

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mick Antoniw MS
Chair
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru
SeneddLJC@senedd.wales

26 February 2021

Dear Mick,

I am writing to inform you that I have published a Written Statement on the first review of preparations for the 2021 Senedd election in accordance with the Welsh Elections (Coronavirus) Bill, which can be found at: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-first-review-preparations-2021-senedd-election-accordance-welsh-elections>.

The Written Statement refers to the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group on Elections and Registration. A communique from the meeting can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communiques-from-the-interministerial-group-for-elections-and-registration>. I am sorry that, owing to an administrative oversight, I did not provide advance written notice of the meeting in accordance with the Inter-institutional Relations Agreement.

Yours sincerely,

Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **First review of preparations for the 2021 Senedd election in accordance with the Welsh Elections (Coronavirus) Bill**

DATE **26 February 2021**

BY **Julie James MS, Minister for Housing and Local Government**

In accordance with section 15 of the Welsh Elections (Coronavirus) Bill (“the Bill”), I can confirm that the Welsh Ministers completed our first review of the preparations for the holding of the poll for the 2021 Senedd election on 18 February 2021.

In summary, the result of the review is that we remain committed to the election being held on 6 May as scheduled, alongside local authority by elections as determined by Returning Officers, and also the Police and Crime Commissioner elections which are the responsibility of the UK Government. As the public health situation is currently gradually improving, the postponement of the Senedd election is not reasonably anticipated at this time. Everybody must prepare on this basis.

We continue to work closely with the UK and Scottish Governments. On 3 February I joined the inaugural meeting of the Interministerial Group for Elections and Registration. A

communique from the meeting can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communiques-from-the-interministerial-group-for-elections-and-registration>.

Further reviews

The next statutory review of preparations for 2021 Senedd election is due to be completed by 12 March and I will lay a further statement as soon as reasonably practicable after its completion. The First Minister will also lay a statement in accordance with section 6 of the Bill on or before 24 March setting out whether he intends to exercise his power under that section to propose postponement of the poll.

Criteria and pre-election period guidance

The criteria to be used by the First Minister for determining whether it is necessary or appropriate to postpone the election, and the guidance on the exercise of Welsh

Government functions in the pre-election period, will be published as soon as possible and in accordance with sections 4 and 6 of the Bill.

Campaigning

Our Coronavirus FAQs incorporate guidance on campaigning and can be found here: <https://gov.wales/alert-level-4-frequently-asked-questions#section-61335>. We will continue to update this page as we receive more questions and as the public health situation develops, and we will issue guidance to election campaigners, in accordance with section 9 of the Bill, as soon as possible.

It is important to note that our position on campaigning has not changed at this stage, as there is not sufficient headroom to adjust existing restrictions at present. This means that although it is a reasonable excuse to leave home for essential work purposes related to elections (for example if you are part of an electoral services team), to comply with legal obligations connected to elections (for example collecting signatures for a nomination), or to vote, it is not a reasonable excuse to leave home to deliver leaflets or campaign door-to-door.

Running the elections

We are working closely with Returning Officers to help them source venues and staff for the elections. As part of this, we emphasise that schools, community centres, places of worship and other facilities should if at all possible be put at the disposal of Returning Officers for use as polling stations and counting centres so that the poll is accessible. The opening of premises for official use for elections is permitted under our Coronavirus regulations.

We would also encourage public servants and other members of the public, including those seeking work, to put themselves forward via Volunteering Wales (volunteering-wales.net) to work on the elections.

Voting

Polling stations will be Covid-secure, and it will be the responsibility of Returning Officers to ensure this. Voters attending polling stations will not need to register for the purposes of NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect unless the venue is open for another purpose which requires it. Organising a poll or attending a polling station will not breach Coronavirus regulations restricting movement or mass gatherings, as long as physical distancing and other rules are observed.

But we would also encourage people, particularly those who are shielding, to consider applying for a postal vote. If you intend to vote by post please apply as soon as possible as this will help administrators in their preparations for 6 May.

Counting votes and election results

We are fully supportive of the steps Returning Officers will need to take to manage the counting of votes differently to maintain compliance with electoral law as well as Coronavirus regulations. We are making available additional funding for this purpose. We appreciate that there may be delays in completing counts and announcing results as a result of the necessary changes and we recognise that this is understandable if we are to have a free and fair elections in current circumstances.