

Parish and community council elections in England and Wales

Guidance for candidates

Part 4 of 6 – The campaign

This document applies to parish and community council elections only. It does not apply to district, borough, county, county borough and unitary authority elections, or mayoral elections. Our guidance and resources for all local elections in England and Wales can be accessed from our website at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents.

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Essential information

This section of the document contains our guidance on campaigning at parish council elections in England and community council elections in Wales. Supplementary information, which may only be relevant to some candidates, is provided at the back of this document. You can also view this supplementary guidance by clicking on the links within this document or by clicking on the chapter heading on the contents page.

We are here to help, so please contact your local Commission team if you have any questions. See our [Overview document](#) for contact details.

In this document, we use 'you' to refer to the candidate. We use 'must' to refer to a specific legal requirement and 'should' for recommended practice.

Deadlines mentioned in this document are generic. We have published a [generic election timetable on our website](#). Once an election has been called, you will be able to obtain a copy of the specific timetable for that election from the Returning Officer.

Campaigning dos and don'ts

When can you start campaigning?

1.1 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.

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1.2 Election spending limits apply from the date a person officially becomes a candidate. For more information on election spending, please see [Part 3: Spending and donations](#).

When does a person officially become a candidate?

1.3 The last date for publishing the notice of election is the 25th working day before the poll. This is the earliest you can officially become a candidate.

1.4 You will officially become a candidate on the 25th working day before the poll 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).

1.5 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 the earlier.

1.6 Once you have officially become a candidate, you are entitled to a copy of the register of electors and absent voters' lists for the parish/community area or, if your parish/community is warded, for the ward you are standing in. You can also use publicly funded rooms and schools for public meetings (see paragraph **1.18** below).

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. You can find out more about who can register and application forms at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.
- Help voters with information about postal and proxy voting – you can find application forms and information at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. The deadline for applying for a postal vote for the elections is 5pm on the 11th working day before the poll. The deadline for applying for a proxy

vote for the elections is 5pm on the sixth working day before the poll.

During the campaign, you should...

- If you develop your own application forms, make sure they include all the required information, or 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. You should use our absent voting application forms on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk as a guide.
- Make sure your supporters follow [our code of conduct on applications to vote by post or proxy and postal votes](#) – this will help them to avoid situations where their honesty or integrity could be questioned.
- 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 document [Part 2a: Standing as an independent candidate](#) and [Part 2b: Standing as a party candidate](#).
- 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 and when.
- Check that your systems for recording spending and donations are working. For more information on donations and election spending see [Part 3: Spending and donations](#).

During the campaign, you must not...

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- Pay canvassers. Canvassing means trying to persuade an elector to vote for or against a particular candidate or party.

1.7 More information on election offences and how to report these can be found in the supplementary information section at the end of this document (from paragraph **1.36**).

1.8 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 paragraph **1.59** for more information.

Use of the electoral register

1.9 Once you officially become a candidate as explained in paragraph **1.3**, you are entitled to receive a free copy of the full electoral register and the lists of people voting by post or proxy ('the absent voters' lists') for the parish/community area or, if your parish/community is warded, for the ward that you are contesting.

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

1.10 The version you will receive will be the current one at the time of your application. You can also request the list of newly registered electors when it is published five working days before the poll.

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

1.12 You can use them to:

- complete your nomination form
- help you campaign
- check that donations and loans from individuals are permissible

Any person found breaching the restrictions on use of the electoral register could face a fine of up to £5,000.

1.13 You must not release any details that appear only in the full register and do not appear in the edited version of the register which is available for general sale. You must not:

- use the full register and absent voters' lists for any other purpose not listed above, or
- pass copies on to anyone outside your campaign (except for certain data processing companies)

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

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

1.15 You must ask for your copy of the register and absent voters' lists from the Electoral Registration Officer. You can find their contact details on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

1.16 The request must be made in writing and we have made a [register request form](#) and an [absent voters' lists request form](#) available for this purpose on our website.

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

Using schools and rooms for public meetings

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

1.19 The Electoral Registration Officer keeps a list of all suitable meeting rooms in their area and their availability, and will make this available for candidates and agents to inspect from the day the notice of election is published until the day before polling day. Contact details can be found on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

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

1.21 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.

Candidates' right to use rooms does not include hours during which a school is used for educational purposes. Equally, any prior letting of a meeting room must take precedence.

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Campaign publicity dos and don'ts

1.22 You must:

- Use imprints on all your campaign material, including websites. See paragraph **1.25** below for more information.
- Comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners – 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.

1.23 You should:

- Consider how to make your campaign accessible to people who are visually impaired, have learning difficulties or low literacy skills, or whose first language isn't English or, in Wales, Welsh. You may want to make contact with disability groups in your local area for advice.

1.24 You must not:

- Produce material that looks like the poll cards sent to voters by the Returning Officer.
- Pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).

Using imprints

What is an imprint?

1.25 An imprint must, by law, be added to campaign material to show who is responsible for its production. It helps to ensure that the campaign is transparent.

What do you need to include?

1.26 On printed material, such as leaflets and posters, you must include the name and address of:

- the printer
- the promoter
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

1.27 The promoter is the person who has authorised the material to be printed. If the promoter is acting on behalf of a group or organisation, the group or organisation's name and address must also be included.

1.28 You can use either home or office addresses.

1.29 If you are putting an advert in a newspaper, your advert does not need to include the printer's details.

Example of an imprint

1.30 A standard imprint for independent candidates should look like this:

Printed by [printer's name and address].

Promoted by [agent's name] of [agent's address], on behalf of [candidate's name] of [candidate's address].

1.31 If the candidate is also the promoter of the material, the 'on behalf of' part of the imprint is not required.

In all cases, you must make sure that the imprint lists all the promoters and organisations involved.

Where do you put the imprint?

1.32 If your material is single-sided – such as a window poster – you must put the imprint on the face of the document. If it is multi-sided, you must put it on the first or last page.

Websites and other electronic material

1.33 You should also put an imprint on electronic material, such as websites and emails. The imprint should include the name and address of the promoter and the organisation on whose behalf it has been produced.

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Polling day dos and don'ts

1.34 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. Tellers are volunteers for candidates who stand outside polling stations and record the elector numbers of electors who have voted.
- 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](#). For candidates in Wales, we have also produced the secrecy requirements for [postal vote openings](#), [the poll](#) and the [count](#) bi-lingually in English and Welsh.
- Comply with all requests by polling station staff or the Returning Officer about campaigning near polling stations.

Tellers are volunteers for candidates who stand outside polling stations and record the elector numbers of electors who have voted.

1.35 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. This is an essential part of any modern democracy and breaches are taken seriously. You can find details in our documents that set out the secrecy requirements for:
 - the poll: [English version](#) – [English and Welsh version](#)
 - postal voting: [English version](#) – [English and Welsh version](#)
 - the count: [English version](#) – [English and Welsh version](#)

In particular, if you (or your agents) are attending postal vote opening sessions before the close of poll, you must

- not seek to identify and publicise how votes have been marked on individual ballot papers.
- Before the close of poll, publish exit polls or any other poll which gives the impression that it is based on information given by people after they have voted.

Supplementary information

List of offences

1.36 You should be aware of a number of electoral and non-electoral offences and should seek your own legal advice where necessary. The following is a list that provides a summary of the electoral offences.

Bribery

1.37 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

1.38 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.

Undue influence

1.39 A person is guilty of undue influence if they directly or indirectly make use of or threaten to make use of force, violence or restraint, or inflict or threaten to inflict injury, damage or harm in order to induce or compel that person to vote or refrain from voting.

1.40 A person may also be guilty of undue influence if they impede or prevent any voter from freely exercising their right to vote – even where the attempt is unsuccessful.

We do not regulate any of these offences.

For details of how to report any allegations of electoral malpractice see paragraph 1.54.

1.41 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.

Personation

1.42 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.

1.43 Aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the offence of personation is also an offence.

False statements

About a candidate's personal character or conduct

1.44 It is an illegal practice 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.

1.45 False statements that are not about another candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander.

1.46 It is also an illegal practice to make a false statement of a candidate's withdrawal.

In nomination papers

1.47 It is an offence to knowingly provide a false statement on a nomination paper. 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

1.48 It is an offence to supply false information on a registration, postal vote or proxy vote application form. False information includes a false signature.

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False application to vote by post or by proxy

1.49 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

1.50 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

1.51 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

1.52 Certain offences relate specifically to election campaign publicity material. Election campaign publicity material must contain an imprint, not resemble a poll card and not contain a false statement as to the personal character or conduct of another candidate.

We do not 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

1.53 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.

Reporting allegations of electoral malpractice

1.54 If you have reason to believe that an election-related crime has been committed, you should first raise the matter with the Electoral Registration Officer or the Returning Officer in your area.

1.55 If appropriate, the matter will be investigated by the police. The Electoral Registration Officer or Returning Officer may refer it to the police or provide you with the details of the police contact for your area so that you can report your allegation. Every police force has designated a Single Point of Contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election matters.

1.56 If you want the police to formally investigate your concerns you should be prepared to give them a statement and substantiate your allegation.

1.57 You can contact the Electoral Registration Officer or Returning Officer for your area through the elections office at your local authority. Contact details are available from our About my vote website www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

1.58 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 at the following link: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement/making-allegations.

What if you have made a mistake?

1.59 If you have acted in contravention of the election rules, you can apply for relief from the penalties for any offence.

1.60 You should always seek legal advice if considering applying for relief.

1.61 For more information:

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- visit www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/HMCSCourtFinder/FormFinder.do, and enter the form number LOC002

or

- contact the Election Petitions Office at the Royal Courts of Justice at:

Supreme Court Cost Office

The Election Petitions Office
Room E13
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London WC2A 2LL

Tel: 0207 073 4752 or 020 7947 7529