency ballot papers and the declaration of result.

As Regional Returning Officer for South East Wales, I am responsible for the overall conduct of the election, and for liaising with and co-ordinating the work of the Constituency Returning Officers across the region. I am also responsible for: giving notice of the election; the nomination procedures; publication of the statement of persons and parties nominated and the notice of poll; collation and calculation of votes for each individual candidate and political party; allocation of seats for the electoral region; the declarations of result.

COVID-19 MEASURES

A number of measures will be put in place that will make this election look and feel different. You can expect to see many of the changes you've become used to over recent months in banks, shops and other indoor spaces.

In polling stations and the verification and count centres individuals will be expected to use the hand sanitiser provided when they enter and leave and wear a face covering at all times (unless they are subject to an exemption).

Other physical/social distancing measures will be in place such as one-way systems, queue management and the use of clear safety screens designed to ensure the protection and safety of all stakeholders involved in the election process.

All arrangements will be kept under review and may be subject to change should circumstances change.

RESOURCES

All guidance and forms (including nomination papers) are available at The Electoral Commission's website: -

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/senedd-elections>

The following guidance is available.

- Part 1 – Can you stand for election?**
- Part 2a – Standing at the constituency election**
- Part 2b – Standing at the regional election**
- Part 3 – Spending and donations**
- Part 4 – The campaign**
- Part 5 – Your right to attend key electoral events**
- Part 6 – After the declaration of results**

It is recommended that you read all parts of the guidance.

CANDIDATE / ELECTION AGENTS BRIEFING

A candidates and agents briefing will be held on Wednesday 17 March at 16.00 via Microsoft Teams. The briefing session will provide an overview for candidates and agents and provide vital information including the nomination procedure, polling information, the verification and count process, candidate spending and election expenses. If you would like to attend the briefing session, please contact Audra Williams, audra.williams@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk Tel: 01495 355087.

NOTICE OF ELECTION / POLL CARDS

The Notice of Election will be published on the 22 March 2021.

DELIVERY OF NOMINATION PAPERS

Nomination packs are available to download from the Electoral Commission website or you can contact Electoral Services. **Nomination papers must be delivered to the office of the Constituency/Regional Returning Officer at The General Offices, Steelworks Road, Ebbw Vale NP23 6DN between the hours of 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. on normal working days.**

I will be available to accept nomination papers following the publication of the Notice of Election. You will be offered pre-set dates and times to come in and submit your nomination papers and you will need to make an appointment for one of these slots. Please contact Audra Williams on 01495 355087 to make an appointment. **Nominations cannot be accepted after 4.00 p.m. on Thursday 8 April.**

You will need to follow public health guidance and will be asked to wear a mask upon entering the building and during your nomination appointment (unless you are subject to an exemption).

Candidates and election agents are encouraged to submit their nomination papers as early as possible to allow for processing and checking. The Constituency/Regional Returning Officer cannot be held responsible for any late/incorrect nominations.

You can request to have your nomination papers informally inspected before they are actually lodged. **It would be best to send a scanned copy by email to audra.williams@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk**

A deposit of £500 **must** accompany the nomination. I will accept the following payment methods: -

Cash

BACS

BACS payments should be made to the following account: -

Bank: Barclays Bank Plc

Sort Code: 20-56-64

Account Number: 60363324

Account Name: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Reference: Please also quote your party and/or candidate name.

If you are paying your deposit electronically the deposit of £500 must be received before you present your nomination papers, you should check by calling Audra Williams on 01495 355087 that the payment has been received before you make an appointment to deliver your nomination papers.

Personal cheques cannot be accepted.

PUBLICATION OF THE STATEMENT OF PERSONS NOMINATED AND NOTICE OF POLL

The combined statement of persons nominated and notice will be published by 4.00 p.m. on Friday 9 April 2021 for both elections.

REGISTER OF ELECTORS

Each Constituency candidate and individual Regional candidate is entitled to one copy of the Register. The respective Electoral Registration Office for each Constituency can supply you with a register for their area in either data or printed format. Please contact them direct if you wish to receive a copy. The telephone numbers for each Electoral Registration Office are listed on the Notice of Election. Candidates must make a written request for a copy of the register.

As soon as the written request is received and you have become a candidate you will be supplied with the following: -

- The register for nominations (which is the register in force on 1 March 2021)
- Any election notice of alteration published

Please note that the earliest date a candidate can be supplied the register is the last date for publication of the notice of election i.e. 29 March 2021.

Political Parties are, however, entitled to obtain and use the electoral register at any time

ISSUE OF POLL CARDS AND POSTAL VOTES

Poll Cards will be posted across the South East Wales region from the end of March.

Proxy Voting Poll Cards will be issued 1-2 two weeks before the election.

It is planned that Postal Votes will be issued across the South East Wales region on either Monday 19 or Tuesday 20 April 2021.

The respective Electoral Registration Office for each County or County Borough can supply you with a list of postal and proxy voters. Please contact them direct if you wish to receive a copy. The telephone numbers for each Electoral Registration Office are listed on the Notice of Election.

OPENING OF POSTAL VOTES

Should you wish to appoint an agent to attend any of the postal vote openings taking place across the South East Wales region. Appointment forms are available on the Electoral Commission's website along with guidance. You should contact each individual Constituency Returning Officer to find out when they will be opening postal votes for their Constituency. The Constituency Returning Officer must give candidates 48 hours' notice of when and where the sessions will take place.

You should note that the opened postal ballot papers will be verified face down at this stage and therefore you will not be able to ascertain any voting pattern from observing.

For the Blaenau Gwent Constituency, full details of postal vote openings will follow but I intend again to operate a two stage process. Stage 1 will include the opening of the outer envelopes and checking elector's personal identifiers and stage 2 will be when the ballot papers are removed (face down) from the ballot paper envelopes. This process will take place at The General Offices, Steelworks Road, Ebbw Vale NP23 6DN.

CAMPAIGN PUBLICITY ADVICE

Campaign material, is subject to a number of restrictions under electoral law. Election campaign material must contain an imprint (the imprint must contain the name and address of the printer and promoter); must not resemble a poll card, and must not contain a false statement as to the personal character or conduct of another candidate.

You should include an imprint on printed material, websites and electronic mail. Please refer to the Electoral Commission Guidance Part 4 - The Campaign. **To avoid any complaints, it is highly recommended that you read and follow this guidance.**

SOCIAL MEDIA

This will be an important part of the campaign but please bear in mind restrictions and false statements about a candidate's personal character or conduct etc applies to statements made through this medium.

FLY POSTING / DISPLAY OF ADVERTISEMENTS

A common 'flashpoint' between candidates in elections is fly-posting. Candidates and agents are reminded that it is an offence under Town and Country Planning Acts to display fly-posters, and it is also illegal to deface road-signs being property of any Highways Authority. Any defaced road-signs will be cleaned and the relevant Highways Authority who will recharge any associated costs. Please refer to the Electoral Commission Guidance Part 4 - The Campaign. To avoid any complaints, it is highly recommended that you read and follow this guidance.

THE POLL

Polling for this election takes place between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. on Thursday 6 May 2021.

The colour of the Regional ballot paper will be white and the Blaenau Gwent Constituency ballot paper will be lilac.

CAMPAIGNING ON POLLING DAY

Campaigning cannot happen within a polling station or polling place. There should be no long term parking of vehicles for campaigning purposes, for example displaying election materials or using loudspeakers, immediately outside entrances or within a reasonable distance of the entrance. Cars being used in campaigns that are also used to transport voters may need to wait for the voter while at the polling station, but this should not be unduly prolonged. Please refer to the Electoral Commission Guidance Part 4 - The Campaign.

REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE

If you have reason to believe that an election-related crime has been committed, you should first raise the matter with the Constituency Returning Officer or the Regional Returning Officer. They may be able to explain whether or not an election-related crime has been committed and refer it to the Police if necessary or provide you with the details of the police contact for the area so that you can report your allegation. If you want the police to formally investigate your concerns, you should be prepared to give them a statement and substantiate your allegation. Every police force has been designated a Single Point of Contact for elections.

THE VERIFICATION / COUNT

I recommend that you read the Electoral Commissions guidance for candidate and agents Part 5 – Your right to attend key electoral events. Page 13 – 20 explains the verification / count process.

Friday 7 May 2021

The verification for each constituency will commence no later than 10am on Friday 7 May. As this is a combined election, the ballot papers for the Police & Crime Commissioner Election will be verified at the same time. Following completion of the verification, the Count for the Members of the Senedd for the constituency will begin followed by the Count for Members of the Senedd for the region.

The central calculation, allocation of seats and declaration of result for the Regional Election will be made by the Regional Returning Officer. I will provide you with further information about attending the central calculation and the declaration of result in due course. Numbers will be very limited on this occasion.

Detailed information will be provided and you will need to follow public health guidance and will be asked to wear a mask upon entering the venue and during these proceedings (unless you are subject to an exemption).

If you wish to attend the verification / count of one of the below local authorities, please contact the respective Constituency Returning Officer on the following. The Constituency Returning Officer may also write direct to you with their local arrangements: -

Blaenau Gwent	-	01495 355086
Caerphilly	-	01443 864405
Islwyn	-	01443 864405
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	-	01685 725202
Monmouth	-	01633 644212
Newport East	-	01633 210744
Newport West	-	01633 210744
Torfaen	-	01495 766074

ELECTION EXPENSES - SPENDING AND DONATIONS

Candidates and their agents must follow certain rules about how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election. Please read the Electoral Commissions guidance for candidate and agents Part 3 – Spending and donations.

Please refer to the guidance which sets out the spending limits for Constituency and Regional candidates. You can download election expenses return forms from the Electoral Commission website at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/senedd-elections>

If you have any queries relating to spending and donations, you should contact the Electoral Commission on 0333 103 1929 or infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

The last day for the return of election expenses is 11 June 2021 (if the result is declared on 7 May 2021).

Yours faithfully

M.A. Morris

Michelle Morris
Managing Director
Constituency & Regional Returning Officer

The General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6DN

Y Swyddfeydd Cyffredinol
Heol Gwaith Dur
Glyn Ebwy
NP23 6DN