

Senedd Elections 2026

Directions to Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers from the Electoral Management Board

These directions are given by the Electoral Management Board under Sections 20B and 20C of the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru etc. Act 2013 (“the 2013 Act”), as amended by the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 (“the 2024 Act”).

Under this legislation, the EMB may give directions in writing to Returning Officers (ROs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) about the exercise of the officers’ functions in relation to Senedd elections.

As required by legislation, the Directions have been the subject of formal consultation with the Electoral Commission. An informal consultation has also taken place with Returning Officers. The final directions issued reflect issues identified and comments made in those consultations.

The EMB approved this final set of directions on the 3 October 2025. The table below provides a full statement of the directions with a short commentary where clarification might be useful.

	Subject	Direction
1	Ballot Paper <i>Colour of Ballot Papers</i>	(a) Subject to direction 1(b) below, ballot papers must be white and tendered ballot papers must be pink. (b) Ballot papers and/or tendered ballot papers of other colours may be used: i. in the constituencies of Caerdydd Penarth and/or Caerdydd Ffynnon Taf, for reasons of administrative convenience arising from the fact that those constituencies share a returning officer; ii. where ballot papers are re-issued for any reason; and/or iii. in other exceptional circumstances where the returning officer considers that other colours should be used for reasons of administrative necessity or in order to avoid confusion among electors, for example in order to manage cross-boundary issues. <i>The ballot paper is the fundamental voter facing document in the election. This provides a consistent form of paper for all voters.</i>
2	Notices <i>Publication of Notice of Election</i>	Returning Officers must publish the Notice of Election during the week commencing 23 March 2026. <i>This provides a consistent approach to publishing the Notice and also means the nomination period for parties and candidates is broadly consistent across Wales.</i>

3	Poll Cards <i>Date of dispatch of poll cards</i>	Returning Officers must ensure that the main poll card print run is dispatched to electors no later than 3 April 2026. <i>The vast majority of poll cards arriving in the same week provides consistency across Wales.</i>
4	Second Interim Election Notice of Alteration <i>Publication Date</i>	Electoral Registration Officers must publish the Second Interim Election Notice of Alteration between 21 April and 24 April 2026. <i>With publication of the Second Interim Election Notice of Alteration near to the postal vote application deadline, a second issue of postal votes is able to pick up those electors who have applied for a postal vote since the first issue, ensuring they get their postal packs as quickly as possible and do not have to wait until the final issue.</i>
5	Verification and Count <i>Count Timing</i>	Returning Officers must ensure that the first ballot boxes are opened after 9:00 am and not later than 11:00am on Friday 8 May 2026 to allow the verification and count to begin. There will be no overnight counting of votes but the verification/count in all constituencies must be underway by 11:00am on 8 May 2026. In circumstances where the Returning Officer considers the verification process should take place overnight for reasons of administrative necessity, for example in order to manage cross-boundary issues, they may do so. <i>The Direction formalises the position that there will be no overnight count, but ensures that there will be no undue delay, with all Counts underway by 11:00 am.</i> <i>The Direction does not require that all ballot boxes will have been received at the Count Centre(s) by 11:00am on 8 May. It only requires that boxes begin to be opened by 11:00am.</i> <i>The Direction does not prevent Returning Officers from undertaking preparatory work immediately following the close of poll. The verification/counting of the votes on 8 May does not preclude a reconciliation of unused or spoilt papers and the checking of arithmetic on Ballot Paper Accounts at the close of poll/overnight. However, Returning Officers are reminded that if they undertake any such checking of spoilt or unused papers, or begin the verification stage, at the close of poll/overnight then access of candidates, agents, observers etc. to observe will need to be permitted. The need to ensure transparency, scrutiny and acceptance is paramount so the details of any such activities would need to be publicised to candidates, agents, observers etc.</i>

6	Postal Votes <i>Royal Mail Sweep</i>	Returning Officers must make arrangements with Royal Mail for a polling day sweep of the sorting office(s) for their constituency to ensure that, as far as possible, all postal packs in the system are recovered. <i>The EMB will liaise centrally with Royal Mail, but the local arrangements for the receipt of the sweep need to be made by each RO with their Royal Mail representative. It is in the interest of the voters that every effort is made to recover all the votes cast.</i>
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Election Timetable: Senedd Election

7 May 2026

The days which are disregarded in calculating the timetable are Saturday, Sunday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, bank holidays and any day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning.

Please be aware that the timetable may change in the event of days being appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning.

Event	Working days before poll by law (deadline if not midnight)	Date
Publication of notice of election	Not later than 25 days	w/c 23 March (Direction)
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers	19 days (4pm)	4pm on Thursday 9 April
Deadline for withdrawals of nomination	19 days (4pm)	4pm on Thursday 9 April
Publication of first interim election notice of alteration	19 days	Thursday 9 April
Deadline for the notification of appointment of election agents	18 days (4pm)	4pm on Friday 10 April
Publication of statement of parties and persons nominated, including notice of poll and situation of polling stations	Not later than 18 days (4pm)	Not later than 4pm on Friday 10 April
Deadline for receiving applications for registration	12 days	Monday 20 April
Deadline for receiving new postal vote and postal proxy applications, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	11 days (5pm)	5pm on Tuesday 21 April
Publication of the second interim notice of alteration	Between 18 days and 6 days	Between Tuesday 21 and Friday 24 April (Direction)
Deadline for receiving new applications to vote by proxy (not postal proxy or emergency proxies)	6 days (5pm)	5pm on Tuesday 28 April

Event	Working days before poll (deadline if not midnight)	Date
Publication of final election notice of alteration	5 days	Wednesday 29 April
Deadline for notification of appointment of polling and counting agents	5 days	Wednesday 29 April
POLLING DAY	0 (7am to 10pm)	7am to 10pm on Thursday 7 May
Last time that electors can apply for a replacement for a spoilt or lost postal vote	0 (5pm)	5pm on Thursday 7 May
Deadline for emergency proxy applications	0 (5pm)	5pm on Thursday 7 May
Last time to alter the register due to clerical error or court appeal	0 (9pm)	9pm on Thursday 7 May
Verification and Counting of the Votes	+1	From 9am on Friday 8 May (direction)