



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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## WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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**TITLE**        **Timing of the 2021 Senedd ordinary general election**

**DATE**        **19 March 2021**

**BY**            **Mark Drakeford, First Minister and Julie James, Minister for  
Housing and Local Government**

We are making this statement under sections 6(8) and 15(4) of the Welsh Elections (Coronavirus) Act 2021 (“the Act”).

We completed the second review of the preparations for the holding of the 2021 poll for the Senedd ordinary general election on 12 March. We can confirm that for the purposes of this review the criteria we published on 5 March under section 12 of the Act (for determining whether it is necessary or appropriate to postpone the poll for the 2021 Senedd ordinary general election for a reason relating to coronavirus) have not been met.

This was reflected in the Written Statement issued on 12 March:

*The review this week concluded the criteria for postponing the Senedd election have not been met. Full preparations for 6 May will therefore continue. Guidance for election campaigning will be published on Friday and elements will be reflected in the regulations. The move to ‘stay local’ will mean leafletting will be able to resume on a local basis, but regulations will still prohibit door-to-door canvassing.*

This Written Statement provides further information on the status of the indicators under the published criteria at the time of the review.

### **Criterion 1: Public Health situation (data correct as of 5 March)**

*Key Indicators:*

#### **Confirmed case rates.**

The rate for Wales was 53 cases per 100k based on Public Health Wales data.

#### **Hospital capacity.**

The COVID 19 confirmed hospital occupancy (7 day rolling average) was 527. The Stats Wales COVID 19 confirmed ICU occupancy (7 day rolling average) was 48.

**Feedback from local health professionals (including incident management teams or outbreak control teams).**

There was no feedback which would suggest holding the election is an unacceptable risk.

**Feedback from local authority leaders and other local partners.**

There was no feedback which would suggest holding the election is an unacceptable risk.

**Rates of change in the Alert Level Indicators.**

The Alert Level indicators were stable and/or decreasing.

**The progress of the vaccination programme.**

The vaccination programme was progressing well. 951,540 individuals had received a first dose of the COVID 19 vaccine, while 139,445 individuals had received the two dose course of the COVID 19 vaccine.

**Incidence of variants of concern.**

Variants of concern were not considered to pose an unacceptable risk in the context of holding the election.

**Criterion 2: Status of Preparations for the Election**

*Key Indicators:*

**Advice from the Welsh Government's Chief Medical Officer and Technical Advisory Cell regarding the impact of the current spread of the virus on the safe running of the poll.**

Initial advice from the Welsh Government's Chief Medical Officer and Technical Advisory Cell regarding the impact of the current spread of the virus on the safe running of the poll was positive. Modelling suggested that infection rates, deaths and hospital occupancy in the period around the 6 May are likely to be at a low enough level that the election will not pose a risk of increased infection rates to the extent that it would present a significant risk to public health and to the safe running of the

election. This was on the assumption that appropriate measures, such as social distancing and increased hygiene, were put in place at polling stations and count venues to mitigate the risk of transmission of the virus.

The advice noted that the impact of transmission is likely to have the lowest impact if prevalence of COVID-19 is lowest. On this basis, the modelled estimates therefore recommend that the preferred election date should be on 6 May, rather than, illustratively, 8 July. This is because it is closest to periods of restrictions which are currently reducing the spread of the virus.

The full, final advice is available here: <https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-group-mitigating-risks-increased-covid-19-transmission-during-elections>

The report made a number of recommendations on how to mitigate the risks associated with coronavirus, the majority of which were already part of relevant guidance and plans. Our officials are continuing to work with Regional Returning Officers, electoral administrators, the Electoral Commission and other partners in relation to the practical steps that can be taken to increase the safety of the poll.

### **The timing of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections.**

The Police and Crime Commissioner elections are still scheduled for 6 May.

### **Feedback from Returning Officers, the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders, for example relating to the availability of staff and venues or capacity to process absent votes.**

Electoral administrators are continuing to make preparations to allow for a safe and fair running of the poll. The Welsh Government has regular discussions with Regional Returning Officers (RROs), the Electoral Commission and other partners on the impact of the pandemic on the logistics of running the election.

The Minister for Housing and Local Government met RROs on 3 March to discuss the preparations for the elections on 6 May. It was recognised that in the context of the risks being faced in these extraordinary times, it is not possible to give absolute assurance about the holding of the poll in May, or indeed at any point in the coming months. However, there was a common understanding that the preparations being made put us in as strong a position as feasibly possible – given the circumstances we face and taking into account the need to put in place appropriate Covid-secure arrangements – to have a reasonable degree of confidence that the elections could be held on 6 May.

The Minister also met the Electoral Commission and officials have engaged with the Association of Electoral Administrators and representatives of Welsh Police forces during this process.

Two key risks were identified in the discussions:

- Staffing, and the risk that insufficient volunteers come forward initially from usual cohorts, or withdraw closer to the election. The Welsh Government and the UK Government are encouraging civil servants, other public servants and other members of the public to put themselves forward, via [Volunteering Wales](#), to work for Returning Officers to deliver the 6 May elections.
- Acceptance by those participating in the election of the necessary Coronavirus mitigations at polling stations and count venues. The Welsh Government is clear that everyone participating in the election must follow Coronavirus regulations and guidance as well as electoral law and guidance and instructions from Returning Officers. If, as is likely, processes such as counting votes take longer as a result of the arrangements Returning Officers need to make to comply with both electoral law and Coronavirus requirements, then Returning Officers will have the full support of Ministers.

As the criteria for postponement have not been met, and as indicated in the Written Statement on 12 March, full preparations for the election on 6 May will continue.

We are supporting Returning Officers and electoral administrators in the actions they are taking to reduce the risks associated with running an election during a pandemic. These actions include implementing social distancing and hygiene measures at polling stations and count venues. We have provided additional funding to Returning Officers to enable these measures to be in place. The Chief Medical Officer has written to those shielding who are eligible to vote in the Senedd election to encourage them to consider postal voting. In the event that individuals are required to self-isolate close to polling day, they will be able to apply for emergency proxy votes.

We have also published [elections guidance](#) as well as specific [guidance on election campaigning](#), which sets out that leafleting is (as of 15 March) allowed on a local basis, but door-to-door canvassing is prohibited. This will be given further consideration in the third 21-day review which will be completed by 2 April. The fourth and final review of election preparations will be completed by 23 April. In extremis, the Senedd could make a decision, subject to the agreement of 40 out of 60 Members, to postpone the poll at any time up to dissolution on 29 April. However, as outlined in this Written Statement, based on the information available the Welsh Government's firm intention at this point remains for the election to be held on 6 May as planned. On this basis we can confirm under section 6(8) of the Act that at present the First Minister does not consider it appropriate or necessary, and therefore does not intend, to exercise the power under section 6(1) of the Act to propose to the Llywydd that the poll for the 2021 Senedd election is postponed for a reason relating to coronavirus.

