

Introduction to our candidates guidance

This guidance aims to provide practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate at a parish council election in England. Standing for election can be complicated, but we hope that our guidance will make it as straightforward as possible.

Candidates and their agents must follow certain rules set out in legislation. Our guidance sets out the stages that you need to go through when standing at a parish council election. You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

It includes relevant factual material as well as links to sources of further information. Each section includes a number of forms and resources, which can be directly accessed via links in the text.

You can find out more in [How to use our guidance](#).

Election timetable

We have published a generic election timetable on our website. For scheduled polls we will publish a specific timetable which will be made available on our website.

If a by-election has been called, you will be able to obtain a copy of the specific timetable for that election from the Returning Officer.

Data protection

Please note that data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data. Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

We are here to help, so please contact us if you have any questions. Please see [Contacting us](#) for contact details.

Terms and expressions we use

We use 'must' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements.

We use 'you' refer to the candidate in this guidance. When we talk about donations, we use 'you' to refer to the person who is responsible at the time for dealing with donations.

Throughout the guidance we have used the term 'parish council' to refer to both town and parish councils.

Some parish councils are subdivided into wards for the purposes of administering elections. In the case of a parish that is un-warded; any references to 'ward' should be read as 'parish'.

Updates to our guidance

Change log

Date of update	Description of change
November 2024	Publication of dates for May 2025: • When do the candidate spending laws apply? • Deadlines Updated to provide clarity on candidate spending: • Personal expenses

How to use this guidance

Our guidance is separated out into sections, each of which deals with a different part of the process you will be involved with as a candidate for parish council elections in England.

When you click on a link in the navigation list to the right, it will reveal the links to the different areas of guidance for each section. When you reach the end of a page, you can use the link at the bottom right-hand side to move to the next page of guidance.

Each section provides links to relevant forms and information resources, you will find these embedded in the text. You can also access these in the '[Resources](#)' link at the end of the navigation tree.

If you wish to print off all of the guidance you can do so using the link at the top of the page.

Our guidance sets out the stages that candidates and their agents need to go through when standing at a local government election. The areas covered are:

Section	What it covers:
What you need to know before standing as a candidate	• Qualifications and disqualifications to stand as a candidate • When you officially become a candidate
Candidate spending	• The rules about how much candidates can spend on their campaigns • Reporting on campaign spending after the election

<u>The campaign</u>	• The rules on publication and display of campaign literature • The rules about campaigning • General principles for campaigning
<u>Nominations</u>	• The nomination process and what forms you will need to complete • Submission of nomination papers • What happens after you have submitted your nomination papers
<u>Postal Votes</u>	• The processes for issuing and opening postal votes • Attending postal vote opening sessions
<u>Polling Day</u>	• Polling day processes • Attending polling stations • Polling day dos and don'ts
<u>Verification and count</u>	• What happens at the verification and count • Attending the verification and count
<u>After the declaration of the result</u>	• Submitting spending returns • Access to election documentation, including marked registers • Other post poll activities

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Contacting us

If your question is about spending or donations, please contact us at:

Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk (Opens in new window)

Tel: 0333 103 1928

For any other queries, please contact us at:

Email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk (Opens in new window)

Tel: 0333 103 1928

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What you need to know before you stand as a candidate

Before starting the process of standing for election, potential candidates need to be confident that they meet all of the requirements.

They also need to be aware of the rules that apply to candidates relating to spending and donations.

This guidance sets out details of:

- When do you officially become a candidate?
- Who is responsible for candidate spending and donations?
- Qualifications and disqualifications for standing for election
- Appointing your postal voting, polling and counting agents

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Who does what at a parish council election and how to contact them

The Returning Officer

Parish council elections are run by the Returning Officer, who is normally a senior officer of the local authority and independent of the authority in respect of their electoral functions. You will be able to contact the Returning Officer for your area by contacting your local elections office. Addresses and telephone numbers of all elections offices can be found on our website www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter.

The Returning Officer will offer briefings ahead of an election and we strongly encourage you to attend, even if you have stood for election before.

The Electoral Registration Officer

The Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists for their local authority area. The Electoral Registration Officer is normally a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Returning Officer. You can find the contact details for your Electoral Registration Officer at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent statutory body established in November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We are currently headed by ten Commissioners, including a Chair. We report directly to the UK Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

We are responsible for registering political parties and non-party campaigners, the monitoring and publication of significant donations to registered political parties and the regulation of party and non-party campaigner spending at certain elections. We also have a role in promoting voter awareness. We are required to report on the administration of certain electoral events, to keep electoral matters under review and, if requested, must review and report on any electoral matter. We also accredit observers to be present at election proceedings.

We do not run elections but have responsibility for providing advice and assistance on electoral matters to all those involved in elections, including Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, political parties and candidates.

We are here to help, so [please get in touch](#) if you have any questions.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

When do you officially become a candidate?

The earliest you can officially become a candidate is on the last date for publishing the notice of election, which is 25 working days before the poll.

You will officially become a candidate on this day if, on or before this date, you have already declared yourself a candidate at the election (or another person has declared that you are a candidate).

If, after this date, you or others declare that you will be a candidate at the election, you will become a candidate on the date such a declaration is made, or on the date that you submit your nomination papers, whichever is earlier.

The day after the date you officially become a candidate, [spending rules](#) will apply.

Once you have officially become a candidate, you are entitled to a [copy of the electoral register](#).^[1]

You are also entitled to a copy of the lists of absent voters for the parish area or, if your parish is warded, for the ward you are standing in.

In addition, you can use publicly funded rooms and schools for [public meetings](#).

You can start campaigning before you officially become a candidate. More information is set out in our [guidance on campaigning](#).

1. Regulation 108 Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Who is responsible for candidate spending?

Candidates at parish council elections must follow certain rules about how much they can spend, and what they must report after the election.

They must also ensure that their spending return is complete and correct to the best of their knowledge.

This means that candidates need to be fully aware of the rules and ensure that they are following them.

After the election, candidates must sign a declarations to say that their spending return is complete and correct to the best of their knowledge.

Spending

The rules apply to spending on activities to promote your candidacy, or to criticise other candidates, during a particular period in the run-up to the election.

This period is called the 'regulated period'. When we use the term 'regulated period' we mean the time when spending limits and rules apply.

It is your responsibility to fully and accurately report candidate spending. You should ensure you understand the rules and that all spending is properly authorised, recorded and reported.

Candidate spending includes any expenses incurred, whether on goods, services, property or facilities, for the purposes of the candidate's election during the regulated period.

By 'incur' we mean make a legal commitment to spend money, such as confirming an order.

This includes:

- items or services bought before the regulated period begins, but used during it
- the value items or services given to you free of charge or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% - known as 'notional spending'

There are rules covering:

- who can authorise spending and pay for items and services
- how much you can spend
- which activities count towards your spending limit
- deadlines for receiving and paying invoices
- what records you must keep
- how and when you report your spending

Candidate spending is often known as ‘expenses’. Sometimes, people think this means that spending can be reclaimed from the local council, or from us, the Electoral Commission. This is not the case. You are not entitled to recover any spending from public funds.

You can find out more information in our guidance about [candidate spending](#).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Qualifications and disqualifications for standing for election

In order to stand as a candidate you must ensure that you meet the necessary qualifications and be sure that you are not disqualified. This section sets out the [qualifications](#) and [disqualifications](#) for standing for election.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are qualified to stand and are not subject to any disqualifications. Neither the Returning Officer nor the Electoral Commission can confirm this to you. If you are in doubt about your eligibility you should seek legal advice.

Last updated: 15 October 2024

Qualifications

To be able to stand as a candidate at a parish council election you must:

- be at least 18 years old ^[1]
- be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, a qualifying EU citizen or an EU citizen with retained rights ^[2]
- meet at least one of the following four qualifications:
 - You are, and will continue to be, registered as a local government elector for the parish in which you wish to stand from the day of your nomination onwards. ^[3] More information is set out in our guidance '[Being a registered local government elector](#)'.
 - You have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election. ^[4] More information is set out in our guidance '[Occupying as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the local authority area](#)'.
 - Your main or only place of work during the 12 months prior to the day of your nomination and the day of election has been in the parish area. ^[5] More information is set out in our guidance '[Your main or only place of work is in the local authority area](#)'.
 - You have lived in the parish area or within three miles of it during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election. ^[6] More information is set out in our guidance '[Living in the parish area \(or within three miles of it\)](#)'.

When completing your home address form and consent to nomination form you will be asked to indicate which qualifications you meet. You should indicate on the forms all those qualifications that apply to you.

Meaning of an eligible commonwealth citizen

An eligible Commonwealth citizen is a Commonwealth citizen who either:

- does not need leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or
- has indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom

Meaning of qualifying EU citizens

A qualifying EU citizen is a citizen of a country:

- that has a bilateral Voting and Candidacy Rights (VCR) treaty with the UK
- is resident in the UK
- with any form of leave to remain, or does not require such leave.

Currently the UK holds bilateral treaties with the following countries:

Denmark
Luxembourg
Poland
Portugal
Spain

Meaning of EU citizens with retained rights

An EU citizen has retained rights if:

- they are a citizen of a country which does not have a bilateral Voting and Candidacy Rights (VCR) treaty with the UK
- and they have been legally resident in the UK since before the UK left the EU on 31/12/2020 (the Implementation Period Completion Date – IPCD)

The member states of the European Union which do not currently have a bilateral VCR treaty with the UK and are not Commonwealth countries are:

Austria	Hungary
Belgium	Italy
Bulgaria	Latvia
Croatia	Lithuania
Czech Republic	The Netherlands
Estonia	Romania
Finland	Slovakia
France	Slovenia
Germany	Sweden
Greece	

1. Section 79(1), Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972)
2. s.79(1), LGA 1972
3. Section 79 (1)(a), LGA 1972
4. Section 79 (1)(b), LGA 1972
5. Section 79 (1)(c), LGA 1972
6. Section 79 (1)(e), LGA 1972

Last updated: 15 October 2024

Being a registered local government elector

To be able to use this qualification, your name must appear on the register of local government electors for the parish area you wish to stand in at the time of your nomination and throughout your term of office should you be elected. ^[1]

Unlike the other qualifications that must only be satisfied on the day of your nomination and on polling day, this is an on-going qualification. We therefore recommend that if you meet any of the other qualifications as well, you also indicate this on your [home address form](#) and [consent to nomination](#), which are two of the required nomination papers.

1. Section 79 (1)(a), Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Occupying as owner or tenant any land or premises in the local authority area

To be able to use this qualification, you must have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and before polling day. ^[1]

You must occupy 'land or other premises' to meet this qualification. The inclusion of the words 'other premises' can be taken as something other than land (i.e. some form of structure). Because 'land' and 'other premises' are alternatives it is, in theory, possible for a person to meet this qualification by occupying land only. There are some structures that might, arguably, fall outside the term 'premises' (e.g. a tent, caravan, house boat or mobile home). However, a person occupying such a structure need only establish occupancy of the land on which, for example their tent, is located.

If the land or premises crosses the parish boundary, the land/premises is 'in that area' with respect to both parishes.

You must also occupy the land or other premises as an 'owner' or 'tenant'. Ownership may be established by showing title to the land or premises in question. Tenancy is established by showing a lease or in certain circumstances another legal interest over the land. In a number of circumstances, a lease will survive even though it has expired and the parties have failed to sign a new lease, and the tenancy survives through tacit agreement between the parties. Therefore, there may be circumstances in which a person's tenancy of land or premises might need to be established by evidence other than a current lease.

You must also have 'occupied' the land or premises. Therefore, in addition to establishing legal ownership or legal tenancy, you must establish that you have actually occupied the land or premises. This is a question of fact in each case. The interpretation of the term 'occupy' in other legal contexts suggests that it is not necessary for a person to be personally resident on the land or premises (which would in any event be covered by the qualification of 'lived in the parish area').

However, it does require something to be actually done on the land or premises – an empty unlocked house cannot be described as 'occupied', for example. It also requires a sufficient degree of control to exclude or prevent strangers from interfering with the land or premises. If you have sub-let all of your land or premises to another person, this will point against you having 'occupied' it yourself.

Finally, you must have occupied the land or premises 'during the whole of the twelve months preceding' the day on which you are nominated and polling day. Whether an absence will prevent you from claiming that you have occupied the land or premises for the preceding year should be worked out by taking into account all other factors: for instance, whether you have allowed others to occupy the land or premises in your absence, and the reason for your absence.

1. Section 79 (1)(b), Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 October 2024

Your main or only place of work is in the local authority area

To be able to use this qualification, your main or only place of work must have been in the parish area during the 12 months prior to your nomination and prior to polling day itself. ^[1]

You do not have to be in paid employment to qualify, as long as you satisfy the requirement of your main or only place of work being in the parish area. Councillors whose main or only job is being a councillor would be able to use this qualification, provided that their place of work is within the parish.

1. Section 79 (1)(c), Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Living in the parish area (or within three miles of it)

To be able to use this qualification, you are not required to have lived at the same address for the whole of the 12 months before the day on which you are nominated, but you must have lived in the same parish area, or within three miles of it, during the whole of those 12 months. ^[1]

If in the last 12 months you have lived at more than one address in the parish (or within three miles of it) you should declare on the [home address form](#) all of the addresses at which you have lived during that period.

This qualification also requires you to live in the parish area, or within three miles of it, from the date of nomination to polling day.

1. Section 79 (1)(e), Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Disqualifications

Apart from meeting the qualifications for standing for election, you must also not be disqualified.

The full range of disqualifications is complex and if you are in any doubt about whether you are disqualified, you must do everything you can to check that you are not disqualified before submitting your nomination papers.

You must be sure that you are not disqualified as you will be asked to sign one of the required nomination papers to confirm that you are not disqualified.

It is a criminal offence to make a false statement on your nomination papers as to your qualification for being elected, so if you are in any doubt you should contact your employer, consult the legislation or, if necessary, take your own independent legal advice.

The Returning Officer will not be able to confirm whether or not you are disqualified.

There are certain people who are disqualified from being elected to a parish council. You cannot be a candidate if at the time of your nomination and on polling day:

- You are employed by the parish council or hold a paid office under the parish council (including joint boards or committees). ^[1] More information is set out in our guidance [Working for a parish council](#)
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order. ^[2] More information is set out in our guidance [Bankruptcy restrictions or interim order section](#).
- You have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before polling day ^[3] and the ordinary period allowed for making an appeal or applications in respect of the conviction has passed. A person who is in the process of making an appeal or application in relation to the conviction is not disqualified at any time before the end of the day on which the appeal or application is disposed of, abandoned or fails by reason of non-prosecution. ^[4]
- You have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal electoral practices). The disqualification for an illegal practice begins from the date the person has been reported guilty by an election court or convicted and lasts for three years. The disqualification for a corrupt practice begins from the date a person has been reported guilty by an election court or convicted and lasts for five years ^[5] unless at any time within that period a court determines that the conviction should not be upheld, in which case the disqualification ends at that time. ^[6]
- You are subject to the notification requirement of or under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, and the ordinary period allowed for making an appeal or application in respect of the order or notification has passed. ^[7] A disqualification set under s.81A of the Local Government Act 1972 will only apply to a person who is subject to any relevant notification requirements or relevant order made on or after 28 June 2022. A person who is in the process of making an appeal or application in relation to the disqualification is not disqualified at any time before the end of the day on which the appeal or application is disposed of, abandoned or fails by reason of non-prosecution. ^[8]
- You have been convicted of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate, future candidate or campaigner or holder of a relevant elective office. ^[9] The effect of a disqualification order is that the person will be disqualified from standing for, being elected to, and holding any relevant elective office for five years.

A person may also be disqualified from being or becoming a member of certain authorities ^[10] following a conviction under the Localism Act 2011. ^[11]

1. Section 80(1)(a) Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972)
2. Section 80(1)(b) LGA 1972
3. Section 80(1)(d) LGA 1972
4. Section 80(5) LGA 1972
5. Section 80(1)(e) LGA 1972
6. Section 173(3) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
7. Section 81A(4) and (5) LGA 1972
8. Section 81A(4)(b) LGA 1972
9. Section 30, EAA 2022
10. Section 27(6) Localism Act 2011 (LA 2011)
11. Section 34(4) LA 2011

Last updated: 15 October 2024

Working for a parish council

You are disqualified from standing as a candidate at elections to a particular parish if you are a paid officer or employee of that parish. ^[1] This would be the case where your appointment:

- has been made
- could be made
- has been confirmed by the local authority itself
- has been confirmed by any committee or sub-committee of the local authority
- has been confirmed by any joint committee or National Park authority where the local authority is represented by a person holding such an office or employment

However, the disqualification on the basis of being a paid officer or employee does not apply to the office of chairman, vice-chairman or deputy chairman of the parish.

Most parishes will not have committees or sub-committees, but some may. Paid officers of a parish employed under the direction of such committees or sub-committees are disqualified from standing to that parish. In addition, where such a committee or sub-committee has a member, or members, appointed on the nomination of another local authority, the disqualification will also apply to being elected to the other local authority.

If you are a paid officer of a local authority employed under the direction of a joint board, joint or combined authority, joint waste authority, economic prosperity board or joint committee, you will be disqualified from being elected as a member of all of the authorities that are represented on that body.

Joint boards, committees etc. can include various organisations, such as fire services and education authorities. Therefore, as a general rule, if you work in the local public sector, you should seek advice from your employer's HR department to help you establish whether the disqualification would apply to you. Sometimes employment relationships can be complex and if this is the case for you, we recommend that you seek your own legal advice.

This disqualification applies on both the date of your nomination and on polling day. If you were employed by the parish council, you must have resigned and served any notice period before the date of your nomination to avoid having a contract of employment with the parish council at that time.

1. Section 80(1)(a) Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Bankruptcy restrictions or interim orders

Bankruptcy in itself is not a disqualification. If you have been adjudged bankrupt by a court in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, you are not disqualified on that basis. However, you are disqualified if you are currently subject to any of the following:

- an interim bankruptcy restrictions order
- a bankruptcy restrictions order
- an interim debt relief restrictions order
- debt relief restrictions order

made by a court in England or Wales. ^[1] If the order was made in Northern Ireland, you should take your own legal advice since the law is complex.

1. Section 80(1)(b) Local Government Act 1972

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Can I stand for election in more than one parish council?

Yes, you can stand for election in different parish councils, provided you are qualified to stand in all those parish councils.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Can I stand for election in more than one ward within the same parish council?

Some parishes will be sub-divided into wards. You can check with the Returning Officer if the parish you intend to stand in is warded. While you may submit nomination papers for more than one ward, you cannot stand for election in more than one ward within the same parish after the deadline for withdrawals. ^[1]

If the Returning Officer accepts your nomination papers and you are validly nominated in more than one ward within the same parish, you must withdraw from all wards but one by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll.

If you do not, then you will be deemed to have withdrawn from all of the wards. [\[2\]](#)

1. Rule 12 Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 12 LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Can I stand as a candidate at both a parish council and the election to the principal council?

Yes, provided you meet the qualifications for both, you can stand for election at a parish council election at the same time as standing for election at a principal council election, such as an election to the district or county.

More details can be found in our guidance for [standing as a candidate](#) at local government elections in England.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Appointing your postal voting, polling and counting agents

You can appoint agents to observe the following electoral processes, which you are also entitled to observe:

- the [opening of postal votes](#)
- the [poll](#)
- the [count](#)

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Candidate spending

The following section provides guidance on candidate spending at parish elections in England.

This guidance covers:

- how much you can spend in the lead up to the election
- which activities count as candidate spending
- what records you must keep
- how to account for different types of spending

Election agents are not required at parish council elections. The candidate has the main responsibility for complying with these laws, even if they appoint an agent to help with expenses.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

When do the candidate spending laws apply?

We call the time when the spending laws apply the 'regulated period'.

The regulated period

The regulated period for the 2025 parish council elections in England begins on the day after the date you officially become a candidate and ends on polling day, 1 May 2025. ^[1]

When does a person officially become a candidate?

The earliest date you can officially become a candidate is the last date for publication of the notice of election, which will be Tuesday 25 March 2025. ^[2]

You will become a candidate on this date if you or others have already announced your intention to stand. ^[3] For example, your party may have issued a press release when you were selected, or you might have mentioned your intention at a residents' meeting.

If your intention to stand has not been announced by 25 March 2025, you will officially become a candidate on the earlier of:

- the date your intention to stand is announced
- the date when you submit your nomination papers ^[4]

This must be prior to the close of nominations, which is 4pm on Wednesday 2 April 2025. ^[5]

1. Section 90ZA(1) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Schedule 2, paragraph 1 and 2 The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
3. S.118A(3)(a) RPA 1983
4. S.118A(3)(b) RPA 1983
5. Schedule 2, para. 1 and 2 The Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

Last updated: 18 November 2024

How much can you spend?

The spending limit for the regulated period is £960, plus 8p per local government elector in the parish council area registered to vote on the last day for publication of the notice of election in the parish council area which you are standing for. ^[1]

Your local electoral registration officer will be able to give you the number of registered electors in the parish council area in which you are standing.

Example A

If there are 7,500 electors in a parish council area, the spending limit is:

$$£960 + (7,500 \times 0.08) = £1,560$$

Spending limits for 'joint candidates'

You are a joint candidate if you stand in the same parish council area and one of the following conditions applies:

- you have the same election agent
- you use the same campaign rooms
- you publish joint material ^[2]

However, using the same campaign rooms by accident or coincidence is not in itself enough to make candidates joint candidates. ^[3]

Joint candidates have lower spending limits, as they are sharing some of the costs. You should calculate your spending limit as explained above, and then reduce it by:

Number of joint candidates	Reduction of spending limit ^[4]
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Two	By 25% - a quarter
Three or more	By 33% - a third

If you are not sure if you are a joint candidate, please [contact us](#).

Example B

Two candidates standing in the same parish council area decide to issue joint campaign material. This makes them joint candidates. There are 7,500 electors in the parish council area in which they are standing.

To calculate each joint candidate's spending limit, first calculate the spending limit for a single candidate:

$$£960 + (7,500 \times 0.08) = £1,560$$

Then calculate 25% of this amount:

$$£1,560 \times (25 \div 100) = £390$$

Take this amount off the spending limit for a single candidate:

$$£1,560 - £390 = £1170$$

This is the spending limit for each of the two joint candidates.

1. S.76(2)(b)(ib) & (4) RPA 1983
2. S.77(2) RPA 1983
3. S.77(2)(i) RPA 1983
4. S.77(1) RPA 1983

Last updated: 18 April 2024

What records must you keep?

You should ensure that a system is in place to keep records of all your candidate spending so that you can comply with your reporting responsibilities after the election.

What you need to record

For each item of spending, you must record the following information to include in your spending return after the election:

- what the spending was for – for example, leaflets or advertising
- the name and address of the supplier
- the amount or value
- the date that you spent the money

All costs must include VAT, even if you can recover VAT payments.

You must keep invoices or receipts for any payments of £10 or over as you will need to submit these with your return. ^[1]

You may want to also keep copies of each example of campaign material (such as letters or leaflets) used in case there is a need to refer back to it.

You must also record details of spending where:

- you make use of items that have been provided to you
- you authorise spending to be incurred by someone else

For information on the details required in the spending return, please see [Completing your return](#).

1. Schedule 4, para. 3 RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What is candidate spending?

Candidate spending is spending on activities to promote your candidacy, or to criticise other candidates, during the regulated period. ^[1]

To be candidate spending it must:

- be an activity on list of types of election expenses
- promote the candidate ^[2]

Once you have determined that something is candidate spending, you need to determine how it must be reported. It may be:

- ordinary spending incurred by the candidate or agent
- [notional spending](#), where something is provided for you and made use of in your campaign

The following pages provide detail on the activities that count as candidate spending and the different ways the spending is reported.

1. S.90ZA & s.118A(3) RPA 1983
2. S.90ZA RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What activities count as candidate spending?

During the regulated period, spending on any of the following activities will count as candidate spending if the activity promotes the candidate:

- [advertising of any kind](#). ^[1] For example, posters, newspaper adverts, websites, or videos
- [unsolicited material sent to voters](#). ^[2] For example, letters, leaflets, or emails you send that aren't in response to specific queries
- [transport costs](#). ^[3] For example, hire cars or public transport for your campaigners
- [public meetings](#). ^[4] For example, reimbursing expenses of attendees, hiring premises and paying for goods, services or facilities for a public meeting
- [staff costs](#). ^[5] For example, an agent's salary, or staff seconded to you by their employer. You do not need to include time spent on your campaign by volunteers
- [accommodation](#). ^[6] For example, your campaign office
- [administrative costs](#). ^[7] For example, telephone bills, stationery, photocopying and the use of databases

This includes:

- all costs associated with an activity. For example, if you are producing leaflets or advertising, you must include the design and distribution costs
- items or services bought before the regulated period that you use during the regulated period
- some items or services given to you free of charge or at a discount that you make use of during the regulated period. See [Notional spending](#) for more information.

This spending must be reported in your spending return after the election. More details on each category are given on the following pages.

1. Schedule 4A, paragraph 1 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Sch. 4A, para. 2 RPA 1983
3. Sch. 4A, para. 3 RPA 1983
4. Sch. 4A, para. 4 RPA 1983
5. Sch. 4A, para. 5 RPA 1983
6. Sch. 4A, para. 6 RPA 1983
7. Sch. 4A, para. 6 RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Advertising of any kind

General costs

This includes the cost of use, or hire, of any:

- agency, individual or organisation
- services provided by any agency, individual or organisation
- premises or facilities
- equipment

that is used to:

- prepare, produce or facilitate the production of advertising material
- disseminate advertising material by distribution or otherwise

For example, the hire of a photographer and premises to produce images for use in advertising material.

Software

It includes the cost of any software, of any kind, for use on any device to:

- design and produce advertising material in-house
- disseminate or facilitate dissemination of advertising material

whether that material is distributed digitally, electronically or via other means.

For example, a licensing fee for a software application for use on a device.

Services, facilities and equipment

It includes the cost of use, or hire, of any:

- agency, individual or organisation
- services provided by any agency, individual or organisation
- premises or facilities
- equipment

used to

- prepare, produce or facilitate the production of digital or electronic advertising material
- distribute or facilitate the dissemination of that advertising material via any means

including any cost attributable to increasing the visibility of content by any means.

For example, the purchase of a more prominent position on a page within a search engine.

Websites and other digital material

It includes the costs of:

- hosting and maintaining a website or other electronic/digital material that promotes the candidate
- designing and building the website
- a portion of any website or material that is set up to obtain funds for the candidate but also promotes the candidate during the regulated period

Material for sharing

It includes the cost of preparing, producing or facilitating the production of advertising material for:

- downloading and use by others
- posting on and promoting the candidate via any kind of social media channel or platform

For example, the costs of producing advertising material promoting the candidate that is posted to a page on a social media channel encouraging followers to share it.

Downloadable material

If you put material on a website for people to print off for their personal use, such as window posters or petition forms, the design and website costs count as candidate spending. You do not need to count people's print costs against your spending limit unless people are printing documents on your behalf.

If the material could be printed and distributed to voters – for instance a leaflet – you will need to make it clear how you expect people to use it.

If you authorise wider use of the material, the production costs may count as candidate spending whoever does the printing.

Networks

It includes the cost of accessing, purchasing, developing and maintaining any digital or other network which:

- facilitates distribution or dissemination of advertising material by any means
- promotes or increases the visibility of advertising material by any means

For example, the purchase of digital identities used to make material appear as if it has been seen and approved by a high number of users on a social media platform.

Other costs that are included

It includes the cost of any rights or licensing fee for any image used in producing advertising material.

It includes the cost of:

- paper or any other medium on which advertising material is printed
- physically displaying advertising in any location, for example cable ties or glue for putting up posters

It includes the cost of purchase, hire or use of:

- photocopying equipment
- printing equipment

for use in the candidate's election campaign, except where:

- the equipment was acquired by the candidate principally for the candidate's own personal use
- it is provided by another individual, the equipment was acquired by that individual for their own personal use and the candidate is not charged for the use of it

Where paper, photocopying equipment or a printer is purchased or hired principally for use in the campaign, the full cost must be reported.

It includes the cost of purchase and use of any other equipment in connection with:

- preparation, production or facilitating the production of the advertising material
- dissemination by distribution or otherwise of the advertising material

It includes the cost of food and/or accommodation for any individual who provides services in connection with advertising material for the candidate that is paid for or reimbursed by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Last updated: 4 December 2023

Unsolicited material addressed to voters

Costs associated with obtaining information and targeting or identifying voters, including database costs

This includes the cost of accessing, obtaining, purchasing, developing or maintaining:

- IT software or contact databases
- any information, by whatever means

that is used to facilitate the sending of unsolicited material to voters.

For example, the purchase of email addresses to target voters

It includes the cost of accessing, obtaining or developing data sets, including data analytics to target voters by whatever means, including the cost of agencies, organisations or others that identify groups of voters, by whatever means.

For example, the cost of any agency paid to analyse social media content to facilitate targeting of voters in a specific electoral area and the cost of modelling by an agency based on that analysis.

It includes the cost of any services to identify voters that are purchased, developed or provided before the regulated period, but are used to target voters during the regulated period.

Where information or access to information is obtained from a third party, including a political party, the commercial cost of obtaining that information from the third party is included.

Costs associated with preparing, producing or distributing unsolicited material to voters, including via digital means

This includes the cost of use, or hire, of any:

- agency, individual or organisation
- services provided by any agency, individual or organisation
- premises or facilities
- equipment

that is used to:

- prepare, produce or facilitate the production of the unsolicited material
- disseminate the unsolicited material by distribution or other means, including any cost attributable to increasing the visibility of material via any means

It includes the cost of delivering material by any means including electronic means or the physical distribution of the material.

For example, the cost of envelopes and stamps or the purchase of a system for sending emails.

It includes the cost of accessing, developing and maintaining any digital or other network which promotes or increases the visibility of unsolicited material on any platform.

For example, a candidate pays a developer to create an app that facilitates targeting of their material on a social media channel.

It includes the cost of oversight and maintenance of all social media, digital or other forms of distribution of unsolicited material. This includes the maintenance of all social media accounts, including if they are maintained by another entity/individual.

Other costs that are included

It includes the cost of any rights or licensing fee for any image used in producing unsolicited material.

It includes the cost of paper or any other medium on which unsolicited material is printed.

It includes the cost of purchase, hire or use of:

- photocopying equipment
- printing equipment

for use in the candidate's election campaign, except where:

- the equipment was acquired by the candidate principally for the candidate's own personal use
- it is provided by another individual, the equipment was acquired by that individual for their own personal use and the candidate is not charged for the use of it

Where paper, photocopying equipment or a printer is purchased or hired principally for use in the campaign, the full cost must be reported.

It includes the cost of purchase and use of any other equipment in connection with:

- preparation, production or facilitating the production of the unsolicited material
- dissemination by distribution or otherwise of the unsolicited material

It includes the cost of food and/or accommodation for any individual who provides service in connection with unsolicited material for the candidate that is paid for or reimbursed by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Costs that are excluded

It does not include any cost associated with the obtaining of data as permitted under any statute or regulation.

For example, candidates are entitled to a copy of the electoral register.

Last updated: 29 November 2023

Transport costs

It includes the cost of transport for the agent where they are reimbursed by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Transport of volunteers and campaigners

It includes the cost of transporting:

- volunteers
- party members, including staff members
- other campaigners

around the electoral area, or to and from the electoral area, including the cost of:

- tickets for any transport, including any booking fee
- hiring of any transport
- fuel or electricity purchased for any transport
- parking for any transport

where they are undertaking campaigning on behalf of the candidate.

It includes the cost of transport paid for by any individual, political party or other third party that is paid for or reimbursed either by the candidate, the political party or a third party, where the individuals being transported were campaigning or undertaking activities associated with the campaign for the candidate.

Transport to an event

It includes the cost of transporting attendees to an event promoting the candidate where that cost is reimbursed or paid for by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Transport that is promoting the candidate

This includes the cost of use, or hire, of any vehicle or form of transport that displays material promoting the candidate, including any cost associated with:

- design and application of the design to the vehicle or form of transport
- driving or moving a vehicle around a specific electoral area
- parking fees where a vehicle is used to display material

Costs that are excluded

The following costs are excluded:

- where the cost is paid for by the individual who used the transport and that payment is not reimbursed
- where transport is provided free of charge by any other individual if the means of transport was acquired by that person principally for their own personal use

'Personal expenses' include the reasonable travelling expenses of the candidate in relation to the election.

Where a transport cost is a personal expense for the candidate, this does not count towards the spending limit. It must be recorded as a personal expense in the spending return. See [Personal expenses](#) for more information.

Last updated: 7 December 2023

Public meetings of any kind

Services, premises, facilities or equipment provided by others

This includes the cost of the use, or hire, of any:

- agency, individual or organisation
- services provided by any agency, individual or organisation
- premises or facilities
- equipment

used in:

- promoting a public meeting
- holding or conducting a public meeting to promote the candidate
- live streaming or broadcasting a public meeting by any means

Other costs under public meetings

It includes the cost of promoting or advertising the event, via any means.

It includes the cost of an event that is being held via a link of any kind or is being live streamed or broadcast, where that event is open to be viewed by users of a channel or platform or by other means.

It includes the cost of the provision of any goods, services or facilities at the event, for example the cost of hiring seating.

It includes the cost of purchase of any equipment in connection with:

- holding or conducting a public meeting to promote the candidate
- live streaming or broadcasting a public meeting by any means

It includes the cost of accommodation and other expenses for any attendee where that cost is reimbursed or paid for by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Costs you do not need to include

You do not need to include:

- events that are for party members only
- events held mainly for purposes other than your campaign,

where your attendance is incidental – for example, an annual social event at which you say a few words

You should make an honest assessment on the facts of whether the meeting is genuinely being held for other purposes.

You may also be invited to attend hustings events run by local organisations or community groups. We have published separate [hustings](#) guidance which explains when the spending rules may apply to these events.

Last updated: 7 December 2023

Staff costs

Agent costs

This includes any remuneration, including allowances, paid to the agent.

Staff who are employed by a political party

It includes the cost of any staff member of a political party who

- provides services to the candidate that are for the purposes of the candidate's election during the regulated period, or
- provides services to the candidate that are for the purposes of the candidate's election prior to that time which are then used during the regulated period

Example A

A staff member of a political party spends their paid working hours coordinating volunteers campaigning for a candidate in a specific constituency. Their work time is to be regarded as for the purposes of the candidate's election.

If it is provided to and made use of by or on behalf of the candidate, then the costs of paying that staff member must appear in the candidate return as notional spending (if the value is more than £50).

Example B

A staff member of a political party spends their paid working hours on a number of different campaigning activities, including both promoting the party generally and promoting a specific candidate. The proportion of their work time that is spent promoting the candidate is to be regarded as for the purposes of that candidate's election.

If it is provided to and made use of by or on behalf of the candidate, then that proportion of the costs of paying that staff member must appear in the candidate return as notional spending.

Example C

A number of candidates attend a briefing on the party's manifesto pledges given by paid party staff. Because the focus is on national party manifesto pledges, the briefing is not to be regarded as given for the purposes of their election as candidates.

Therefore, no spending needs to appear in the candidate returns.

Staff monitoring social media and other press activities

It includes the cost of staff engaged in the management and monitoring of social media channels or platforms and the obtaining of data to allow targeted campaigning. This includes hiring staff to analyse and sort the data and the cost of staff to monitor and post or respond to any kind of social media or other account.

It includes the cost of staff engaged in the management of press activities of any kind, including staff who are liaising with, managing or monitoring any kind of media activity by any means in connection with the candidate's election.

Any other person whose services are engaged

It includes the cost of any other person whose services are engaged in connection with the candidate's election.

Volunteer time

It does not include the cost for services of an agent or any other person who is a volunteer.

You also do not have to include the costs of people's travel, food and accommodation costs while they campaign on your behalf, if they meet the costs themselves.

However, any expenses you meet for them, or reimburse them for, such as transport or accommodation, do count as your spending.

Sometimes you may not be sure if someone working for your campaign is a volunteer or if you should count their time towards your spending limit. For example, they may offer similar services professionally to the ones they are performing for you.

For example, they will be a volunteer if:

- their employer is not paying them for the time they spend on your campaign
- they are using their annual leave
- where they are self-employed, you won't benefit from any professional insurances they hold

If they use specialist equipment or materials, it is likely this will be notional spending.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Accommodation and administrative costs

Office space and equipment

This includes the rental cost of office space, including business rates, for the candidate's campaign, whether newly rented or under an existing rental agreement, and so notional spending will be incurred where such office space is provided free of charge or at a discount by a political party or a third party.

It includes the cost of office space where that office space is being shared. An apportionment must be made and an amount that reasonably reflects the use by the candidate in campaigning must be included in the return for the candidate. This amount will count towards the spending limit of the candidate.

It includes the cost of purchase, use or hire of any general office equipment for the candidate's campaign, and so notional spending will be incurred where such equipment is provided free of charge or at a discount by a political party or a third party.

For example, desks, chairs and computers provided by a party for use in the candidate's campaign.

It includes the cost of purchase, hire or use of:

- mobile phones or other hand-held devices
- the associated contracts

for use in the campaign by the candidate, agent and any other staff or volunteer, where that equipment and/or associated costs are paid for by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party except where:

- the equipment was acquired by the candidate principally for the candidate's own personal use and the costs are not more than would usually be incurred outside of an election period
- it is provided by another individual, the equipment was acquired by that individual for their own personal use, the costs are not more than would usually be incurred outside of an election period and the candidate is not charged for the use of it

Example A

A SIM card with a data and calls allowance is bought for a candidate to use in their campaign, this would count as candidate spending

Example B

A volunteer's mobile phone is used to co-ordinate other volunteers, and a portion of the phone contract charges are reimbursed by the candidate to the volunteer, this would count as candidate spending

Example C

The candidate uses their own phone which they acquired for their own personal use, and no further costs are incurred beyond the usual monthly charge for calls or data. This does not count as candidate spending

Overheads

It includes the cost of:

- electricity
- phone lines and internet access

for use in the candidate's campaign.

It includes the subscription cost for media monitoring services, press wire and press release services.

Costs associated with agents, volunteers and employees

It includes the cost of accommodation for the agent where it is reimbursed by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

It includes the cost of volunteers, employees and party employees campaigning for the candidate in a specific electoral area, including their accommodation costs if they are reimbursed by the candidate, the candidate's party or another third party.

Costs which are excluded

It does not include the cost of childcare for a candidate or their agent or a volunteer.

It does not include the cost of water, gas or council tax.

It does not include the provision by any other individual of accommodation which is the sole or main residence of the individual if the provision is made free of charge.

‘Personal expenses’ include the reasonable accommodation costs of the candidate in relation to the election.

Where an accommodation cost is a personal expense for the candidate, this does not count towards the spending limit. It must be recorded as a personal expense in the spending return. See [Personal expenses](#) for more information.

Last updated: 7 December 2023

What doesn't count as candidate spending?

- costs that are reasonably attributable to the candidate's disability ^[1]
- anything (except adverts) appearing in a newspaper, periodical or on a licensed broadcast channel ^[2]
- facilities you use because you are entitled to do so as a candidate, such as a public room for a meeting ^[3]
- volunteer time including time spent by your staff that you do not pay them for ^[4]
- use of someone's main residence, provided free of charge ^[5]
- use of someone's personal car or other means of transport, acquired principally for that person's personal use and provided free of charge ^[6]
- use of someone's computing or printing equipment acquired principally for that person's personal use and provided free of charge ^[7]
- reasonable expenses attributable to the protection of persons or property, for example hiring security, using a PO Box to avoid publicising a home or office address on imprints, or purchasing antivirus software for protecting campaign computers ^[8]

1. Schedule 4A, paragraph 7A Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Sch. 4A, para. 8 RPA 1983
3. Sch. 4A, para. 9 RPA 1983
4. Sch. 4A, para. 10 RPA 1983
5. Sch. 4A, para. 11 RPA 1983
6. Sch. 4A, para. 12 RPA 1983
7. Sch. 4A, para. 13 RPA 1983
8. Sch. 4A, para. 13A RPA 1983

Last updated: 20 June 2024

Personal expenses

Personal expenses include the reasonable travel and living expenses (such as hotel costs) of the candidate. ^[1]
Personal expenses do not count towards the spending limit but you must report them on your spending return. ^[2]

Personal expenses can include:

- public transport or taxi fares
- purchasing fuel for a vehicle or charging an electric vehicle
- hiring a car if candidate does not already own a car, or if their car is not suitable for campaigning
- staying at a hotel

For some personal expenses, you will need to estimate the proportion of your costs that are attributable to the election. For example, if you own a car, some of the fuel or charging costs during the election period are likely to be for other purposes. You should make an honest and reasonable assessment of these costs.

For domestic charging of electric vehicles, where there is no specific invoice for charging, you can estimate the cost by:

- comparing the capacity of the vehicle's battery with your cost per unit of electricity, and reporting an estimate of how many full charges are attributable to the election, or
- comparing your vehicle's mileage per unit of electricity to your cost per unit of electricity, and reporting an estimate of mileage attributable to the election

If personal expenses are provided to the candidate free of charge, or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% and the difference in value between what the candidate pays is more than £50, it will also be reportable as notional spending. Please see [notional spending](#) for more details.

1. Section 118 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. S.76(5) & Sch. 4, para. 3 RPA 1983

Last updated: 18 November 2024

Unused and reused items ^[1]

When you use an item for the first time, you must include the cost.

Items that are not used

You do not have to report spending on items that are not used (for example if leaflets are never distributed) and this does not count against the spending limit.

You should retain the unused material or evidence it was destroyed.

If you use the leftover items at a later election, you must report the spending on those items at that later election.

Re-use of items

Where you have paid for an item, you must report the full cost at the time of first use, even if you intend to use it again at a future election.

If you do use it again at a subsequent election, you do not have to report the original payment again. There may be some associated costs which must be reported at that election, for example for storage or cleaning.

1. S.90ZA(1) RPA 1983

Last updated: 8 July 2024

Items received free of charge or at a discount and ‘notional spending’

Sometimes you might use something in your campaign that you did not have to spend money on, because it was provided to you as a benefit in kind, for free or at a discount.

Some examples of a benefit in kind could be:

- space in a hall for an event
- leaflets
- providing volunteers with food and transport

When you use something provided to you as a benefit in kind, the full value of what you used counts towards your spending limit and must be reported. ^[1]

This is called ‘notional spending’.

Benefits in kind transferred or provided for your use or benefit

Under the law there are two different terms used when assessing the value of these benefits in kind.

Items or goods are transferred to the candidate when ownership is given to the candidate. Where items or goods are transferred to the candidate free of charge or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10%, these must be valued at its ‘market value’. ^[2] The market value means the price that would reasonably be expected to be paid for the item or goods if it was on sale in the open market. ^[3]

In contrast, items, goods or services are provided for the candidate’s use or benefit if it is made available for the candidate’s use, but there is no change in ownership. Where an item, goods or services are instead provided for the candidate’s use or benefit free of charge or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10%, the provision of these must be valued at a ‘commercial rate’. ^[4] There is no set definition for commercial rate under the law, however this may be the average rates for the item, goods or service offered by commercial providers.

In this guidance we use the term ‘commercial value’ as an umbrella term for both market value and commercial rate.

What counts as notional spending?

There are five tests that must all be met in order for an item to count as notional spending

1. it is transferred to you or provided for your use or benefit
2. it is transferred or provided for free or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% ^[5]
3. the difference in value between the commercial value of what is provided and what you pay is over £50 ^[6]
4. you make use of it in your campaign (or someone does on your behalf) ^[7]
5. it would have been election expenses if you had incurred the spending. ^[8] See [What activities count as candidate spending?](#) for information about the categories of candidate spending

The following pages provide more information and examples detailing these tests.

1. S.90C(3) & (4) RPA 1983
2. S.90C(1)(a)(i) RPA 1983
3. S.90C(6) RPA 1983
4. S.90C(1)(a)(ii) RPA 1983
5. S.90C(1)(a) RPA 1983
6. S.90C(2), (3) & (4) RPA 1983
7. S.90C(1)(b) RPA 1983
8. S.90C(1)(b) RPA 1983

Last updated: 7 December 2023

Transferred to or provided for the use or benefit of the candidate

The item must be transferred or provided to the candidate for it to count as notional spending. ^[1]

For example, a party sends one of their candidates some leaflets to use in the candidate's campaign – so the leaflets have been transferred to the candidate.

If the candidate distributes the leaflets, they have made use of them in their campaign. The value of the leaflets (if over £50) must be reported as notional spending.

1. S.90C(3) & (4) RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Commercial and non-commercial discounts

Commercial discounts are those available to other similar customers, such as discounts for bulk orders or seasonal reductions. Items, goods and services purchased with commercial discounts will not be treated as notional spending.

Non-commercial discounts are special discounts that you are given by suppliers. This includes any special rate which is not available on the open market. These are different to commercial discounts available to all customers, such as discounts for bulk orders or seasonal reductions.

For example, a printer provides a candidate with a quote of £120 to print leaflets to promote the candidate's campaign. The printer also offers the candidate a 5% discount on the order because they like the candidate's policies. The candidate pays for the leaflets, accepts the discount, and arranges for the leaflets to be delivered to voters.

While the leaflets have been provided for the candidate's use at a non-commercial discount, the discount is not more than 10%. This is not notional spending. The candidate must report the £116 paid for the leaflets as a usual payment made by themselves or any of their agents.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Made use of by or on behalf of the candidate

If a benefit in kind is transferred or provided to the candidate, it only counts as notional spending if it is made use of by the candidate in their campaign, or by someone acting on their behalf. ^[1]

If a campaign activity in support of the candidate is carried out by someone else, it is not enough that the candidate has benefitted from the activity, has been told about it, or even has expressed their thanks to the person carrying it out.

A person only makes use of something on behalf of the candidate if that use has been directed, authorised, or encouraged by the candidate or any of their agents. ^[2]

'Making use of' the benefit in kind requires that there is some active involvement on the part of the candidate (or

someone on their behalf) to make use of the goods or services being provided.

‘Making use of’ can include:

- contributing personally – for example the candidate provides content for leaflets which the party then produces and delivers, thereby using the service provided by the party
- arranging for someone else to contribute on your behalf – for example asking local party volunteers to help deliver leaflets that are provided by their party

For example, a party sends one of their candidates some leaflets to use in the candidate’s campaign, but the candidate and their agent never deliver the leaflets.

In this example neither the candidate, nor someone on their behalf, has made use of the leaflets in their campaign. This is not notional spending. The costs for the leaflets should not be included in the candidate’s return as the leaflets were not used.

1. S.90C(3) & (4) RPA 1983
2. S.90C(1)(a)(i) RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Valuing notional spending

Notional spending begins with being provided with something of value.

The guiding principle

The guiding principle is that, in all cases, you should make an honest and reasonable assessment of the value of the goods or services you are receiving.

If the exact or similar options of the item or services are available on the market, you should use the rates charged by other providers to guide you in making a valuation. For example, if the donor is a commercial provider, you should use the rates they charge other similar customers.

If there are no exact or similar options of the goods or services available on the market, you should base your assessment on the commercial value of a reasonable equivalent. If you are still not sure, please contact us for advice.

Valuing seconded staff

If an employer seconded a member of staff to your campaign, you must record their gross salary and any additional allowances as notional spending.

You do not need to include the employer's national insurance or pension contributions. You will need to include the value of any expenses, such as travel or food, that you or the employer refunds.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Examples of notional spending

There are five tests that must all be met in order for an item to count as notional spending

1. it is transferred to you or provided for your use or benefit
2. it is transferred or provided for free or at a non-commercial discount of more than 10% ^[1]
3. the difference in value between the commercial value of what is provided and what you pay is over £50 ^[2]
4. you make use of it in your campaign (or someone does on your behalf) ^[3]
5. it would have been election expenses if you had incurred the spending. ^[4] See [What activities count as candidate spending?](#) for information about the categories of candidate spending

Example A

A party sends one of their candidates leaflets with a value of £100 to use in the candidate's campaign. The candidate accepts the leaflets and arranges for them to be delivered to voters.

The first and second tests have been met as the leaflets have been provided for the candidate's use for free.

The third test has also been met as the difference in value between the commercial value of the leaflets (£100) and what the candidate pays (£0) is over £50.

The fourth test is met as the candidate has arranged for the leaflets to be used on their behalf by arranging the delivery.

The fifth test is met as unsolicited material to electors counts as an election expense.

As all the tests have been met, this is an example of notional spending. The full value of the leaflets provided to the candidate must be reported as notional spending.

Example B

A printer provides a candidate with a quote of £200 to print leaflets to promote the candidate's campaign. The printer also offers the candidate a 50% non-commercial discount on the order. The candidate pays for the leaflets, accepts the discount, and arranges for the leaflets to be delivered to voters.

The first and second tests have been met as the leaflets have been provided for the candidate's use at a non-commercial discount of more than 10%.

The third test has also been met as the difference in value between the commercial value of the leaflets (£200) and what the candidate pays (£100) is over £50.

The fourth test is met as the candidate has arranged for the leaflets to be used on their behalf by arranging the delivery.

The fifth test is met as unsolicited material to electors counts as an election expense.

As all the tests have been met, this is an example of notional spending. The candidate must report the amount they paid for the leaflets as a usual payment paid by the agent.

The value of the leaflets provided to the candidate through the discount must be reported as notional spending.

1. S.90C(3) & (4) RPA 1983
2. S.90C(1)(a)(i) RPA 1983
3. S.90C(6) RPA 1983
4. S.90C(1)(a)(ii) RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Splitting spending

Sometimes, you may need to split your costs between activities that count as candidate spending and those that don't.

For example, between:

- items used both before and during the regulated period
- your campaign spending and other activities such as an office that you share with your local party
- items used to promote two candidates standing together in the same parish council area

In all cases you should make an honest assessment, based on the facts, of the proportion of expenditure that can fairly be attributed to your candidate spending.

For example, if you are sharing a party office, the telephone bill may only provide a breakdown of the cost of calls over a certain value.

In these cases, you should consider the best way of making an honest assessment on the information you have. For example, you could compare the bill with one that does not cover a regulated period.

It is your responsibility to report your candidate spending fully and accurately. You should ensure you understand the rules and that all spending is properly authorised, recorded, and reported.

After the election, you will have to sign a declaration to declare that it is complete and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief. ^[1]

It is an offence to knowingly make a false declaration. ^[2]

If you are still not sure, call or [email us](#) for advice.

1. S.90C(3) & (4) RPA 1983
2. S.90C(1)(a)(i) RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Spending to promote the candidate and party

Sometimes spending by parties promotes both the party and the candidate. In these cases, this spending may be reportable by the candidate and count towards the candidate's spending limit rather than the party's.

To assess whether spending is reportable by the candidate you must first assess whether it promotes the candidate.

What is spending to promote the candidate?

If an activity is aimed at voters in the electoral area in which the candidate is standing to promote or secure the election of that candidate, then it is spending to promote the candidate.

For example, activity promoting a party will be regarded as promoting a candidate whenever the item either:

- identifies the specific candidate
- identifies the specific electoral area in which the candidate is standing

Where material is distributed across a number of electoral areas, you will need to apportion the costs of the activity.

Where material:

- features a candidate
- is distributed across a wider area than just the specific electoral area in which that candidate is standing

a proportion of the cost of that material will be regarded as used for the purposes of the candidate's election.

The proportion that will be regarded as used for the purposes of the candidate's election is the cost of distribution in that candidate's specific electoral area.

If you are in any doubt as to whether spending is or will be candidate or party spending, you should contact us.

For more information on political party campaign spending, see our guidance on [party campaign spending](#).

Please see [Splitting spending](#) for further information on apportioning spending.

Last updated: 7 December 2023

Examples

Spending by the party that promotes the candidate

EXAMPLE A

A political party produces a letter that sets out the party's policies and in the final lines it asks voters to vote for a specific candidate in that electoral area. Since the candidate is identifiable, the letter is to be regarded as distributed for the purposes of the candidate's election.

EXAMPLE B

A political party produces an advert that sets out the party's policies and asks voters to vote for the party in that electoral area. Although the advert does not name the candidate, it identifies the electoral area. Therefore, the advert is to be regarded as distributed for the purposes of the party's candidate's election.

Spending that should be partially attributed to both the party and the candidate

EXAMPLE C

A leaflet featuring the party leader is distributed across Great Britain, including in the electoral area where the party leader is standing. The leaflets distributed in the party leader's electoral area are to be regarded as distributed for the purposes of the leader's election as a candidate.

EXAMPLE D

A prominent local councillor is featured in a leaflet that is distributed across the entire county, including in the specific electoral area they are standing in. The leaflets distributed in the councillor's electoral area are to be regarded as distributed for the purposes of the councillor's election as a candidate.

EXAMPLE E

A party prepares a digital campaign featuring a popular party member in one area of the country. The party member is a candidate in one part of that area. The material is targeted at a particular group of voters and will appear in the social media feeds of someone who is in the target group. The target group includes a geographic location. The proportion of the campaign targeted in the prominent party member's electoral area is to be regarded as published for the purposes of their election as a candidate.

Spending that doesn't promote the candidate

EXAMPLE F

A political party produces a letter that sets out the party's policies and encourages voters to vote for the party. Although the letter is addressed to a household in an electoral area, the letter itself does not identify the candidate or the electoral area. This is not to be regarded as used for the purposes of the candidate's election.

EXAMPLE G

A party prepares a digital campaign featuring a popular party member across the entire country, including where the party member is a candidate. The material is not targeted but will appear if a particular set of words is typed into a search engine. It is not possible to ascertain how often or when this appeared to voters in the party member's electoral area. This is not to be regarded as used for the purposes of their election as a candidate.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Reporting your spending

You must meet deadlines for:

- receiving and paying invoices
- sending a spending and donations return to the local returning officer

You must also submit a declaration that the return is complete and accurate. ^[1]

You must still submit a return and declarations even if you haven't spent any money. ^[2] This is called a 'nil return'.

You can find these deadlines, and more information on reporting, in [Completing your return](#).

1. Schedule 4, paragraph 3 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Sch. 4, para. 3 RPA 1983

Last updated: 18 November 2024

Campaigning

The following sections will guide and inform you on several aspects surrounding your campaigning. This includes:

- When you can start campaigning and dos and don'ts for your campaign
- Using the electoral register and absent voter lists
- Your role in maintaining the integrity of the election
- Electoral offences and reporting allegations of electoral fraud

Last updated: 11 January 2024

When can you start campaigning?

You can start campaigning at any time. You do not have to wait until you are validly nominated to declare that you will run for election, ask people to support you or publish campaign material.

Election spending limits apply from the day after the date after a person officially becomes a candidate.

For more information on election spending, please see our guidance on [candidate spending](#).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Campaigning dos and don'ts

This section sets out activities that candidates and their supporters can carry out during their campaign, those they should carry out, and things that they must not do.

More information about acceptable campaigning activities is set out in our [Code of conduct for campaigners](#)

Last updated: 3 April 2024

During the campaign, you may...

- Encourage people who are not on the electoral register to apply for registration. The deadline for registering to vote in time for an election is 12 working days before the poll. ^[1] Individuals can register online at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>.
- Remind voters who wish to vote in person that they will be required to produce an accepted form of photographic ID to prove their identity before they will be issued with a ballot paper. Where an individual does not have or does not wish to use an accepted form of photographic ID, they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. For more information on the accepted forms of photographic ID and Voter Authority Certificates see our guidance for polling day
- Help voters with information about postal and proxy voting and encourage voters to apply online at <https://www.gov.uk/vote-uk-election>. The deadline for applying for a postal vote for the elections is 5pm, 11 working days before the poll. ^[2] The deadline for applying for a proxy vote for the elections is 5pm, 6 working days before the poll, ^[3] although in some circumstances electors may apply for an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day. ^[4] An elector can apply for an emergency proxy if, after 5pm, 6 working days before the poll they have had a medical emergency or have been called away on business, or the photographic ID that they intended to use in the polling station becomes unavailable and they do not have alternative form of accepted photographic ID.
- Find more information about who can register to vote and postal and proxy voting on our website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>

1. Section 13B(1)-(3) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 83) and Reg. 29(4), Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (RPR (E&W) 2001)
2. Regulation 29(4), RPR (E&W) 2001
3. Regulation 56, RPR (E&W) 2001
4. Regulation 56, RPR (E&W) 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

During the campaign, you should...

- Make sure any application forms you develop include all the required information, otherwise the applications will be rejected. In particular, you must make sure that the signature and date of birth fields on postal and proxy application forms are in the correct format and there is a field for applicants to include their National Insurance number. You should use our absent voting application forms as a guide and you should liaise with the ERO who may be able to provide you with forms you can use. To help ensure that voters application are received and processed as quickly as possible, you can also let them know that they can apply for an absent vote online at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote>.
- Inform voters to return their completed application forms to the ERO as soon as possible. Campaigners should not collect completed paper applications from voters and should not ask voters to send completed applications to campaigners' addresses.
- Never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot packs from voters.
- Make sure your supporters follow the [Code of conduct for campaigners in Great Britain](#) – this will help them to avoid situations where their honesty or integrity could be questioned.
- Make sure your supporters are courteous when dealing with other candidates and their supporters.
- Be aware of the deadlines for appointing agents to attend postal vote opening sessions, polling stations and the count. Deadlines are set out in our guidance for [postal voting](#), [polling day](#) and the [verification and count](#).
- Check our guidance on how [postal vote openings](#), the [voting process](#) and [the count](#) will work so that you know what you can expect to happen.
- Check that your systems for recording spending are working. For more information on election spending see our guidance on [candidate spending](#).

Last updated: 20 December 2023

During the campaign, you must not...

- Knowingly make a false statement about the personal character of another candidate. ^[1]
- Pay canvassers. ^[2] Canvassing means trying to persuade an elector to vote for or against a particular candidate or party.
- Handle completed ballot papers or postal ballot packs for voters who are not close family or someone you care for. ^[3]

You will need to make sure your supporters are also aware of the restrictions on postal vote handling and follow the [Code of conduct for campaigners in Great Britain](#). This will help them to avoid situations where their honesty or integrity could be questioned.

More information on election offences and how to report these can be found in our [guidance on offences](#).

If you have made a mistake and have acted in contravention of the rules, you can apply for relief from the consequences of having made a mistake. See our guidance on [what to do if you have made a mistake](#) for more information.

1. Section 106, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Section 111, RPA 1983
3. s.112A, RPA 1983

Last updated: 16 October 2024

Campaign publicity dos and don'ts

You must:

- Use imprints on all your printed campaign material and any electronic campaign material that is designed to be printed off locally. ^[1] You should ensure the imprint is clear and visible. See our guidance on using [imprints](#) for more information.
- Comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners ^[2] – you should ask the relevant local authority for advice.
- Make sure that outdoor posters are removed promptly after the election – you must do this within two weeks of the close of the poll. ^[3]

You should:

- Include an imprint on all non-printed campaign material, including websites.
- Consider how to make your campaign accessible to all voters – for example disabled voters or voters whose first language isn't English may need campaign material provided in a particular format. You may want to make contact with disability groups in your local area for advice.

You must not:

- Produce material that looks like the poll cards sent to voters. ^[4]
- Pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business). ^[5]

1. Section 143 Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA 2000) and Section 110 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements)(England) Regulations 2007 and Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992
3. Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements)(England) Regulations 2007 and Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992
4. Section 94, RPA 1983
5. Section 109 RPA 1983

Last updated: 16 October 2024

Using imprints

What is an imprint?

An imprint must be added by law to all printed election material to show who is responsible for its production. ^[1]

You should ensure that your imprint is clear and visible.

Our guide to [candidate imprints](#) on printed material explains the rules you must follow if you are a candidate in this type of election.

Under the Elections Act 2022, imprints are also required on certain digital material. For the imprint requirements on digital material, please see our [statutory guidance on digital imprints](#).

1. S.143 PERA 2000 and art. 64 PCCE Order 2012

Last updated: 3 April 2024

Using schools and rooms for public meetings

You may want to engage with the public at public meetings, promoting your views and responding to questions from the audience.

The ERO keeps a list of the location and availability of meeting rooms in their area. They will make this list available for inspection by candidates and election agents (and persons authorised by them) from the day the notice of election is published. Contact details for EROs can be found [on our website](#).

Once you are a candidate you will be able to use available public rooms up until the day before polling day. ^[1]

You should contact the owner of the premises to make a booking, giving reasonable notice to reduce the risk of the request being refused.

There is no hire charge for using these rooms, but you must pay for any expenses incurred, such as heating, lighting and cleaning, and for any damage to the premises.

Your right to use the room does not include hours during which a school is used for educational purposes or when any prior letting of a room has been agreed.

1. s.96, Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Using the electoral register and lists of absent voters

Once you officially become a candidate, you are entitled to receive a free copy of the electoral register. ^[1] You are also entitled to the lists of people voting by post or proxy ('the lists of absent voters') for the parish area or, if your parish is warded, for the ward that you are contesting.

Registered political parties are entitled to receive a copy of the electoral register at any time.

There are two registers

Using information received from the public, registration officers keep two registers –

The electoral register

The electoral register lists the names and addresses of everyone who is registered to vote in public elections. The register is used for electoral purposes, such as making sure only eligible people can vote. It is also used for other limited purposes specified in law, such as detecting crime (e.g. fraud), calling people for jury service, checking credit applications.

The open register (also known as the edited register).

The open register is an extract of the electoral register, but is not used for elections. It can be bought by any person, company or organisation. For example, it is used by businesses and charities to confirm name and address details. Electors can request not to have their name and address included in the open register.

1. Regulation 108, Representation of the People Regulations (England & Wales) 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Applying for a copy of the electoral register and the lists of absent voters

Copies of the electoral register and lists of absent voters can be obtained from the Electoral Registration Officer. You can find their contact details on [our website](#).

The request must be made in writing ^[1] and we have made a register request form and an absent voters' lists request form available for this purpose.

The register and lists will be supplied in electronic format unless you specifically request a paper copy.

The version of the electoral register and lists supplied will be the ones current at the time of your request. You may also request the updates to the electoral registers and lists that are published in the lead-up to the poll, including the list of newly registered electors when it is published five working days before the poll.

Any person found breaching the restrictions on use of the electoral register could face an unlimited fine. For more information see our guidance on [restrictions on the use of the electoral register](#).

1. Reg. 102, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Restrictions on the use of the information contained in the electoral register and lists of absent voters

The electoral register and lists of absent voters contain people's personal data and so their use is very carefully controlled.

You can use them to:

- complete your nomination form
- help you campaign
- check that donations are permissible

You must not release to any person any details that appear only in the electoral register and not on the open register which is available for general sale. You must not use the electoral register and lists of absent voters for any other purpose not listed above. ^[1]

If you have supplied a copy of the electoral register or lists of absent voters to campaign workers, they must also comply with the requirements above.

You must ensure that you keep both the electoral register and the lists of absent voters secure. ^[2] Once you no longer need the register and lists of absents voters for any electoral purposes, you should securely destroy any copies supplied to you as a candidate in accordance with Information Commissioner's [guidelines](#).

1. Regulations 102 and 108 Representation of the People Regulations 2001
2. Article 5, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2016

Last updated: 5 September 2024

Maintaining the integrity of the election

Candidates are one of the key public faces of the election, and your conduct will be scrutinised in detail by your opponents, the media and voters.

Voters should be able to trust that you will comply with the law and maintain the integrity of the election process.

You should also make sure that your supporters fully understand the law and know what they need to do to ensure that voters can participate freely in this election.

The police can only investigate allegations of electoral fraud where there is evidence to show that an offence has taken place, so you should always be able to substantiate any claims or allegations when you refer them to the police.

You should also consider the impact on public trust and confidence of making false or unsubstantiated allegations about the conduct of other campaigners.

Neither the Returning Officer nor the Commission regulate these offences. For details of how to report any allegations see our guidance on [Reporting allegations of electoral fraud](#).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Table of offences

The following table shows a number of electoral and non-electoral offences of which you should be aware. You should seek your own legal advice where necessary.

Offence	Explanation
Bribery ^[1]	The offence of bribery includes where someone directly or indirectly gives any money or procures any office to or for any voter, in order to induce any voter to vote or not vote.
Treating ^[2]	A person is guilty of treating if either before, during or after an election they directly or indirectly give or provide any food, drink, entertainment or provision to corruptly influence any voter to vote or refrain from voting. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.
	A person is guilty of undue influence if they carry out an activity on account of: • a person having voted in a particular way or refrained from voting • assuming a person to have voted in a particular way or to have refrained from voting

Undue Influence ^[3]	These activities are: • using or threatening to use violence against a person • damaging or destroying, or threatening to damage or destroy a person's property • damaging or destroying, or threatening to damage or destroy a person's reputation • causing or threatening to cause financial loss to a person • causing spiritual injury to, or placing undue spiritual pressure on, a person • doing any other act designed to intimidate a person • doing any act designed to deceive a person in relation to the administration of an election Undue influence doesn't exclusively relate to physical access to the polling station. For example, a leaflet that threatens to make use of force in order to induce a voter to vote in a particular way could also be undue influence.
Handling of postal voting documents by political campaigners ^[4]	It is an offence for political campaigners to handle completed ballot papers or postal ballot packs for voters who are not their close family or someone they care for.
Personation ^[5]	Personation is where an individual votes as someone else either by post or in person at a polling station, as an elector or as a proxy. This offence applies if the person that is being personated is living, dead or fictitious. Aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the offence of personation is also an offence.
False statements About a candidate's personal character or conduct ^[6]	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 also an illegal practice to make a false statement of a candidate's withdrawal in order to promote or procure the election of another candidate.
False statements In nomination papers ^[7]	It is an offence to provide a statement on a nomination paper, which you know to be false. For example, if you know you are disqualified from election you must not sign the consent to nomination.
False registration information and false postal/proxy voting application ^[8]	It is an offence to supply false information on a registration, postal vote or proxy vote application form. False information includes a false signature.
False application to vote by post or by proxy ^[9]	A person is guilty of an offence if they apply to vote by post or proxy to gain a vote to which they are not entitled or to deprive someone else of their vote.
Multiple voting and proxy voting offences ^[10]	There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting by post as an elector or proxy when subject to a legal incapacity to vote and inducing or procuring another to commit the offence.
Breaches of the secrecy of the ballot ^[11]	Everyone involved in the election process or attending certain proceedings must maintain the secrecy of the ballot. The Returning Officer will give a copy of the official secrecy requirements to everyone who attends the opening of postal votes or the counting of ballot papers, and to polling agents.
Campaign publicity material	Certain offences relate specifically to election campaign publicity material. Printed election campaign publicity material must contain an imprint ^[12] and not resemble a poll card. ^[13] Campaign publicity material must also not contain a false statement as to the personal character or conduct of another candidate. ^[14] Neither the Returning Officer nor the Commission regulate the content of campaign material and are not able to comment on the legality of any particular

	electoral material beyond what is covered in this guidance.
Racial hatred	Under the Public Order Act 1986, it is an offence to publish or distribute threatening, abusive or insulting material that is intended to stir up racial hatred or which is likely to stir up racial hatred.

1. Section 113, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. Section 114, RPA 1983
3. Section 114A, RPA 1983
4. Section 112A, RPA 1983
5. Section 60, RPA 1983
6. Section 106, RPA 1983
7. Section 65A, RPA 1983
8. Section 13D, RPA 1983
9. Section 62A, RPA 1983
10. Section 61, RPA 1983
11. Section 66, RPA 1983
12. Section 143 PPERA 2000 and Section 110 RPA 83
13. Section 94 RPA 83
14. Section 106 RPA 83

Last updated: 16 October 2024

What if you have made a mistake?

You may be able to apply for relief from the penalties of an offence which has been committed inadvertently, innocently or without your knowledge.

You should always seek independent legal advice when considering applying for relief.

For more information, you should contact the:

Election Petitions Office
Room E105
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London WC2A 2LL

Email: Election_Petitions@justice.gov.uk

Phone: 0207 947 6877

Last updated: 16 April 2024

Reporting allegations of electoral fraud

If you are concerned that electoral fraud may have been committed, you should first speak to the Electoral Registration Officer or the Returning Officer.

They may be able to explain whether or not electoral fraud has been committed, and can refer your concerns to the police if necessary. They can also provide you with the details of the police contact for the relevant police force so that you can report the allegation yourself.

If you have evidence that an electoral offence has been committed you should contact the police immediately, using the 101 non-emergency number unless there is a crime in progress, in which case you should use the standard 999 emergency line.

Every police force has a dedicated Single Point of Contact Officer who will be able to provide advice to ensure that your allegations are properly investigated. You should be prepared to give them a statement and substantiate your allegation.

If you do not want to give a statement to the police, you can report your concerns anonymously on the [Crimestoppers website](#) or by calling Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

You can find contact details of Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers on [our website](#).

Please note that if your allegation relates to party, election or registered campaigner finance matters, such as spending or donations, then you should follow the advice given on [our website](#).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Nominations

The following sections provide guidance on standing as a candidate at a parish council election in England.

The guidance covers:

- The nomination process, including what forms you need to complete
- When and how you need to submit your nomination papers
- What happens after you submit your nomination papers

There are specific rules that candidates need to follow, depending on whether they are standing as a political party

candidate or standing as an independent candidate. These differences will be clearly highlighted throughout the guidance.

Guidance on standing for other elections can be found on our [website](#).

Last updated: 16 October 2024

Completing your nomination papers

To become nominated as a candidate at a parish council election in England, you need to submit a completed set of nomination papers to the place fixed by the RO by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll. ^[1]

This deadline is set out in law and cannot be changed for any reason.

The start date from which you will be able to submit nomination papers, as well as the times and place for delivery, will be set out in the notice of election published by the local RO. ^[2]

There are three nomination papers that you must submit to make your nomination valid: ^[3]

- the nomination form
- a home address form
- your consent to nomination

The RO can hold your nomination paper invalid if the particulars of your nomination are not as required by law. The RO can also reject your nomination if they conclude that it is clearly a sham, for example, if an obviously fictitious name is provided.

You can obtain nomination papers from the local elections office. Contact details can be obtained from our website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter> alternatively, the Commission has produced a set of nomination papers that you could use.

There are different nomination papers for elections held on 2 May 2024 and for those held on or after 7 May 2024. Please make sure you use the correct version, depending on when the poll will be held. Using the wrong nominations pack may cause your nomination to be rejected.

If you or someone you trust are unable to complete the nomination form, the RO can help by preparing the form for your signature. ^[4]

The RO may also be able to offer informal checks of your completed nomination papers before you submit them. You should find out from the Returning Officer whether they plan to offer informal checks.

Note that any information you provide on your nomination papers must be true to the best of your knowledge. It is an offence to provide a false statement on your nomination papers. Providing a false statement could invalidate your election, and is also punishable by an unlimited fine and/or imprisonment. ^[5]

1. Rule 1, Schedule 2, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 3(1)(a), Schedule 2, LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 4, LE(P&C)R 2006
4. Rule 6(4)(b), LE(P&C)R 2006
5. Section 65A Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983

Last updated: 7 August 2024

The nomination form

Your name and description (if you choose to use one) should be written on the nomination form before you ask subscribers to sign the form.

The nomination form must be completed in English.

The form must contain:

Your full name ^[1]

- This means your surname and other names in full.
- Using initials only could lead to your nomination paper being rejected
- Do not use prefixes such as Mr, Mrs, Dr or Cllr as part of your name.
- The same applies to suffixes. However, if you have a title, you can use this as your full name. For example, if your actual name is Joseph Smith but your hereditary title is Joseph Avon, you can use the name Joseph Avon as your full name.

Signatures of two registered electors ^[2]

Also known (known as proposer and seconder) from the parish area, or from the parish ward if the parish is warded. The proposer and seconder must be on the local government electoral register that is in force 25 working days before the poll. For more information see our guidance on [subscribers](#).

Description

You can also choose to use a description on your nomination paper. The type of description you can use depends on whether you are an independent candidate or a candidate standing on behalf of a registered political party.

Type of candidate	Description you can chose to use
	You may use 'Independent'. Or you may use a description of no more than six words in English to

Independent candidates	appear on the ballot paper. It can be any description providing it is sufficient to identity you and is unlikely to associate you with a political party registered with the Electoral Commission. Examples include ‘farmer’, ‘Baker in the High Street’, ‘member of village action team’, etc. Note that the six-word limit is set out in law and the Returning Officer will have to reject your nomination if you exceed it. If you are in any doubt about whether your description exceeds six words, you should contact the Returning Officer for advice.
Political party candidates	You can use a party name or registered description. If you want to use a party name or registered description, you must also submit alongside your other nomination papers a certificate that shows that you are authorised to use the party’s name or description. More information is set out in our guidance for candidates standing on behalf of political parties.

You do not have to use a description. If you choose not to use a description, you can leave the description field of the nomination form blank.

1. Rule 4(2)(a), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 6 LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 11 September 2024

Commonly used name(s)

You must complete your full name on the nomination form. ^[1]

If you:

- commonly use a surname or forename that is different from any other surname or forename you have
- use one or more forenames or surname in a different way from the way they are stated on your nomination form

you may state your commonly used name or names on your nomination form in addition to your full names that you have provided. ^[2]

For example, you may be known by your abbreviated name ‘Andy’, rather than your full first name ‘Andrew’. In that case, you can write ‘Andy’ into the commonly used forename box on the nomination paper if you would rather that

name appear on the ballot paper.

You can request to use a commonly used forename, surname or both.

Any commonly used name(s) would then appear on:

- the statement of persons nominated
- the notice of poll, and
- the ballot papers

The RO will disallow commonly used names that are likely to mislead or confuse electors, or are obscene or offensive. ^[3] If the name(s) are not permissible, the RO will write to you stating the reason for rejection. In those cases, your actual name will be used instead.

If either the commonly used forename or surname box on the nomination paper is left blank, then your actual forename or surname, depending on which commonly used name box has been left blank, will be used.

It is an offence to give a false statement on your nomination form. Therefore if you choose to provide a commonly used name you must ensure that it is a forename or surname which you commonly use.

1. Rule 4(2) Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 4(3), LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 9(4), LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 22 October 2024

Signatures of subscribers

Each nomination form needs to be signed (subscribed) by two electors on the local government electoral register in the parish or, if the parish is warded, in the parish ward.

The electors must be of voting age and be on the register that is in force on the last day for publication of notice of election. ^[1]

Each elector may not subscribe more nomination forms than there are vacancies. ^[2]

For example, if there are two vacancies in a parish ward, an elector may subscribe up to two candidates' nomination forms in that ward; if three candidates submit nomination forms subscribed by the same person, the two that were submitted first will be accepted, but the third will be invalid.

You should therefore always enquire, before asking a subscriber to sign your form, if they have already signed someone else's.

If a nomination form contains more than two subscribers' signatures, only the first two will be accepted. ^[3] If either

of the subscribers is invalid, the Returning Officer must hold the nomination form invalid, regardless of whether the form contains more than two. ^[4]

There is nothing to prevent you from subscribing your own nomination providing that you are registered in the parish, or if the parish is warded, in the parish ward.

Nomination forms should not be altered once they are subscribed. All of your details should be completed before you invite anyone to subscribe your nomination. Once the RO has formally accepted a nomination form, signatures cannot be withdrawn.

Anonymously registered electors

There may be some electors on the register who have registered anonymously because of risks to their safety. Anonymously registered electors may not subscribe nomination forms.

Anonymous electors are shown on the register with just their poll number and the letter 'N' (rather than with their name and address).

The elector number

The elector numbers of the proposer and seconder, as they appear on the electoral register must be entered on the nomination form. ^[5] The elector number includes the distinctive numbers or letters of the polling district can usually be found at the front of the register.

Both the RO and ERO will be able to advise you how the register is laid out.

You will be entitled to a free copy of the electoral register for the parish area or parish ward you are contesting, as appropriate. ^[6]

You should use it to ensure that your nomination form is properly subscribed.

In line with data protection legislation and the electoral provision under which you have obtained the register, you must ensure that you keep the electoral register secure and, once you have finished with it, ensure that it is securely destroyed.

Data protection considerations

When collecting subscriber information, you should point out what the information will be used for, how personal data will be processed and kept secure. The lawful basis to collect the information in this form is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and exercise of official authority as set out in Representation of the People Act 1983 and associated regulations.

You should also explain that the information will be shared with the RO. For further information on data protection and processing you should refer to the RO's privacy notice on their website.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data. Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

1. Rule 6(7), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 6(5), LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 6(1) and (2), LE(P&C)R 2006
4. Rule 6(1) and (2), LE(P&C)R 2006
5. Rule 6(3), LE(P&C)R 2006
6. Regulation 108, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Consent to nomination

You must formally consent to your nomination in writing. ^[1]

The content of the consent to nomination form is fixed by law and the entire form must be returned in order for your nomination to be valid.

On the form you will be asked to state that you are qualified and not disqualified from standing.

You must meet at least one of the [qualifications to stand for election](#). On the consent to nomination form you should state as many of the qualifications as apply.

You must also state your date of birth.

You are not allowed to sign the consent form earlier than one calendar month before the deadline for submitting your nomination papers. ^[2]

Your signature must be witnessed; and the witness must attest the form. ^[3]

The witness's full name and home address in full must be provided on the home address form.

There are no restrictions on who can be a witness to the consent to nomination. ^[4]

1. Rule 7, Schedule 2, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 7(a), Schedule 2, LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 7(c), Schedule 2, LE(P&C)R 2006
4. Rule 7(c), Schedule 2, LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 11 September 2024

Home address form

The home address form must state: ^[1]

- your full name
- your home address in full
- your qualifying address, or, where you have declared on your consent to nomination that you meet more than one qualification, your qualifying addresses
- which of the qualifications your qualifying address or addresses relate to
- the full name and the home address in full of the witness to your consent to nomination form

Your home address:

- must be completed in full
- must not contain abbreviations
- must be your current home address
- must not be a business address (unless you run a business from your home)

The qualifying address:

Where you have selected one of the following options on the consent to nomination, you must state

- option (a) on the consent to nomination form - the address in full where you are registered as a local government elector
- option (b) on the consent to nomination - a description and the address of that land or premises which you have occupied as owner or tenant
- option (c) on the consent to nomination - the address of your place of work
- option (d) on the consent to nomination, the address or addresses in full of where you have resided

Choosing not to publish your home address

You may choose for your home address not to be published on the statement of persons nominated or the ballot paper.

In this case the home address form must contain, as well as your full name and home address:

- a statement, signed by you, which states that you require your home address not to be made public
- the name of the relevant area in which your home address is situated (if your home address is in the UK
- if you live outside the UK, the name of the country in which your home address is situated

What is the relevant area?

The relevant area means:

- For home addresses in England:
 - if the address is within a district for which there is a district council, that district;
 - if the address is within a county in which there are no districts with councils, that county;
 - if the address is within a London borough, that London borough;
 - if the address is within the City of London (including the Inner and Middle Temples, the City of London; and
 - if the address is within the Isles of Scilly, the Isles of Scilly
- For home addresses in Wales:
 - if the address is within a county, that county;
 - if the address is within a county borough, that county borough
- For home addresses in Scotland:
 - the local government area in which the address is situated
- For home addresses in Northern Ireland:
 - the local government district in which the address is situated

What is the relevant area?

The relevant area means:

- For home addresses in England:
 - if the address is within a district for which there is a district council, that district;
 - if the address is within a county in which there are no districts with councils, that county;
 - if the address is within a London borough, that London borough;
 - if the address is within the City of London (including the Inner and Middle Temples), the City of London; and
 - if the address is within the Isles of Scilly, the Isles of Scilly
- For home addresses in Wales:
 - if the address is within a county, that county;
 - if the address is within a county borough, that county borough
- For home addresses in Scotland:
 - the local government area in which the address is situated
- For home addresses in Northern Ireland:
 - the local government district in which the address is situated

1. Rule 4(5), Schedule 2, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Candidates standing on behalf of political parties

This section provides specific information for candidates standing on behalf of a political party on the additional information required to be submitted as part of their nomination papers.

To stand on behalf of a registered political party, the party must be registered on the Commission's register of political parties at <https://search.electoralcommission.org.uk> and be listed as allowed to field candidates in England. You will also need to submit the a certificate of authorisation to be able to stand on behalf of that party. If you also wish to use an emblem of the party, you will also need to submit an emblem request form as part of your nomination.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

The certificate of authorisation

Political parties authorise candidates to stand for them by issuing a certificate of authorisation. This must state that the candidate may use one of the following: ^[1]

- the exact party name as registered with the Commission
- one of the party's registered descriptions
- your choice of either the registered party name or one of the registered descriptions.

Particular care should be taken by the Nominating Officer (or someone authorised to act on their behalf) when completing the certificate of authorisation. If the certificate explicitly authorises a particular party name/description and this does not match the name/description on the nomination paper, the whole nomination will be invalid. ^[2]

The certificate of authorisation must be signed by the registered Nominating Officer of the political party or by someone authorised by the Nominating Officer to act on their behalf ^[3] and must be received to the RO by the nominations deadline, 4pm 19 working days before the poll. ^[4]

If you are standing on behalf of two or more parties, you will need a certificate of authorisation from the Nominating Officer of each of the registered parties (or people authorised to act on their behalf). ^[5] Joint descriptions are listed on the Commission's [register of political parties](#) on the registration page for the relevant parties.

1. Rule 5(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 8(2)(a), LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 5(1)(a), LE(P&C)R 2006
4. Rule 5(3)(b), LE(P&C)R 2006
5. Rule 5(3), LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Request to use an emblem on the ballot paper

If you have been authorised by a political party to use the party name or a registered description on the ballot paper, you can also request that one of the party's official emblems is printed on the ballot paper next to your name. ^[1]

You must make the request for an emblem in writing and deliver it to the Returning Officer. ^[2] The request must be received by the Returning Officer by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll. ^[3]

A party can register up to three emblems. You may want to check with your party (e.g. with the Nominating Officer or someone authorised to act on their behalf) which emblem to use. Make sure you request a current emblem.

Candidates standing on behalf of two or more registered parties and using a joint description can use an emblem that has been registered by one of the relevant parties. ^[4] The request must be made in writing and delivered to the RO ^[5] by the close of nominations, i.e. by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll. ^[6] The RO will supply you with a form you can use to make this request or, alternatively, you can use the emblem request form produced by the Commission.

The request should state both the name of the political party and the description of the emblem to be used, as listed on the [Commission's online register of political parties](#). Registered emblems cannot be varied in any way.

1. Rule 16(3), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 16(3), (3A) and (4), LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 5(1)(b), LE(P&C)R 2006
4. Rule 16(3A), LE(P&C)R 2006
5. Rule 16(4), LE(P&C)R 2006
6. Rule 5(1)(b), LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 12 September 2024

Submitting your nomination papers

It is your responsibility to ensure that your nomination papers, including the home address form and the consent to nomination, and where you are standing on behalf of a party, the certificate of authorisation and emblem request form, are delivered to the place specified on the notice of election by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll. ^[1]

We recommend that you or someone you trust delivers them, so you can be sure they are delivered to the Returning Officer in time.

You should contact the RO as soon as possible to find out what arrangements are in place for submitting nomination papers. You will be able to contact the RO via your local elections office. Contact details can be

obtained from our website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>

1. Rule 3(1)(a), 4(1) and 7, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)

Last updated: 1 December 2023

How must nomination papers be submitted?

The nomination form, the home address form and consent to nomination must be delivered by hand and cannot be submitted by post, fax, e-mail or other electronic means. ^[1]

The certificate of authorisation and the emblem request form may be submitted by post, but may not be submitted by fax, e-mail or other electronic means. ^[2]

The original version of each completed paper must be submitted. ^[3]

For example, a certificate of authorisation which has been sent as an attachment to an email to be printed out would make it a 'copy document' and not the original document.

1. Rule 4(1) and 7(d), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rules 5(1),(3) and 12, LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 5(1) and 16(4), LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

When must nomination papers be submitted?

You should submit your nomination papers as early as possible to give you sufficient time to submit new nomination papers should your first set contain any errors.

Usually, nomination papers can only be delivered during normal office hours. The RO will confirm the exact details of when and where they can be delivered on the notice of election.

The notice of election will be published no later than 25 working days before the poll and will state the earliest date on which you can submit nomination papers. ^[1]

In most cases, the notice of election will be published on the website of the local authority in which the parish is situated.

After you have submitted your nomination papers you will be sent a notice by the Returning Officer to let you know whether or not your nomination is valid. ^[2]

If, after you have submitted your nomination papers you change your mind and no longer want to stand for election, you can [withdraw](#), provided you do so by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll. ^[3]

1. Rule 1, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 8(6), LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 11, LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Withdrawing

You may withdraw as a candidate by signing and submitting a withdrawal notice, which must be witnessed by one other person. ^[1] There are no restrictions on who may submit the notice, but it must be delivered by hand. Your witness must also sign the notice. A notice of withdrawal can be obtained from your local RO or downloaded from our website.

If you are outside the UK and want to withdraw, your proposer can sign the withdrawal notice on your behalf. The withdrawal must be accompanied by a written declaration signed by your proposer confirming your absence.

If you are outside the UK and stand nominated by more than one nomination form, you should speak to the RO if you wish to withdraw as special rules apply in this instance.

The withdrawal notice must be submitted by the deadline for withdrawals (i.e. by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll).

After the withdrawal deadline it is not possible to withdraw from the election, and your name will appear on the ballot paper. If the election is uncontested, you will be declared elected.

1. Rule 13, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Being validly nominated in more than one ward

If the parish is warded and you are validly nominated in more than one ward in that parish, you must withdraw from all wards but one before the deadline for withdrawals (i.e. by 4pm, 19 working days before the poll). ^[1]

If you do not withdraw from all but one ward, you will be deemed to have withdrawn from all of the wards.

1. Rule 12, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What happens after the close of nominations

The RO will publish a statement of persons nominated for the parish, or for each parish ward if the parish is warded, by 4pm, 18 working days before the poll. ^[1]

The statement will include: ^[2]

- the full or commonly used names, as the case may be, of all candidates validly nominated
- the names of candidates who no longer stand nominated, if any (i.e. invalid and withdrawn candidates), with the reason why they are no longer standing
- the address of each candidate, or if they have requested not to make their home address public, the name of the relevant area in which their home address is situated (or the country if their home address is situated outside the UK)
- each candidate's description (if any)

1. Rule 1, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 9 LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Inspecting the other candidates' nomination papers

Nomination forms and consent to nomination forms that have been delivered to the RO are open to inspection by anyone from the close of nominations until the day before the poll. Inspections take place during normal office hours, and anyone inspecting these forms can take a copy of them. ^[1]

Inspecting the home address form

Only certain people are entitled to inspect home address forms. ^[2] These people are:

- any (other) person standing nominated as a candidate in the same electoral area as you
- the election agent of any other person standing nominated as a candidate in the same electoral area as you - (or, if the candidate is acting as their own agent, any person nominated by them)
- the proposer or seconder of any other person standing nominated as a candidate in the same electoral area as you

Inspections of the home address form can take place during normal office hours from the close of nominations until the day before the poll. However, no one is permitted to take an extract from them or make a copy of them.

1. Rule 11, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 11A, LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Will the election be contested or uncontested?

After the close of nominations, the RO will establish whether or not there is a need to hold a poll in the parish or, if the parish is warded, in the parish wards.

If there are more candidates than seats after the deadline for withdrawals, there will be a poll. ^[1] If, however, after the deadline for withdrawals the number of validly nominated candidates is less than or equal to the number of seats to be filled in the electoral area, those candidates are declared to be elected. ^[2]

In this case, the RO will declare those candidates to be elected to the parish council as soon as possible and will give public notice of the names of those declared elected.

Even if the election is uncontested, elected candidates must still make a declaration as to their election spending. You can find more information in our guidance about submitting [spending returns](#) and [taking up office](#).

1. Rule 14(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 50(2), LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Death of a candidate

If the RO is notified of a candidate's death during the election campaign or even on polling day itself (but before the declaration of the result), the poll will be cancelled. ^[1]

The RO will in that case order a new election to fill the vacancy. The new polling day will be within 35 working days of the day fixed for the first election. ^[2]

Candidates already validly nominated do not have to be nominated a second time. ^[3]

Should a fellow candidate die during the campaign, the RO will provide you with further guidance.

If an already elected candidate dies after the declaration of the result, a by-election would be needed to fill the vacancy.

1. Rule 55(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Section 39, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
3. Section 39(5)(b), RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Postal votes

The following sections provide guidance on postal voting and the processes involved.

The guidance covers:

- who can apply to vote by post
- what is contained in postal ballot pack
- the opening of postal votes and who can attend
- the postal vote opening process
- the appointment of postal voting agents and their role
- your duty to maintain secrecy during postal vote opening sessions, the [code of conduct for campaigners in Great Britain](#) and restrictions for campaigners around postal vote handling.

Last updated: 7 November 2024

Who can apply to vote by post?

The following can apply to vote by post in local elections by submitting an application to their Electoral Registration Officer:

- A person aged 18 or over who is registered to vote
- A person aged 18 or over who or has applied to be registered to vote
- A person who has been appointed to vote as a proxy on behalf of someone else

The application must be received by the Electoral Registration Officer by 5pm, 11 working days before the poll. ^[1]

The Electoral Registration Officer has no discretion to extend the deadline for whatever reason.

1. Regulation 56 (1), Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Postal ballot packs

Postal ballot will be sent to electors from around two weeks before polling day. Electors who registered close to the registration deadline will be issued with their postal ballot packs once their names have been added to the final register update on the fifth working day before the poll.

Electors who applied for their postal vote close to the application deadline will be issued with their postal ballot packs once their application has been determined.

Electors will then mark their ballot paper, complete the postal voting statement by providing their signature and date of birth, and return them to the Returning Officer before the close of poll (i.e. 10pm on polling day).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What does the postal ballot pack contain?

Postal ballot packs contain the following:

- Envelope A is the envelope that the elector returns their ballot paper in. It is marked with the letter 'A' and the words 'ballot paper envelope'
- Envelope B is the envelope that the elector will use to return the ballot paper envelope and the postal voting statement. It is marked with the letter 'B' and the address of the Returning Officer
- The postal voting statement contains the elector's name, the number of the ballot paper issued to them, instructions on how to vote by post and space for the elector to sign and provide their date of birth
- The ballot paper

If the election is combined with another poll, the Returning Officer may have decided to combine the issue of postal votes. In that case, the postal ballot pack will also contain the ballot paper for the other electoral event(s).

Last updated: 1 December 2023

The opening of postal votes

Who can attend the opening of postal votes?

Candidates and postal voting agents are not entitled to attend the issue of postal votes.

The following people are entitled to attend the opening of returned postal votes:

- You
- agents you have appointed to attend openings on your behalf. ^[1] For details on how to appoint these agents see [Appointing your postal voting agent](#).

Duty to maintain secrecy during postal vote opening sessions

Ballot papers will be kept face down throughout a postal vote opening session. ^[2] Anyone attending an opening session has a duty to maintain secrecy and must not:

- obtain
- attempt to obtain
- communicate at any time to another person
 - any information relating to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of a ballot paper ^[3]
 - any information as to the official mark on a postal ballot paper before the close of poll ^[4]
- disclose how any particular ballot paper has been marked or pass on any such information gained from the session. ^[5]

It follows therefore that keeping a tally of how ballot papers have been marked is not allowed.

Anyone found guilty of breaching these requirements can face an unlimited fine, or may be imprisoned for up to six months. ^[6]

1. Regulation 69, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (RPR 2001)
2. Regulation 84(6), RPR 2001
3. Section 66 (3A) (a) RPR 2001
4. Section 66 (3A) (b) and (4)(a) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPR 1983)
5. Section 66 (4)(b) RPR 2001
6. Section 66 (6) RPA 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Appointing postal voting agents

You may appoint agents to attend postal vote openings.

Anyone can be appointed as a postal vote agent except for:

- the Returning Officer or a member of their staff ^[1]
- a partner or clerk of the Returning Officer or a member of their staff ^[2]
- anyone not entitled to vote at the election as a result of the report of an election court or a conviction for a corrupt or illegal practice under the Representation of the People Act 1983 ^[3]

A person may be appointed as a postal voting agent for more than one candidate. ^[4]

You can automatically act as one of these agents without the need of an official appointment. ^[5]

The Returning Officer will tell you the maximum number of postal voting you can appoint. ^[6] All candidates will be allowed to appoint exactly the same number.

The request to appoint postal voting agents must be made in writing to the Returning Officer. ^[7]

The request must contain the names and addresses of the people being appointed. ^[8] The Returning Officer will provide forms you can use for this, or you can use the Commission's postal voting agent appointment form.

Appointment forms for postal voting agents need to be submitted to the Returning Officer by the time fixed for the opening of postal votes they want to attend. ^[9]

The Returning Officer will give you at least 48 hours' notice before the scheduled start of each postal vote opening session. ^[10]

If an agent dies or becomes incapable of acting, you may appoint another agent in their place by submitting the relevant appointment form to the Returning Officer. ^[11] Any new appointment in these circumstances must be made without delay.

More information on what postal voting agents can and cannot do and what they can expect to see at postal vote opening sessions can be found in our guidance [what does a postal voting agent do](#) and [the stages of the postal vote opening process](#).

1. Section 99 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. s.99 RPA 1983
3. s.165 RPA 1983
4. Rule 27(2) Local Elections (Parish and Communities) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
5. Rule 27(9), (10), Schedule 2, LE(P&C)R 2006 and Regulations 68 and 69(7), Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (RPR 2001)
6. reg.69(1) RPR 2001 and Rule 27(4) Schedule 2 LE(P&C)R 2006
7. reg.69(2) RPR 2001 and Rule 27(5) Schedule 2 LE(P&C)R 2001
8. reg.69(2) RPR 2001 and Rule 27(5) Schedule 2 LE(P&C)R 2001
9. reg.69(2) RPR 2001
10. reg. 80 RPR 2001
11. reg.69(4) RPR 2001

Last updated: 8 November 2024

What does a postal voting agent do?

A postal voting agent is allowed to attend and observe postal vote opening sessions, which are run by the Returning Officer.

At each opening session the Returning Officer will decide whether or not the date of birth and signature provided by electors on their postal voting statements match the signature and date of birth previously provided and held on their records. If there is a mismatch, the postal vote will be rejected.

A postal voting agent has a right to observe, but not to interfere with this process. A postal voting agent can, however, object to the decision of a Returning Officer to reject a postal vote. ^[1] It will not affect the Returning Officer's decision, but the Returning Officer will record any objections by marking the postal voting statement with the words 'rejection objected to'.

Like your postal voting agents, both you and the person you may have appointed to attend on your behalf are also entitled to object to a rejection.

The Returning Officer will explain the postal vote opening process to you and may issue you with information on the procedures to be followed, including instructions on what you can and cannot do at the session. You should comply with any instructions that the Returning Officer has given.

1. Regulation 85A(4), Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

When are the postal votes opened and how will you know when an opening session is taking place?

It is likely that several opening sessions will take place before polling day, as well as on polling day itself.

The Returning Officer (RO) must:

- give candidates at least 48 hours' notice of when and where the sessions will take place. ^[1]
- set out how many postal voting agents will be allowed to attend each session.

There will be a final opening session after the polls have closed to open any postal votes handed in to polling stations. This session may be held at the count venue or in another location. The RO will advise you of the location for the final opening.

For more information on the process carried out at the opening of postal votes see our guidance on the [stages of the postal vote opening process](#).

1. Reg. 80, Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Stages of the postal vote opening process

The stages of the postal vote opening process can be summarised as follows:

Stage	Process
1	Postal votes are brought to the opening session in ballot boxes
2	The covering envelopes (envelope B) are taken out and counted
3	The total number of covering envelopes is recorded
4	Covering envelopes (envelope B) are divided between teams of opening staff
5	Staff open each covering envelope (envelope B) and remove the postal voting statement and the sealed ballot paper envelope (envelope A)
6	Staff check that the number on the postal voting statement matches the number on envelope A
7	If the numbers match, staff check that the elector has provided a signature and a date of birth (without checking that they are the elector's at this stage) Postal voting statements without a signature and date of birth cause the postal vote to be rejected
8	If the statement or ballot paper envelope is missing, or the numbers on the statement and ballot paper envelope do not match, the document(s) are set aside, recorded and stored in secure packets
9	The Returning Officer (RO) must verify the dates of birth and signatures provided on the statements
10	The RO must be satisfied that the dates of birth and signatures on the statements match those previously held on record
11	Following verification of the signatures and dates of birth, postal voting statements are removed from the tables
12	Staff open the ballot paper envelopes (envelope A) and remove the ballot paper

13	Staff check that the number on the back of the ballot paper matches the number on the ballot paper envelope (envelope A)
14	Valid ballot papers (not votes) are counted and the total number is recorded
15	All valid ballot papers are placed into ballot boxes and stored being delivered to the count venue for counting after the close of poll

Matching up postal voting statements with postal ballot papers

The RO will keep lists of any provisionally rejected postal ballot papers ^[1] which are:

- any postal ballot paper that has been returned without a postal voting statement
- any postal voting statement that are not returned with the ballot paper

The RO will check these lists regularly to ensure that if any mismatched documents can be matched up, those postal ballots they are re-introduced into the process.

1. Reg. 87(2) and (3), Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Invalid and rejected postal voting statements

Valid ballot papers are those ballot papers whose related postal voting statement has passed the signature and date of birth checks.

A very small number of voters do not need to sign their postal voting statement. These voters will have been granted a waiver because they are unable to sign or provide a consistent signature due to a disability or an inability to read or write. The postal voting statement sent to such electors will make this clear.

Invalid ballot papers are set aside and stored in secure packets.

Unless a waiver has been granted the Returning Officer (RO) will reject a postal voting statement if a signature and/or date of birth is missing, or if a signature and/or date of birth does not match that previously provided by the elector and held on record.

Rejected statements are attached to the relevant ballot paper or ballot paper envelope. They are marked as 'rejected' and shown to any agents present.

Agents can object to the RO's decision to reject any postal vote and, if they do, the words 'rejection objected to' are added to it. However, the RO's decision is final and the postal vote will remain rejected.

Other reasons for rejection include when an individual handing in a postal vote to the Returning Officer:

- does not fully complete the postal vote return form (incomplete)
- hands in postal votes on behalf of more than the permitted number of electors
- is a campaigner not permitted to handle postal votes
- does not complete the postal vote return form (left behind)

In these cases the postal vote will be rejected. You may see these rejected postal votes sealed up with a description of its contents written on each packet.

Last updated: 16 October 2024

Polling day

Polling day is the day on which polling stations will open and electors will visit them to cast their votes in person. It is also the last day that Returning Officers can accept returned postal votes. Polling day is sometimes called "election day".

The guidance covers:

- Polling station locations and the voting process
- Who can support you on polling day (including polling agents and tellers)
- Polling day dos and don'ts for you and your campaigners
- What happens after polls close

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Polling stations

You are entitled to observe proceedings inside polling stations. ^[1] Additionally, you may appoint agents to attend polling stations on your behalf. ^[2] For more information see our guidance on [how to appoint polling agents](#).

Finding the location of polling stations

The Returning Officer must give public notice of the location of polling stations by the sixth working day before the poll. ^[3] They will give a copy of this notice to all appointed election agents soon after this.

Polling station opening hours

Polling stations will be open on polling day between 7am and 10pm. Any voters waiting in a queue at their polling station at 10pm will be allowed to vote, even if they haven't yet been issued with a ballot paper.

1. Rule 30, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 27, LE(P&C)R 2001
3. Rule 21(3), LE(P&C)R 2001

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Who can vote at polling stations?

Most people choose to vote in person at their polling station. Any person on the polling station's electoral register can vote at the polling station in a local election, unless:

- they are a registered postal voter
- they are a registered proxy voter and their proxy has already voted for them or has applied to vote on their behalf by post
- they are not 18 years of age or older on polling day
- they are registered as an overseas elector

Electors will receive a poll card before the election telling them where and when they can vote. Electors do not need to take their poll card to the polling station in order to vote, unless they are registered anonymously due to a risk to their safety.

Photographic ID requirements

Electors voting in a polling station will be required to show photographic ID before they are issued with a ballot paper. The accepted forms of photographic ID are: [\[1\]](#)

- a passport issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, an EEA state, or a Commonwealth country (including an Irish Passport Card)
- a driving licence issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state
- a biometric immigration document
- an identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)
- a Ministry of Defence Form 90 (Defence Identity Card)
- a Blue Badge
- a national identity card issued by an EEA state
- an Older Person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government
- a Disabled Person's Bus Pass funded by the UK Government
- an Oyster 60+ Card funded by the UK Government
- a Freedom Pass
- a Scottish National Entitlement Card for the purpose of concessionary travel
- a 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- a Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- a Senior SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- a Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person's SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- a War Disablement SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- a 60+ SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- a Half Fare SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
- an Electoral Identity Card issued in Northern Ireland

Expired photographic ID documents can still be used as accepted photographic ID at the polling station, as long as the photograph is still a good likeness of the elector.

Where an elector does not have one of the accepted forms of photographic ID, they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate in a number of ways:

- online at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>
- in writing on a paper application form
- in person, if the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is offering this service at their office

Anonymous electors wishing to vote in person will be required to apply for an Anonymous Elector's Document. An application for an Anonymous Elector's document can only be made in writing, using a paper application form. Your local ERO will be able to provide the elector with this form on request. The application form can then be returned to the ERO by the elector by post, by hand or by emailing a scanned copy.

Candidates and agents should not handle completed applications for Voter Authority Certificates or Anonymous Elector's Documents. Further information is provided in our [code of conduct for campaigners in Great Britain](#).

Return of postal ballot packs

Registered postal voters cannot be issued with a ballot paper at the polling station, but they can return their completed postal ballot pack to their polling station on polling day. Alternatively, they may return their postal vote to any polling station in the ward or by hand to the Returning Officer (RO) at the elections office.

If the RO has issued postal ballot packs for more than one election on the same day, they will provide information to the electors to explain where their postal ballot packs can be returned to.

Postal ballot packs returned to polling stations must be handed to polling station staff and not placed in the ballot box.

Restrictions on the handling of postal votes

It is an offence for a political campaigner to handle completed ballot papers or postal ballot packs for voters who are not close family or someone they care for.

It also sets a limit for the number of postal votes that can be handed in to a polling station or handed to the RO and introduces a requirement the completion of a form when doing so.

A person can hand in postal votes on behalf of five other electors as well as their own.

A person who hands in a postal vote is required to complete a form containing information required by law. Failure to complete the form will result in the rejection of the postal votes that are handed in at a polling station or handed to the RO.

1. Schedule 1, Rule 37, Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 16 October 2024

What is the normal voting process?

The voting process can be summarised as follows.

Polling station staff will:

- ask voters for their name and address before making sure that they are eligible to vote by checking against the register of electors
- ask the voter to produce their photographic ID
- verify the photographic ID
- mark a straight line against the voter's entry on the register of electors
- call out the name and electoral number of the elector
- write the elector number on a list (the Corresponding Numbers List) next to the number of the ballot paper to be issued
- ensure that the ballot paper includes the official mark (e.g. a barcode or watermark)
- fold the ballot paper and then hand it unfolded to the elector so that they can see all of the options on the ballot paper

The elector will then:

- take the ballot paper to the polling booth, and
- mark the ballot paper in private, unless assisted by a companion or the Presiding Officer
- fold the marked ballot paper and show the ballot paper number and unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper to the Presiding Officer
- place the ballot paper into the ballot box and then leave the polling station

The polling station will have facilities for any voter who wishes to have their ID checked in private.

Where the voter does not bring ID or brings an incorrect form of ID, the voter will be able to return to the polling station with an acceptable form of photographic ID. Once an acceptable form of ID is shown, the voter will be issued with a ballot paper.

COMBINED POLLS

Where the election has been combined with another electoral event, polling station staff will be issuing the ballot papers for all electoral events that the voter is eligible to vote at.

This means that sometimes electors may not be receiving all of the ballot papers being issued in the polling station, as they may not be entitled to vote at every electoral event.

If polls have been combined, a single ballot box may be used for all contests, or separate ballot boxes may be used for each separate contest.

Accessibility in polling stations

The Returning Officer has a responsibility to ensure that voting is accessible. They must provide each polling station with a range of equipment as is reasonable for the purposes of enabling or making it easier for disabled voters to vote independently and in secret.

The Presiding Officer can assist anyone who is unable to mark the ballot paper themselves. ^[1] Alternatively, a voter may bring along someone they know and trust to assist them in marking their vote. ^[2] The person assisting the voter must be aged 18 or over, and can only assist a maximum of two voters at the election.

Any person attending the polling station to assist an elector must complete a declaration to the Presiding Officer before they aid the elector in the polling booth.

1. Rule 36, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 37, LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Collection of postal ballots from the polling station

The Returning Officer may arrange for the collection of any postal votes that electors have handed in at polling stations throughout polling day. The Presiding Officer must seal any returned postal votes in a packet before they are collected. Any of your agents present can add their own seal to the packet if they wish.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What happens after polls close?

Once all voters who have been issued with a ballot paper have voted, the ballot box is sealed by the Presiding Officer and polling agents can add their own seal if they wish. ^[1] After the Presiding Officer has completed all of the paperwork, the sealed ballot box is taken to the count venue.

1. Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Who can support you on polling day

On polling day, you may be supported by campaigners, polling agents, and you may also intend to use tellers.

This section sets out more information about

- polling agents and how to appoint them
- the role of tellers
- the requirement to maintain the secrecy of the ballot
- dos and don'ts for candidates and their supporters on polling day

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Polling agents

You may appoint people as agents to attend the polling stations. ^[1]

What does a polling agent do?

While a polling agent can observe the poll, they do not have to be present in a polling station for polling and related procedures to take place. Polling agents have a number of important roles to play on polling day. They can:

- be present in the polling station before the opening of the poll to watch the Presiding Officer show the empty ballot box before it is sealed
- detect personation and prevent people voting more than once in the election (other than as proxies). Personation is when an individual votes as someone else, whether that person is living, dead or fictitious.
- be present when the Presiding Officer marks a ballot paper at the request of an elector who needs assistance marking a ballot paper because of a disability or an inability to read or write
- report to you any improper activities and keep notes, if required, for giving evidence in court
- be present at the close of poll when the various packets of documents are sealed
- attach their seal to any packets made up by the Presiding Officer at the close of poll, including the ballot box. Polling agents' seals cannot be attached to ballot boxes at the start of, or during, the poll.

You can also do anything that a polling agent is entitled to do. ^[2]

1. Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
2. Rule 27(9) and (10) LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Appointing polling agents

Anyone can be appointed as a polling agent, provided that they are not:

- the Returning Officer (RO) or a member of their staff ^[1]
- a partner or clerk of the RO or a member of their staff ^[2]
- anyone not entitled to vote at the election as a result of the report of an election court or a conviction for a corrupt or illegal practice under the Representation of the People Act 1983 ^[3]

The same person may be appointed as a polling agent for more than one candidate. ^[4] You can also automatically act as one of those agents without the need of an official appointment. ^[5]

The number of agents who may be appointed to any particular polling station is limited to four, ^[6] or such greater number as the RO decides to allow. If more than that number are appointed, the RO will draw lots to determine those people who may attend. Only one polling agent for each candidate can be present in a polling station at any time, but a polling agent can be appointed to attend multiple polling stations. Your right to attend will remain unaffected by this.

Polling agents must be appointed by not later than 5 working days before the poll. ^[7] The request to appoint polling agents must be made in writing to the RO. ^[8] It must contain the names and addresses of the people being appointed. ^[9] The RO will provide forms you can use for this, or you can use the Commission's polling agent appointment form.

If an agent dies or becomes incapable of acting, you may appoint another agent in their place by submitting the relevant appointment form to the RO. ^[10] Any new appointment in these circumstances must be made without delay.

1. Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
2. s.99 RPA 1983
3. s.165 RPA 1983
4. Rule 27(2), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
5. Rule 27(9), (10) LR(P&C)R 2006
6. Rule 27(3), LE(P&C)R 2006
7. Rule 27(5), LE(P&C)R 2006
8. Rule 27(5) LE(P&C)R 2006
9. Rule 27(5) LE(P&C)R 2006
10. Rule 27(6) LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 8 November 2024

Tellers

Tellers are people who stand outside polling places and record the elector numbers of electors who have voted. They can then identify likely supporters who have not voted and encourage them to vote before the close of poll.

Tellers have no legal status and voters can refuse to give information to them. The Returning Officer (RO) is in charge of the conduct of the election. If they are concerned by the activities of tellers, they can ask tellers to comply with agreed behaviour or leave the polling place.

We have produced a factsheet of tellers' dos and don'ts, as well as more comprehensive guidance on the activities of tellers. The guidance aims to ensure that everyone knows precisely what is and is not acceptable and is designed to promote appropriate standards of conduct. The RO may also provide their own version of guidance to tellers.

Last updated: 13 September 2024

Maintaining the secrecy of the ballot

Anyone attending a polling station has a duty to maintain the secrecy of the ballot. ^[1] In particular, the following information must not be disclosed:

- the name or electoral number of who has or has not voted
- the number or other unique identifying mark on the ballot paper

Anyone attending a polling station must also not try to ascertain how a voter has voted or who they are about to vote for.

A polling agent can mark off on their copy of the register of electors those voters who have applied for a ballot paper. If the polling agent leaves the polling station during the hours of polling, they will need to leave the marked copy of the register in the polling station to ensure that secrecy requirements are not breached.

Any person found guilty of breaching the secrecy requirements can face an unlimited fine, or may be imprisoned for up to six months.

For more information read the polling station secrecy requirements.

1. Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

Last updated: 13 September 2024

Polling day dos and don'ts

You should:

- make sure that any tellers working for you follow our tellers' dos and don'ts and any guidance issued by the Returning Officer.
- make sure your campaigners follow the [Code of conduct for campaigners in Great Britain](#) which sets out what is, and is not, considered acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community.
- comply with requests by polling station staff or the Returning Officer about campaigning near polling stations. You should, however, be allowed to put your message to voters on polling day, including in public spaces outside polling places.
- make sure that any agents who are attending polling stations, postal vote opening sessions or the count understand the rules about the secrecy of the ballot. For more information, see our documents setting out the secrecy requirements for the poll, postal voting and the count.

You must not:

- campaign near polling stations in a way that could be seen by voters as aggressive or intimidating (for example, large groups of supporters carrying banners, or vehicles with loudspeakers or heavily branded with campaign material).
- breach the requirements on secrecy of the ballot. ^[1] This is an essential part of any modern democracy and breaches are taken seriously.
- seek to identify and publicise how votes have been marked on individual ballot papers, particularly if you (or your agents) attend postal vote opening sessions.
- publish exit polls or any other data based on information given by people about how they voted after they have cast their vote, including a postal vote, before the close of poll ^[2]

1. Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006
2. s.66, RPA 1983

Last updated: 20 December 2023

Verification and count

The following sections provide guidance on the process of verifying and counting the votes in the election. As a candidate you will be invited to attend and observe these processes.

It includes guidance on the following:

- when and where the count will take place
- who can attend the count
- what does a counting agent do?
- duty to maintain secrecy
- how votes are counted
- what if the vote on a ballot paper is not clear?
- doubtful ballot papers
- declaration of result

Last updated: 1 July 2024

When and where will count take place

The verification and count may take place immediately following the close of poll or the Returning Officer may

decide to verify and count during the following day(s).

The Returning Officer will notify you of the exact time and location and will request that you provide a list of who will be attending with you. See our guidance on [who can attend the count](#) and [appointing counting agents](#) for more information.

The Returning Officer will issue instructions or an invitation with any requirements they have in place for attendance which you should ensure are followed by yourself and anyone else attending with you.

Last updated: 1 August 2024

Who can attend the count?

You are entitled to observe the count. ^[1]

Additionally, you can invite one other person to attend, this person is in attendance as your guest, they have no powers or functions.

You may also appoint agents to attend the count on your behalf. ^[2]

What does a counting agent do?

Counting agents have a number of important roles to play at the count:

- they observe the counting process and make sure that it is accurate
- they can draw to the attention of count staff any doubtful ballot papers
- if they disagree with a decision by the Returning Officer to reject a ballot paper, they can ask the Returning Officer to mark on the ballot paper “rejection objected to”
- if a count is suspended for any reason, counting agents can add their seals when the Returning Officer seals the ballot boxes and envelopes

You can do anything a counting agent is allowed to do. ^[3]

1. Rule 44, Local Elections (Parish and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Rule 27 LE(P&C)R 2006
3. Rule 27(9) LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Appointing your counting agents

You may appoint other people as agents to attend the count. ^[1]

Anyone, apart from those listed below can be appointed as a counting agent:

- the Returning Officer or a member of their staff ^[2]
- a partner or clerk of the Returning Officer or a member of their staff ^[3]
- anyone not entitled to vote at the election as a result of the report of an election court or a conviction for a corrupt or illegal practice under the Representation of the People Act 1983 ^[4]

The same person may be appointed as a counting agent for more than one candidate. ^[5] You can also automatically act as one of those agents without the need of an official appointment. ^[6]

The Returning Officer will tell you the maximum number of counting agents you can appoint. All candidates will be allowed to appoint exactly the same number. ^[7]

At the count, unless there are special circumstances, the number of counting agents allowed for each candidate will not be less than the number obtained by dividing the number of counting assistants (i.e. those staff employed on the counting) by the number of candidates. ^[8]

The request to appoint these agents must be made in writing to the Returning Officer. ^[9] It must contain the names and addresses of the people being appointed. ^[10] The Returning Officer will provide forms you can use for this, or you can find counting agent appointment forms on the Commission's website.

The deadline for appointing counting agents is by no later than the fifth working day before the poll. ^[11]

If an agent dies or becomes incapable of acting, you may appoint another agent in their place by submitting the relevant appointment form to the Returning Officer. ^[12] Any new appointment in these circumstances must be made without delay.

For more information on what agents can and cannot do and what they can expect to see at the count, guidance can be found in [What does a counting agent do?](#)

1. Rule 27 Local Election (Parish and Communities) Rules 2006 (LE(P&C)R 2006)
2. Section 99 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
3. s.99 RPA 1983
4. s.165 RPA 1983
5. Rule 27(2) LE(P&C)R 2006
6. Rule 27(9) and (10), LE(P&C)R 2006
7. Rule 27(4) LE(P&C)R 2006
8. Rule 27(4) LE(P&C)R 2006
9. Rule 27(5) LE(P&C)R 2006
10. Rule 27(5) LE(P&C)R 2006
11. Rule 27(5) LE(P&C)R 2006
12. Rule 27(6) LE(P&C)R 2006

Last updated: 8 November 2024

Duty to maintain secrecy

Anyone attending the count has a duty to maintain the secrecy of the count. ^[1] In particular, anyone attending must not:

- ascertain or attempt to ascertain number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper
- communicate any information obtained at the count as to the candidate for whom any vote is given on any particular ballot paper

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 23 April 2024

How the votes will be counted

Stage 1 - Check in

The Returning Officer's (RO) staff will deliver the ballot boxes from the polling station to the count venue.

The RO's staff check in the ballot boxes as they arrive at the count venue.

Stage 2 - Verification

Ballot boxes are emptied onto tables and the empty boxes are shown to agents.

Staff count the ballot papers from each polling station.

Staff verify that the number of ballot papers matches the number of papers issued, as recorded on the Presiding Officers' ballot paper accounts.

The verified ballot papers are shown to counting agents face up.

The RO determines the reasons for any discrepancies and produces a final verified total.

The RO produces a statement of the verification. Agents can view or copy this statement if they wish.

Where the election has been combined with another electoral event, all ballot boxes will be verified before any results are declared.

There may be a single ballot box for all elections or separate boxes for each. In any case, ballot papers will be sorted into the separate contests.

Any ballot paper found in the 'wrong' ballot box is still valid and will be moved to the correct box during verification.

If the count does not take place immediately following verification, the verified boxes will be stored securely. Candidates and agents can attach their seals to boxes if they wish.

Stage 3 - Counting of the votes

Staff sort ballot papers by candidate. Where more than one candidate is to be elected, the RO may use different methods to establish the votes cast for each candidate, e.g. counting sheets or 'grass skirts'.

Staff count the number of votes cast for each candidate.

The RO will share the provisional result with you and the agents. You can ask the RO to recount the votes.

The RO can refuse to recount if they think the request is unreasonable.

Last updated: 2 October 2024

What if the vote on a ballot paper is not clear?

A ballot paper will not be counted if it:

- is unmarked
- does not contain the official mark
- contains votes for more candidates than the number of vacancies
- contains any mark or writing that can identify the voter
- does not indicate the voter's intention with certainty

The Returning Officer must draw up a statement showing the number of ballot papers rejected for these reasons.
[\[1\]](#)

The Returning Officer must mark the word "rejected" on any ballot paper that is rejected. They must add the words "rejection objected to" if a counting agent objects to the Returning Officer's decision.

If the voter's intention is clear on a ballot paper and the voter cannot be identified by any mark or writing, it will not be void if a vote is marked:

- elsewhere than in the proper place
- by other means than a cross (e.g. a tick)
- by more than one mark

Doubtful ballot papers

To assist Returning Officers, we have produced guidance on how to adjudicate votes on ballot papers that may appear doubtful. This guidance is contained in our booklet *Dealing with doubtful ballot papers*, we have produced doubtful ballot paper placemats for one-member, two-member and three-member wards that Returning Officers

may refer to at the count.

The examples given in these documents are based on the election rules.

Please note that while these documents provide guidance for Returning Officers, each individual Returning Officer has the ultimate responsibility for making a decision on individual ballot papers. Their decision to reject a particular ballot paper during the count or recount is final and can be reviewed only at an election petition after the declaration of the result. For more details see our guidance on [election petitions](#).

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 2 October 2024

Equality of votes

If two or more candidates have the same number of votes, and a further vote for either would see the candidate elected, the Returning Officer must decide between them by drawing lots.

The Returning Officer will decide the method of drawing lots.

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Declaration of result

The Returning Officer will declare elected the candidate (or candidates in the case of multi-seat vacancy) with the most votes.

The Returning Officer will give public notice of the result.

The Returning Officer will publish a notice with the name of each candidate elected, the number of votes for all candidates, and the number of rejected ballot papers.

Some Returning Officers allow candidates to make speeches after the result is declared. Please check arrangements with your Returning Officer.

What happens to the paperwork after the result is announced?

The Returning Officer must seal all election documentation, add a description of the contents to each packet and forward them on to the Electoral Registration Officer.

For more information on what happens after the declaration of the result see our guidance on [After the election](#).

Last updated: 5 August 2024

After the election

This section sets out what happens after the election, including actions that candidates must take.

This covers:

- Submitting your spending return and the associated deadlines
- Access and supply of election documents
- Election petitions

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Deadlines

After the election, the candidate should make sure that:

- all invoices are received no later than 14 calendar days after polling day ^[1]
- all invoices are paid no later than 21 calendar days after polling day ^[2]
- an election spending return reporting details of the candidate’s spending, together with a declaration confirming the return is complete and correct to the best of their knowledge and belief, is reported to the Returning Officer no later than 28 days after polling day. ^[3]

Please note that if the deadline for any of the above falls on a weekend or public holiday, the deadline will move to the next working day. ^[4] This is included within the following deadline calculations.

Polling day	Latest date to receive your invoices	Latest date to pay your invoices	Latest date to submit your return and declaration
1 May 2025	15 May 2025	22 May 2025	29 May 2025

You must still submit a return even if you haven’t spent any money. ^[5] This is called a ‘nil return’.

There are consequences for failure to submit spending returns and these are set out in [What happens if a spending return or declaration isn't submitted?](#)

Invoices received or paid outside of the deadlines

We call claims (invoices for your candidate spending) that are received by the election agent later than the deadline of 14 days, unpaid claims.

Unpaid claims cannot legally be paid unless a court order is gained granting leave to pay the claim. ^[6] It can be an offence to pay an unpaid claim without a court order. ^[7]

We call claims (invoices) that were submitted within the deadline of 14 days but remain unpaid later than the deadline of 21 days, disputed claims.

Disputed claims cannot legally be paid without a court order first being gained granting leave to pay the claim. ^[8]

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983
2. Sch. 4, para. 1 RPA 1983
3. Sch. 4, para. 3 RPA 1983
4. Section 119 RPA 1983
5. Sch. 4, para. 3 RPA 1983
6. Sch. 4, para. 1 & para. 6 RPA 1983
7. Sch. 4, para. 1(2) RPA 1983
8. Sch. 4, para. 1 & para. 6 RPA 1983

Last updated: 18 November 2024

Completing your return

The spending report is known as a 'return'.

This should include the following for each item of spending: ^[1]

- what the spending was for – for example, leaflets or advertising
- the name and address of the supplier
- the amount or value
- details of when it was incurred and paid
- details of any unpaid or disputed amounts
- details of any notional spending, and a declaration of its value
- invoices or receipts for any payment of £10 or over
- details of any personal expenses

There is more information on the details that you need to report in [Candidate spending](#).

The spending return must be accompanied by a declaration to verify the return. ^[2] It is your responsibility to fully and accurately report candidate spending.

It is a criminal offence to make a false declaration knowingly. ^[3]

Forms you will need:

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983
2. Sch. 4, para. 3 RPA 1983
3. Sch. 4, para. 5 RPA 1983

Last updated: 16 January 2024

What happens if a spending return or declaration isn't submitted?

Failure to submit a spending return or declaration by the deadline without an authorised excuse is a criminal offence. ^[1]

The Electoral Commission has a legal remit to secure compliance with the rules on candidates' spending and donations, but no sanctioning powers in respect of breaches. Suspected breaches of the rules should be referred to the police.

If a candidate has been elected but the spending return and/or declaration has not been submitted by the deadline they are barred from sitting or voting, and can be subject to a forfeit or fine of £50 per day if they do so. ^[2]

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983
2. Schedule 4, paragraph 4 RPA 1983,

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What happens if you don't follow the rules?

If you do not comply with the legal or regulatory requirements, you may be subject to criminal sanctions. If you win the election and someone succeeds in an election petition against your campaign activities or reporting, you could be barred from holding office.

You can find more information about the Commission's regulatory role at:

electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-enforcement-work

Last updated: 17 April 2024

Declaration and acceptance of office

If you are elected and do not make a declaration of acceptance of office at or before the first meeting after the election (or a later meeting if that is permitted by the parish council), your seat will become vacant and a further notice of casual vacancy will need to be published. ^[1]

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

What happens to the paperwork after the result is announced?

After the results are declared, all election documents are securely held by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for a period of 12 months. ^[1]

Most documents are available for public inspection. Please note that ballot papers are not open to public inspection.

Inspection and Supply of the marked register and lists of absent voters

The marked electoral registers and lists of absent voters show who has been issued with a ballot paper, who has returned their postal ballot paper, and who has had a proxy vote cast on their behalf.

You can inspect or obtain copies of the marked register of electors and lists of absent voters after the election if you make a request in writing to the Electoral Registration Officer. Contact details are available on our website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>.

You should be aware that you can only use the information obtained from these documents for research or electoral purposes.

The request for inspection must specify: ^[1]

- which documents are requested
 - the purposes for which the information in any document will be used
 - where the request is to inspect the marked register or lists, any reason why inspecting the full register or unmarked lists would not be sufficient to achieve that purpose
 - who will inspect the documents
 - the date on which you wish to inspect the documents
 - whether you would prefer to inspect the documents in a printed or data form
- Inspection is under supervision and will be free of charge. You won't be able to take copies, but may make handwritten notes.

The request for supply must specify: ^[1]

- which of the marked register or lists (or the relevant part of the register or lists) are requested
- whether a printed copy of the records or lists is requested or a copy in data form
- the purposes for which the marked register or lists will be used and why the supply or purchase of a copy of the full register or unmarked lists would not be sufficient to achieve that purpose

The requested document will be supplied for a fee of £10 plus £2 for printed and £1 for data versions per 1,000 entries. ^[1]

Note that after 12 months these documents, held by the Electoral Registration Officer, will be destroyed, unless a court order directs otherwise. ^[1]

Under current data protection legislation personal data processed for any purpose shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose. If you request and are supplied with any of the information listed above, once the purpose for collecting this data has passed, you need to consider if there is a reason for you to retain that data. If there is not you should ensure secure destruction of any data held.

Nomination papers cannot be inspected after the election. They can only be inspected until the day before the poll.

Inspection of other election documents

You can inspect other election documents, but you will not be allowed to make any notes or take copies of these documents. The only documents that cannot be inspected are:

- the ballot papers
- the corresponding number lists
- the certificates allowing polling station staff to vote at the polling station they are working at
- the Ballot Paper Refusal List (information from this list can only be disclosed to the relevant elector or proxy on request following their refusal) ^[1]

After 12 months all of the election documents that are held by the Electoral Registration Officer will be destroyed, unless a court order directs otherwise. ^[1]

Election spending returns ^[1]

The spending returns and declarations are held by the Returning Officer. Spending returns and declarations can be inspected by any person after they have been submitted. Copies can also be made for a fee of 20p per side.

Spending returns and declarations are kept for one year and you can request to have them returned to you at the end of this period. If you do not want them back, they may be destroyed.

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983
2. Regulation 118(2) Representation of the People Regulations 2001 (RPR 2001)
3. Reg. 117(3) RPR 2001
4. Reg. 120(2) RPR 2001
5. Rule 54 LE(P&C)R 2006
6. Section 32 Voter Identification Regulations 2022
7. Rule 54 LE(P&C)R 2006
8. Schedule 4, paragraph 8 Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 1 December 2023

Election petitions

The outcome of a parish council election can be challenged through an election petition.

Lodging an election petition

Only certain people can lodge an election petition, and only under specific circumstances.

An election petition can be presented by: ^[1]

- someone claiming to have been a candidate at the election, or
- at least four electors (not anonymously registered electors) who had a right to vote at the election (although they need not have voted)

The allowable grounds for a petition are that: ^[2]

- the successful candidate was disqualified at the time of the election
- the successful candidate was not duly elected
- the election was invalidated by corrupt or illegal practices
- the election was invalidated because of general corruption or the employment of a corrupt canvasser/ agent

Normally, a petition must be presented within 21 calendar days after the date of the election. ^[3] However, if the petition complains of corrupt or illegal practices involving the payment of money or other reward, or an illegal practice relating to election spending, further time may be allowed.

For any questions relating to election petitions, including to confirm the deadlines for lodging an election petition, you should contact the Election Petitions Office:

The Election Petitions Office
Room E105
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London
WC2A 2LL

Email: Election_Petitions@justice.gov.uk

Phone: 0207 947 6877

Fax: 0870 324 0024

There are costs attached to an election petition. If you are considering lodging an election petition, we strongly recommend that you take independent legal advice.

1. S.66 Representation of the People Act 1983
2. s.127, s.164, s.165 RPA 1983,
3. s.129 RPA 1983

Last updated: 9 January 2024

Resources for Candidates at Parish council elections in England

What you need to know before you stand as a candidate

Campaigning

Nominations

Postal votes

Polling Day

Verification and count

After the election

Last updated: 13 September 2024