

# Briefing Note

## Elections 2024

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### Purpose / Background

To update ward and parish councillors on elections in 2024. This briefing note focuses on business as usual and scenario planning.

There is a complex combination of polls in May 2024, including local elections, parish elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections (PCC). West Berkshire have been designated as Police Area Returning Officer (PARO) for the Thames Valley Area.

The uncertainty surrounding the timing of a general election remains a key risk. The Prime Minister can call an election at any time (25 working days' notice), but this must happen before 28 January 2025. Speculation is either for an Autumn or May election. A May 2024 general election creates the most extreme election scenario for MKCC.

### What's on in the coming years for MKCC

Year	Election type
2024	19 MKCC wards, Police & Crime Commissioner, 50% of Parishes & <b>Parliamentary (?)</b>
2025	Fallow year
2026	All out MKCC and Parish elections following boundary review

### MK May 2024 (without a General Election)

Polls on the 2 May 2024 will be more complex than in 2023, but assuming there is no general election, will represent a manageable risk. Additional challenges include:

- Further new Elections Act changes, including online absent vote applications (OAVA) and new restrictions on the handling and receipt of postal vote packs in Polling Stations.
- PCC Elections - The counting of PCC votes will be more straightforward than in 2021 (the voting system has changed to First Past the Post). The PARO has indicated that we will be required to verify our votes on Friday 3 May and count on Saturday 4 May. We plan to count PCC papers in the Chamber and adjacent areas in Civic Offices on the Saturday.

### Preparing for a General Election

A general election could happen at any time in 2024. As always this presents additional challenges but for next year the following are new:

- MKCC has been designated Returning Officer for the new Buckingham and Bletchley constituency, which comprises four wards in Milton Keynes (three Bletchley seats and Tattenhoe) plus most of the north of Aylesbury Vale. We have started working closely with our colleagues in Bucks but will be responsible for an additional 45 Polling Stations, 35,000 electors, 5,000 postal votes and managing the count.
- New Elections Act changes, including a new entitlement for overseas voters to retain their parliamentary franchise for life (previously capped at 15 years). Taken together with other Elections Act changes and significantly higher demand, including from many electors who will not have voted when previous changes were implemented (for example this year's local elections when Voter ID was introduced), will require additional manpower and communication / awareness resources.

## May 2024 (with a General Election)

If a general election is called in May 2024, alongside scheduled polls it would be a significant undertaking for MKCC. We would not have delivered this combination of polls before and given the additional complexities highlighted above, will need to be managed carefully.

Given these factors, and that a general election in May 2024 could be called even after the local election timetable has commenced, the Retuning Officer and the elections team think it best to plan for a May 2024 general election. This has direct financial and resource implications set out below:

### 1. The count

The law requires that counting has commenced at a parliamentary election by 2am, and that all ballot papers, for all polls are verified together before counting can commence. Based on the effect of a parliamentary turnout on other polls we estimate that there will be in the region of **450,000** ballot papers to verify prior to a count commencing. For context, in May 2023 there were 66,000 ballot papers to verify.

In order to achieve the above, something in the region of 250 counting staff will be required (there were 110 in May 2023). The principal issue is therefore the amount of space required to accommodate such a significant operation. The decision has now been made by Corporate Leadership Team to hire the Marshall Arena for May which has the space to accommodate these numbers.

This means that we will use the Arena in May regardless of whether there is a parliamentary election or not, given that a formal booking is required to secure the venue.

### 2. Postal voting

Our printers have advised that at least 4 months' notice of a May parliamentary election would be required in order to deliver a combined postal pack. As this is unlikely to happen, it is probable that two postal packs would be required (one with a parliamentary ballot paper and one with other ballot papers). This will exponentially increase the resources required for postal vote opening and is likely to be confusing for electors.

In parts of the Buckingham and Bletchley constituency, voters would receive a parliamentary pack from MKCC and a PCC pack from Bucks Council, which would be a different style, as different printers are used.

### 3. Demand, resources and complexity

The naturally heightened interest and demand of a general election combined with the various Elections Act changes, new cross constituency boundaries and different franchises (different electors will not be able to vote in every poll) will require additional manpower at every stage of the process. In some polling stations there could be 4 different ballot papers to deal with.

## Comparison of 2024 May Polls Scenarios

Activity	Scenario – no General Election in May	Scenario – General Election in May
Poll Cards	Approx 200,000 combined Poll Cards for PCC, local and parish elections, signed off at the end of February.	If called after February, then an additional 225,000 Poll Cards will need to be proofed, printed and posted.
Registration routines	During the election timetable: Around 2-4,000 new applications to register, 1,000 new postal vote applications, and zero overseas applications. 500 emails per week.	During the election timetable: Around 15-20,000 new applications to register, 5,000 new postal vote applications and 3-4,000 overseas vote applications (15 minutes on average to process). 2,500 -3,000 emails per week.
Preparation	Existing space used at Civic, with briefings and ballot box pick up from Civic.	Additional space required for additional ballot boxes, with briefings and ballot box pick up at Civic and north Bucks
Polling Stations	135 Polling Stations and Presiding Officers, 230 Poll Clerks, 180 ballot boxes and 17 Polling Station Inspectors.	180 Polling Stations and Presiding Officers, 320 Poll Clerks, 350 ballot boxes and 25 Polling Station Inspectors
Postal Votes	Around 40,000 combined postal packs issued with a 70% turnout. 4 scanners running concurrently.	Around 90,000 un-combined packs issued with around an 85% turnout. 6 scanners running concurrently
Turnout	30-35%	70%
Close of Poll	180 ballot boxes returned to the count venue and 2 x satellite venues.	350 ballot boxes returned to the count venue and 3 x satellite venues.
Count	<p>Around 130,000 ballot paper to verify and count over Friday and Saturday for PCC.</p> <p>Around 22 Count Team Leaders on Friday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Around 450,000 ballot papers to verify before 2am. Parliamentary election ballot papers counted overnight after verification.</li> <li>• Bucks PCC ballot papers transport to Stoke Mandeville stadium.</li> <li>• MKCC PCC , local and parish papers stored securely.</li> <li>• Local ballot papers counted Friday afternoon. Parish and PCC Papers counted Saturday and or Sunday.</li> <li>• 23 Count Team leaders required overnight.</li> <li>• 19 Count Team leaders on Friday afternoon.</li> <li>• 10-15 Count Team leaders for PCC / parish counts on Saturday / Sunday.</li> </ul>