

Local government elections in England | Electoral Commission Search

Local government elections in England You are in the section Home Currently reading: of 12 - Show page contents On this page Introduction Becoming a candidate Campaigning at the election Spending and donation rules Registering to vote The voting process Voting in-person Absent voting The count and declaration of results Electoral fraud Roles and responsibilities Introduction This guide is designed to provide answer to key questions on the upcoming elections in England, relating to candidates, spending and donations, and the voting process. You can use the contents box to easily jump to different sections of this webpage, and click the drop-down questions to see answers. What elections are taking place? There are 230 local elections and four mayoral elections. Local government elections (district, borough, county borough and unitary authority elections) will take place in local authorities across England. Voters will elect councillors, who make decisions on services in the local area. Local authority mayoral elections in Bedford, Leicester, Mansfield and Middlesbrough. A local authority mayor is responsible for running the council.

Election timetable Election timetable Event Deadline Publication of notice of election Monday 27 March Delivery of nomination papers 4pm on Tuesday 4 April Publication of statement of persons nominated 4pm on Wednesday 5 April Deadline to apply to register to vote 11:59pm on Monday 17 April Deadline to apply to vote by post, by postal proxy, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes 5pm on Tuesday 18 April Deadline for new proxy vote applications 5pm on Tuesday 25 April Deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate 5pm on Tuesday 25 April Publication of notice of poll Tuesday 26 April Polling day 7am to 10pm on Thursday 4 May Deadline to apply for a replacement for spoilt or lost postal votes 5pm on Thursday 4 May Deadline for emergency proxy applications 5pm on Thursday 4 May Delivery of return of election expenses 35 calendar days after the day the results have been declared

Becoming a candidate Who can become a candidate? Anyone who wants to stand as a candidate must be at least 18 years old, and a British or qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of a European Union country. Anyone wanting to stand at a local government election will need the signatures of a proposer and seconder from the ward and must meet at least one of the following four qualifications. Be, and continue to be, registered to vote in the local authority area that they are standing in, from the day of their nomination onwards Occupy, as owner or tenant, any land or other premises in the local authority area that they are standing in, during the whole of the 12 months before the day of their nomination and the day of election Their main or only place of work must be in the local authority area that they are standing in. This applies to the 12 months prior to the day of their nomination and the day of election Have lived in the local authority area that they are standing in during the whole of the 12 months before the day of their nomination and the day of election What are the disqualification rules? The rules around standing for election and the disqualifications that apply are complex. Further information can be found in the Electoral Commission's guidance for candidates and agents . Can someone stand for election in more than one ward within the same local authority? Anyone who wants to stand as a candidate can submit nomination papers for more than one ward, but they cannot stand for election in more than one ward within the same local authority after the deadline of withdrawals. When does someone become a candidate? The earliest that a person can officially become a candidate is 27 March, the last day for the publication of the notice of election. If a person has already declared themselves a candidate at the election, or the party has announced the candidate's intention to stand, then they will officially become a

candidate on this date. If they declare that they will be a candidate at the elections after 27 March, they become a candidate on that day, or the date they formally submit their nominations papers – whichever is earliest. When will we know who all the candidates are? The relevant Returning Officer will publish the full list of candidates standing in their constituency. This will happen in most cases by 4pm on Wednesday 5 April. This information will usually be available on the respective local authority website.

Campaigning at the election

When can candidates start campaigning? Candidates can start campaigning at any time. They do not have to wait until they are validly nominated to declare that they will run for election, ask people to support them or publish campaign material. Election spending limits apply from the day after a person officially becomes a candidate.

What can candidates say about one another during the campaign? It is illegal to make a false statement about the personal character of a candidate to influence the result of the election. The police may investigate allegations of the specific electoral offence of making a false statement. Rules about defamation also apply to election materials. Defamation issues are a matter for the civil courts. The Electoral Commission does not have a regulatory role in relation to the content of campaign material or what candidates say about each other. However, we do encourage all campaigners to undertake their vital role responsibly and to support campaign transparency.

What are the electoral rules regarding campaign materials? By law, candidates, parties and non-party campaigners must use 'imprints' on all their printed campaign material. An imprint includes the name and address of the printer and promoter (the person who authorised the material to be printed). It must be included on all printed material such as posters, placards and leaflets. This is so that electors can be clear about the source of the campaign material. It is an offence not to include an imprint on printed election material. While it is not currently a legal requirement, the Electoral Commission recommends that candidates, parties and non-party campaigners wherever possible, place an imprint on their digital materials (e.g. websites, emails and social media platforms). Voters need to know who is targeting them with political messages online. The UK Government's Elections Act 2022 introduces an imprint requirement for digital political material, which will apply year round. It is due to come into effect in November 2023.

Can candidates see the electoral register? Once someone becomes a candidate, they are entitled to receive, free of charge, a copy of the full electoral register and the lists of people voting by post or proxy (the absent voters' lists) for the electoral area that they are contesting. Candidates may only use the full electoral register to help them complete their nomination form, to campaign and to check that donations they receive come from a permissible source. Candidates must not release any details that appear in the electoral register (this is different from information on the open register, which is available for general sale).

Spending and donation rules

What is the regulated period for May elections? The regulated period is the period in the run up to an election during which electoral spending rules apply to campaigning. The regulated period for these elections begins the day after someone officially becomes a candidate and ends on polling day, 4 May. The earliest someone can officially become a candidate is on 27 March.

What are the spending limits? Spending limits apply for the regulated period, and are different depending on the election: For local government election candidates : £806, plus 7p per local government elector registered to vote on the last day for publication of the notice of election in the ward where the candidate is standing. For local authority mayoral election : £2,362 plus 5.9p per registered elector in the local authority area in which the candidate is standing

To assist candidates and

agents in calculating their spending limit for the local government election, the local electoral registration officer will be able to provide candidates with the number of registered electors in the ward and, where needed, the number of constituent councils. What activities count towards the spending limit? The Commission provides guidance to candidates and agents. Further information on what activities count towards the spending limit can be found in from page 9 of our guidance . Candidate spending includes, among other things, the costs of: advertising of any kind, such as posters, newspaper adverts, websites or social media unsolicited material sent to voters, such as letters, leaflets or emails that are not sent in response to specific queries Activities that do not count include, among other things: use of someone's personal car or other means of transport acquired principally for that person's personal use and provided free of charge costs that are reasonably attributable to the candidate's disability Who is responsible for candidate spending? It is the responsibility of the candidate's agent (or the candidate if they act as their own agent) to fully and accurately report spending. Both the candidate and the agent should ensure they understand the rules and that all spending is properly authorised, recorded, and reported. Both the candidate and the agent must make a declaration that their reporting is accurate. Making this statement falsely is an offence. What happens if a candidate exceeds their spending limit? Exceeding the spending limit can be a criminal offence. Allegations relating to candidate spending offences are generally made to the relevant local police force to consider. Whilst the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to monitor compliance with laws relating to candidate and agent expenses, it is not legally empowered to investigate and impose sanctions for these offences. What counts as a donation? A donation is money, goods, property or services given to a candidate, without charge or on non-commercial terms, and which has a value of over £50. Anything with a value of £50 or less does not count as a donation. Who can donate to candidates? Candidates must only accept donations over £50 from permissible sources. This applies to cash donations and donations in kind. Donations that are not from a permissible source must be returned to the donor within 30 days. After that, the donation may be forfeited. Permissible donors are, amongst others, individuals on a UK electoral register (including overseas electors), most registered UK companies, and UK-registered trade unions. The full list of permissible donors can be viewed on page 50 of our guidance for candidate and agents . Can political parties fund their candidates? Many political parties run a local 'fighting fund' for their candidate. If the fund is managed and controlled by the party and not the candidate, then donations to the fund are usually treated as having been made to the party and the agent does not need to treat them as donations to the candidate, unless the donations are specially made towards the candidate's election campaign. However, candidates will need to report donations from the local party that are made for the purpose of meeting their campaign spending. What are the rules on crowdfunding? Candidates can use crowdfunding websites to raise donations for their campaign. The candidate must know who the money comes from so that they can carry out the permissibility checks, and ensure that there are measures in place to return donations that are from impermissible sources. The Commission has published guidance on crowdfunding donations and the rules on permissibility. How do candidates report their regulated spending and donations? Details of the candidate's spending and donations must be reported to the local Returning Officer, together with declarations from the agent and candidate confirming the return is complete and correct no later than 35 days after the election result is declared. If no spending is incurred, a nil return must

be submitted by the candidate (or their agent). What are the rules for non-party campaigners? Non-party campaigners are individuals and organisations that campaign in the run up to elections but do not stand as political parties or candidates. Under candidate campaigning rules, where a non-party campaigner campaigns for or against one or more candidates in a particular constituency, ward or other electoral area, certain rules apply to spending on this activity within the regulated period. Local non-party campaigners can spend up to £50 plus 0.5p per local government elector during the regulated period on campaigning for or against a candidate in the ward. A local non-party campaigner cannot spend more than £50 plus 0.5p per elector without a candidate's authorisation. Further information is in our guidance for candidates and agents .

Registering to vote What is the registration deadline and how do people register to vote? The deadline to apply to register to vote is 11:59pm on Monday 17 April . Voters can register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote . People can still apply by completing a paper registration form if they prefer. They can contact their local electoral registration office for forms or download them on the UK Government's website. Who can vote in the elections? A person can vote in the 4 May elections if they are on the local government register in an area where elections are taking place, and if they are: aged 18 or over on polling day a British citizen an Irish, EU or qualifying Commonwealth citizen British citizens living overseas who are registered as overseas voters cannot vote in local government elections. Service voters stationed abroad are eligible to vote in local government elections. More information on eligibility can be found on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter .

Can someone register at two different addresses? In some cases, voters may be eligible to register at two different addresses. For example, if they own two homes or if they are a student living away from home. It is for the local Electoral Registration Officer to determine whether someone is eligible to register. If an individual is registered to vote in two different local authority areas, then at May's local elections, they are legally entitled to vote in both of those areas. However, it is an offence to vote twice in the same local authority area. Can prisoners vote? Remand prisoners (those who have not been convicted and sentenced) can vote. Convicted prisoners detained because of their sentence cannot. In some limited circumstances, prisoners released on temporary licence may meet the criteria to register to vote. What do voters need to know about the voter ID requirement? From May 2023, voters across England will be required to bring photo ID to vote in person in a polling station, following new requirements introduced by the Elections Act. A new form of free ID, the Voter Authority Certificate, is available for those who do not have another type of accepted ID. If voters lose their existing form of ID, or if it stolen or damaged and the deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate has passed, people will be able to appoint an emergency proxy to vote on their behalf up until 5pm on polling day. What ID can people use to vote? Accepted forms of ID at polling stations include a UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth passport; a UK or EEA drivers' licence; and some concessionary travel passes, such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card. The full list is available [here](#). Those that do not have an accepted form can apply for a free voter ID. Voters will be able to use expired ID if they are still recognisable from the photo. How can voters apply for free ID? Anyone without an accepted form of ID can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate at voter-authority-certificate.service.gov.uk , or by requesting a paper form from their local council. Anyone who needs to apply for free ID, in order to vote in the May 2023 elections, must apply by 5pm on Tuesday 25 April. How will the Commission evaluate

the introduction of voter ID after the polls? Following the polls, we will independently examine how the new voter ID requirement was implemented and how voters found taking part. To fully assess the impact of the new voter ID requirement and the success of its implementation, it will be necessary to collect evidence from a wide range of sources, including all local authorities holding elections in May. A robust evidence base will take time to collect. It is unlikely we will have sufficient data to draw conclusions immediately following the polls, however we will publish our initial findings as soon as possible. This will be followed by our usual, more in-depth, election report in the autumn.

The voting process

What voting system is used in these elections? How do voters complete their ballot paper? The voting system used to elect councillors and local authority mayors is 'first past the post'. Voters can choose from a list of candidates on the ballot paper who will either be part of a political party or standing as an independent candidate. In order to cast a vote, a voter should simply put an X (a cross) next to the one candidate that they wish to vote for. The ballot paper will indicate how many candidates the voter may choose. Under this system, the candidate with the most votes is elected. In some authorities, there may be two or more seats to fill in each ward, in this instance the candidate with the most votes is elected first, then if required the candidate with the second highest number of votes is elected, then the third placed candidate. In the event of a tie, then a candidate is selected by the drawing of lots (i.e., a method of selection by chance such as tossing a coin or picking a name out of a hat).

Voting in-person

What should voters know ahead of polling day? Polling stations will be open between 7am and 10pm on Thursday 4 May. Voters should arrive in plenty of time to avoid missing out on having their say. Any voter who is in a queue at the polling station waiting to vote at 10pm will be able to vote. Voters will need to bring an accepted form of ID in order to vote. Before polling day, voters will be sent a poll card, which includes details of where their polling station is. Voters can only vote at the polling station specified on this card. Anonymous voters need to bring their poll card to the polling station, it is not required of all other voters, though doing so may speed up the process. Polling station staff will be on hand to explain the ballot paper(s) and how to vote. The law relating to obtaining information in polling stations and disclosing such information is complex, but we advise against taking selfies or other photos in the polling station, given the risks that this may be in breach of the law. How will the voter ID requirement work in the polling station? When a voter arrives at a polling station, a member of staff will: Ask their name and address so they can find them on the electoral register Ask for their photo ID, and check if it is acceptable If their ID is acceptable, they will give them their ballot paper and direct them to complete it at a polling booth as usual

How is voting made accessible to voters with disabilities? The Commission provides guidance to polling station staff, to help them make sure that polling stations are accessible to everyone. Changes introduced in the Elections Act permit disabled voters to choose anyone who is over 18 to accompany them in the polling station to help them vote. The Act also changes the assistance available at polling stations. We consulted charities and electoral administrators, before updating our accessibility guidance for administrators, to make sure that disabled voters can access the service they are entitled to in polling stations. Our guidance aims to support Returning Officers to understand and identify the barriers to voting faced by disabled voters. It sets out the equipment that should be made available as a minimum at the polling station, and what other equipment or support may also be helpful to provide. This should include measures such as a tactile voting device, polling booth at wheelchair level,

magnifiers and pencil grips. Returning Officers must have regard to this guidance.

Absent voting How to vote by proxy Voters can register for a 'proxy vote'. This means they ask someone they trust to vote on their behalf. They need to complete and sign a proxy application form and return it to their local electoral registration office by 5pm on Tuesday 25 April. Their proxy will need to show an accepted form of ID at the polling station before they can vote.

How to vote by post If voters do not wish, or are unable, to go to a polling station, they may apply for a postal vote. Voters may apply for a postal vote for a specific election, a specific period of time, or for all elections. They need to complete and sign a postal vote application form and return it to their local electoral registration office by 5pm on Tuesday 18 April.

Is it ok for someone to take a picture of their postal ballot and post it on social media showing how they have voted? Postal ballot papers are treated differently in electoral law than polling station ballot papers. A postal voter may take a picture of their own postal ballot paper and publicise it (including via social media). However, while the postal voter themselves may publicise the information, if someone else persuades or induces them to make this information available, they would be committing an offence. If there are any suggestions or allegations that this could be happening, the person making the complaint should report the matter to the police.

What safeguards are in place to ensure postal voting is secure? Postal voters have to provide their signature and date of birth when applying for a postal vote. When casting their postal vote, they are asked again for their signature and date of birth. Both records are compared and if the Returning Officer is not satisfied that they match, the ballot paper is not counted.

Can political parties handle postal votes? The Electoral Commission has developed a Code of Conduct for campaigners, which applies to all political parties, candidates and their supporters. The Code includes the following guidance for parties, candidates and campaigners. Do not assist in completing a ballot paper - instead, campaigners should always refer the voter to the Returning Officer's team who may be able to arrange a home visit or provide assistance at the polling station. Do not handle or take any completed ballot papers from voters. Instead, voters should be encouraged to post their postal ballot pack themselves - alternatively, the Returning Officer's team may be able to arrange for it to be collected.

Provisions in the Elections Act will ban parties and campaigners from handling completed postal votes and postal vote envelopes. These changes are expected to come into force in autumn 2023 ahead of the May 2024 elections. We encourage campaigners to follow the Code of Conduct.

The count and declaration of results Who is responsible for the count process? When will the results be declared? The relevant local Returning Officer has overall responsibility for counting the votes at their respective election. The relevant local authority will be able to provide projected count times. To support electoral administrators with the count process, we have published guidance.

How are the votes counted? There are four stages to the count process. The postal ballot boxes and ballot boxes from the polling stations arrive at the count venue. Staff carry out a verification process and ensure that the number of postal ballot papers and ballot papers matches the numbers recorded by the relevant Returning Officer, and by the Presiding Officer at the polling station respectively. The votes are counted and the results are declared by the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer will announce the name of the candidate(s) with the most votes as duly elected.

Can the result be challenged after it has been announced? Someone can challenge the result of an election by issuing an election petition. This is a legal action and will be adjudicated by a judge in court. A petition can be presented by: a person claiming to have been a

candidate at the election, or four people who voted as electors at the election or had a right to vote at the election, except for electors registered anonymously A petition at a local government election must normally be presented within 21 calendar days after the day on which the election was held. Further time may be allowed in certain circumstances. Electoral fraud Who is responsible for putting plans in place to deal with electoral fraud? The primary responsibility lies with the local Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer(s) for each area. They work closely with their local police force. Guidance on policing elections has been published to support police officers as they put in place plans to prevent and detect electoral fraud in England and Wales. This guidance, which builds on work previously carried out by the Electoral Commission and the National Police Chiefs Council, now forms part of the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice for police forces in England and Wales. What are the criminal offences that relate to electoral fraud? The Representation of the People Act 1983 specifies a number of criminal offences relating to electoral fraud. The relevant police force for the area in which the election is taking place would investigate any allegations that an offence may have taken place. Every police force has designated a single point of contact officer (known as a SPOC) to lead on election-related crime, who will give advice to local police officers. People can also choose to contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. Anyone, including candidates, politicians and members of the public, who has evidence of electoral fraud taking place should report it to the police immediately, using the 101 non-emergency number, unless there is a crime in progress. Personation – It is an offence to vote as someone else (whether that person is living, dead or fictitious), either by post or at a polling station, in person or as a proxy. Undue influence / intimidation – A person is guilty of undue influence if they attempt to influence someone's vote by: using or threatening force, violence or restraint inflicting or threatening injury, damage, loss or harm impeding or preventing someone from freely exercising their right to vote – even where the attempt is unsuccessful Bribery – A person is guilty of bribery if they directly or indirectly offer any reward (financial or otherwise) in order to induce any voter to vote or refrain from voting. Treating – A person is guilty of treating if either before, during, or after an election they offer food, drink or entertainment to corruptly influence any voter. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality. False statements – It is an offence to make or publish a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate in order to affect the return of a candidate at an election. False statements that are not about a candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander. It is an offence to knowingly provide a false statement on a nomination paper. Multiple voting and proxy voting offences – There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting (whether in person, by post or by proxy) when you are not allowed to and voting more than once in the same election. False information in connection with registration and absent voting – It is an offence to supply false registration information to an Electoral Registration Officer. It is also an offence to supply false information for a postal or proxy vote. Roles and responsibilities Returning Officer (RO) The Returning Officer (RO) is personally responsible for the conduct of the local government election, including the nomination process, counting the votes and declaring the result. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) Electoral Registration Officers (or EROs) are responsible for the preparation and maintenance of the electoral registers and list of absent voters within their area. They must ensure that the electoral

registers are as accurate and complete as possible. Presiding Officers Presiding Officers are appointed by local ROs to run polling stations. Duties include organising the layout of the polling station, supervising poll clerks, issuing ballot papers, assisting voters, accounting for all ballot papers and ensuring that ballot boxes are transported securely to the count venue. The Electoral Commission . Our role in these elections is to: produce guidance for ROs and EROs, set performance standards and report on how electoral administrators perform against these standards produce guidance for candidates standing for election and their agents produce guidance for parties that are campaigning at the election produce guidance for non-party campaigners that are campaigning at the election register political parties and non-party campaigners raise public awareness of the elections and how to take part in them report on the conduct of the elections publish details of where political parties get their money from and how they spend it Page history First published: 28 February 2022 Last updated: 11 March 2022