

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 and your election agent are entitled to observe proceedings inside polling stations. ^[1] Additionally, you may appoint agents to attend polling stations on your behalf. ^[2] For more details please see our guidance on [appointing 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. Schedule 2, Rule 30, Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LEPAR 2006)
2. Schedule 2, Rule 27, LEPAR 2006
3. Schedule 2, Rule 21(3)(a), LEPAR 2006

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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 or a British Overseas Territory
- (for elections taking place on or before 30 April 2025) a passport issued by an EEA state, or a Commonwealth country (including an Irish Passport Card)
- (for elections taking place on or after 1 May 2025) a passport or passport card issued by an EEA state, or a country whose citizens are Commonwealth citizens
- a driving licence issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state
- a biometric immigration document [2]
- an identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)
- a Ministry of Defence Form 90 (Defence Identity Card)
- (for elections taking place on or after 1 May 2025) a Ministry of Defence Form 100 (HM Armed Forces Veteran 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
- (for elections taking place on or before 30 April 2025) a Scottish National Entitlement Card issued in Scotland for the purposes of concessionary travel
- (for elections taking place on or after 1 May 2025) a National Entitlement Card issued by a local authority in Scotland
- 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
2. An eVisa is a biometric residence document in digital form. Currently no other form of photographic ID can be presented in digital format.

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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. Schedule 2, Rule 36(1), Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LEPAR 2006)
2. Schedule 2, Rule 37, LEPAR 2006

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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.

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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. Schedule 2, Rule 43(1), Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

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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

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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 or your election agent 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 and your election agent can also do anything that a polling agent is entitled to do. [\[2\]](#)

1. Schedule 2, Rule 27, Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LEPAR 2006)
2. Schedule 2, Rule 27(10), LEPAR 2006

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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. [\[4\]](#) Both you and your election agent 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 forms.

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. Section 99 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. s.99 RPA 1983
3. s.165 RPA 1983
4. Schedule 2, Rule 27(2), Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (LEPAR 2006)
5. Schedule 2, Rule 27(9), LEPAR 2006
6. Schedule 2, Rule 27(3), LEPAR 2006
7. Schedule 2, Rule 27(5), LEPAR 2006
8. Schedule 2, Rule 27(5), LEPAR 2006
9. Schedule 2, Rule 27(5), LEPAR 2006
10. s.76(4), RPA 1983

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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 is in charge of the conduct of the election in their voting area. 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 guidance to tellers.

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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 ballot papers. If the polling agent leaves the polling station during the hours of polling, they must 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.

1. s.66, Representation of the People Act 1983

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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 (RO).
- 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.
- make sure you follow any additional security advice provided by the RO
- comply with requests by polling station staff or the RO 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. s.66, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. s66A, RPA 1983

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