

WHY SHOULD I VOTE?

The ability to vote freely and without pressure is fundamental to democracy. However, increasing numbers of people in the UK are choosing not to exercise this basic democratic right. Whilst they are perfectly within their rights to do so, we would suggest that there are many positive reasons why people should ensure that they are on the electoral register – and therefore have the opportunity to vote – and then actually do so when elections are called.

How do I get on the Electoral Register?

- The main way should be through your local council. Councils will regularly send out details of how to register and forms to complete. More information can be found by calling your council or looking on their website.
- Alternatively, DirectGov have a tool that will direct you to your local council's voter registration page - <http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=364&LGIL=0>
- More information, along with the relevant form can be found at - <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk>

Why should I get on the Electoral Register?

- Firstly, because if you are over 18... you're entitled to!
- It sends out a powerful message to political parties and other representatives.
- Being on the electoral register gives me far more political 'power'. Electoral candidates and politicians will probably take much greater interest in what you say, what you want and what your views are on issues if they know that you're a potential voter! After all, they need you to vote for them!
- If you can persuade others in your community to do likewise and get on the electoral register, you can collectively become quite a powerful force.
- It sets a good example to those around you
- You can only benefit by doing so

Remember:

1. Being on the electoral register doesn't mean you have to vote. It just means you are able to do so if you want.
2. The electoral register is not a census or a means of checking up on you. It is exactly what it says it is – a register of potential voters.

Why should I vote?

- Again, because if you are over 18 and you're entitled to!
- It's a massive opportunity to decide which policies will be put into place and which type of government or council.
- Elections don't occur that often. Why waste the opportunity?
- Many people in the world don't have democracy as a ruling, political system. We are therefore privileged that we can decide ourselves who should have such power.
- Many people in this country and throughout the world have fought and given their lives so that democracy can prevail. Don't we owe them something?

- If you don't vote, can you honestly complain about the politicians that get elected and the decisions that they make?
- People may be elected that you don't wish to represent you if you don't vote and encourage others to do so as well.
- The person that you have voted for relies on your support. You therefore have entered into a form of 'agreement' with them. People who are elected have a responsibility to represent everyone in their ward/constituency, even those who haven't voted for them or those that haven't voted at all. Nevertheless, the politicians will be relying on your support in the future. They will often say this when talking to you during the lead up to elections. The fact that you have voted perhaps gives you a little more theoretical power and influence?
- The decision as to whether you vote may have an impact on others, such as family or friends. If you decide not to do so, do you want to be at least partly responsible if they follow your example and don't vote?
- If nobody voted, no-one would be elected. What sort of system would we have then?
- It's easy and takes no time at all!

How do I vote? And where?

Below is some general information on the different ways of voting from the *About My Vote* website:

Voting in Person

Most people in the UK choose to cast their vote in person at a local polling station. Voting at a polling station is very straightforward and there is always a member of staff available to help if you're not sure what to do.

If you are on the electoral register, you will receive a poll card before the election telling you where and when to vote. The polling station is often a school or local hall near where you live. The poll card is for your information only, and you do not need to take it to the polling station in order to vote.

The following steps explain how to vote at your polling station on election day:

1. On election day, go to your local polling station. Polling station opening hours are 7am - 10pm. If you are disabled and need assistance getting to the polling station, contact your electoral registration office to find out what help is available. You can also ask to have a companion with you when you vote, or staff in the polling station may be able to help you.
2. Tell the staff inside the polling station your name and address so they can check that you are on the electoral register. You can show them your poll card, but you do not need it to vote.
3. The staff at the polling station will give you a ballot paper listing the parties and candidates you can vote for. It will be stamped with an official mark. You may be given more than one ballot paper if there is more than one election on the same day. If you have a visual impairment, you can ask for a special voting device that allows you to vote on your own in secret.
4. Take your ballot paper into a polling booth so that no one can see how you vote. Read the ballot paper carefully, it will tell you how to cast your vote. Do not write anything else on the paper or your vote may not be counted.
5. Finally, when you have marked your vote, fold the ballot paper in half and put it in the ballot box. Do not let anyone see your vote. If you are not clear on what to do, ask the staff at the polling station to help you.

6. Supporters of the candidates - called tellers- may ask for your name on your way in and out of the polling station. This is normal and you do not have to give them any details if you don't want to.

Voting by post

Voting by post is an easy and convenient way of voting if you are unable to get to the polling station. To vote by post, you need to be on the electoral register. Then you need to fill in a postal vote application form.

You need to sign your application form personally because the electoral registration office needs a copy of your signature for voting security reasons. We know it's slightly less convenient than submitting it online, but it helps to ensure the security of your vote and is used to tackle electoral fraud.

Who can apply for a postal vote?

Anyone aged 18 or over who is on the electoral register can apply for a postal vote. You do not need a reason to vote by post. (This does not apply in Northern Ireland - see the Electoral Office website for more information).

Where can I get my postal vote sent?

A postal vote can be sent to your home address or to any other address that you give. Postal votes can be sent overseas, but you need to consider whether there will be enough time to receive and return your ballot paper by election day.

When will I receive my ballot papers?

Postal votes are usually sent out about a week before election day. Once you've got it, mark your vote on the ballot paper and make sure you send it back so that it arrives by close of poll (which is 10pm on election day). If it arrives later than this your vote won't be counted.

When you get your postal voting papers:

- Put them somewhere safe
- Don't let anyone else handle them
- Make sure they are not left where someone else can pick them up
- When you want to vote:
 - Complete your ballot paper in secret, on your own
 - Don't let anyone else vote for you
 - Don't let anyone else see your vote
 - Don't give the ballot paper to anyone else
 - Put the ballot paper in the envelope and seal it up yourself
 - Complete and sign the postal voting statement
 - Put the postal voting statement and the envelope containing your ballot paper into the larger envelope and seal it.
- When you return your postal vote:
 - Take it to the post box yourself, if you can
 - If you can't do that, either give it to somebody you know and trust to post it for you, or ring your local electoral registration office, to ask if they can collect it from you
 - Don't hand it to a candidate or party worker unless no other way is practical
 - Don't leave it where someone else can pick it up
 - Remember that this is your vote - so keep it to yourself

If anyone tries to help you against your will, or force you to give them your postal vote, you should contact the police. If you have any other queries, ring your local electoral registration office – you can get their contact details on this site by entering your postcode.

Voting by proxy

Voting by proxy is a convenient way of voting if you are unable to get to the polling station. By proxy just means that you appoint someone you trust to vote on your behalf. This section tells you how voting by proxy works.

Voting by proxy can be useful if you fall ill and are unable to get to the polling station on election day, or if you are abroad during an election. It can be particularly useful if you are overseas in a country too far away to send back a postal vote in time for the election (for instance, if you are in the Armed Forces and deployed overseas).

To vote by proxy, you'll need to fill in an application form. You'll need to print the form and complete it, then sign it, and send it back to your local electoral registration office.

You need to sign your application form personally because the electoral registration office needs a copy of your signature for voting security reasons. We know it's slightly less convenient than submitting it online, but it helps to ensure the security of your vote and is used to tackle electoral fraud.

Can I apply for a proxy vote?

You can apply for a proxy vote as long as you are on the electoral register. When you apply for a proxy vote you have to provide a reason. You can apply for a proxy vote if:

- You are unable to go to the polling station for one particular election, for example, if you are away on holiday
- You have a physical condition that means you cannot go to the polling station on election day
- Your employment means that you cannot go to the polling station on election day
- Your attendance on an educational course means that you cannot go to the polling station on election day
- You are a British citizen living overseas
- You are a crown servant or a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces

Except if you are registered blind, you may have to get someone to support your application to confirm that your reason for applying to vote by proxy is valid. Read the notes that accompany the application form to find out if you need to get someone to support your application and who can do it.

When can I apply to vote by proxy?

The deadline for applying to vote by proxy is normally 6 working days before an election. However, if you have a medical emergency 6 days before election day or after, you can apply to vote by emergency proxy if the emergency means that you cannot go to the polling station in person.

Who can vote on my behalf?

Anyone can be your proxy as long as they are eligible to vote in that type of election and they are willing to vote on your behalf.

You cannot be a proxy for more than two people at any one election, unless they are a close relative.