



Chloe Smith MP

Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution

Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and
Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

2 March 2021

Dear William,

Guidance for campaigners in May's local elections

In February, the Government confirmed that the local elections in May 2021 will take place, and published its Election Delivery Plan. The Government committed to produce more detailed guidance for political parties, candidates and campaigners in England.

Following the issuing of the broader COVID 'roadmap', the Government has now published this guidance, which explains how free and fair elections can take place in a COVID-secure way:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-governments-approach-to-elections-and-referendums-during-covid-19>

Campaigning is an important part of effective elections, because voters want to make an informed choice of whom to vote for. There must also be equality - a 'level-playing field' - for how people can campaign. All those involved in the electoral process must also ensure that public health is protected.

The Parliamentary Parties Panel and the Local Government Association independents group were engaged during the development of this guidance, ensuring that the interests of all parties and candidates were taken into account.

Up to 8 March – national lockdown

During the current period of national lockdown, the Government's view is that current restrictions do not support door to door campaigning or leafleting by individual political party campaigners. Existing commercial delivery services, like Royal Mail, are permitted.

It is not acceptable that activists from some parties have been seeking to ignore these provisions. The rules are in place to avoid hundreds of extra individuals campaigning on the streets in every locality, contrary to the clear 'stay at home' message.

There will be two months of outdoor campaigning in the run up to May's polls, to support free and fair elections. Given this, it is not 'necessary' for doorstep campaigning by individual party campaigners to take place prior to 8 March.

From 8 March to 28 March – one-to-one campaigning

From 8 March, individual activists will be able to campaign outdoors in a COVID-secure way. The new rules allow for the delivery of election material by volunteers, and campaigners will be able to canvas electors on their doorsteps, but they must always be socially distanced and never enter inside people's homes.

Campaigners must ensure that necessary mitigations are applied in line with broader COVID guidance, including the wearing of face-coverings, keeping socially distanced at 2 metres, and sanitising hands in between households.

From 29 March – the rule of six

From 29 March, broader COVID restrictions will allow for six people or two households to meet outdoors. In turn, this will allow groups of up to six campaigners to meet and gather outside.

Broader support

The campaigning guidance is one of a number of measures this Government is putting in place to support the delivery of COVID-secure and effective elections. Our Election Delivery Plan provides an extra £31 million in additional funding for local authorities to help with COVID-related costs, over and above existing planned central and local council funding for the elections.

We have laid secondary legislation to introduce time-limited changes:

- (1) Reducing the number of signatures required to validate a candidate's nomination. This allows candidates to demonstrate they have local support while minimising face to face contact in the nominations process. Guidance on these changes can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/may-2021-elections-note-on-changes-to-the-nominations-process-and-number-of-subscribers-required-for-nominations>
- (2) Introducing a new emergency proxy vote: Allowing those affected by COVID (e.g. if self-isolating) to apply for an emergency proxy vote at up to 5pm on election day – so that they can still have their say without having to leave their home. This complements the existing right to apply for a proxy vote in advance.

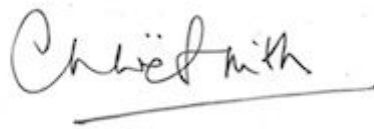
Voters can continue to apply for a postal vote on demand. The Electoral Commission will soon launch a comprehensive public information campaign so that everyone is fully informed

about how to participate in May's elections. Political parties will also, rightly, have a role to play.

There is a necessary balance to be struck in allowing campaigning activity and continuing to protect the NHS and save lives. It is essential that all political campaigners continue to show social responsibility, and parties, agents and candidates ensure that their campaigners understand the rules.

Democracy should not be cancelled because of COVID. May's elections will take place, but in a COVID-secure way, and I encourage all voters to take part.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Chloe Smith', with a horizontal line underneath.

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