



## ● Every Vote Counts!

**Find out how you can vote and campaign!**

### How to get involved



There are lots of ways that you can get involved in politics and have a say in how things are run.

This could be voting to choose politicians, going to see your MP, starting a campaign, or signing a petition.

Everyone can get involved.

## ● Voting



Voting is how we choose the people who will become politicians. Their job is to represent us when decisions are made about our local community, our country and the European Union.



If you don't vote, you are letting other people choose who will represent you and make decisions about issues that affect you.

## ● Register to vote



To be able to vote you have to be over 18 and on the electoral register. The electoral register is a list of all the names and addresses of people in the area who can vote.



You can check to see if you are on the electoral register by contacting your local council.

You can phone them, write to them or email them.



If you are not already registered to vote you can tell your council you want to be on the register and they will tell you what to do next. This may mean filling in a form or registering online



Once you are on the electoral register you can vote at the next election.

## ● Vote in person



Before an election the council will send you a polling card. Polling is another name for voting. This card will tell you when the election is and where you can vote.



On the day of the election you can go to the polling station, which is the name for the place people vote. You can usually vote up until 9pm.



You can take your polling card with you and give it to the people there. If you do not have your polling card you can tell the people at the polling station your name and address.



You will then be given a ballot paper. A ballot paper is a list of names of the people you can vote for.

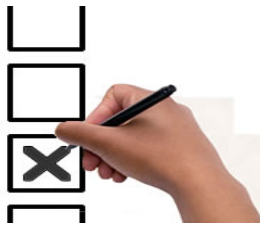
Sometimes more than one election will be held on the same day.



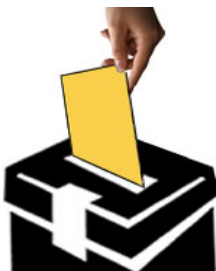
The people at the polling station will help you by showing you what to do if you ask them to.



Once you have your ballot paper you go to one of the polling booths. A polling booth is a place where you can vote in private.



To vote you put a cross in the box on the ballot paper next to the name of the person you want to vote for.



Then you fold up your ballot paper and put it in the ballot box.

A ballot box is a locked box that holds all the marked ballot papers.



When the voting is finished, the ballot boxes are taken to a place where the votes are counted. There are people there to make sure this is done fairly.



The person with the most votes wins the election.

The person who wins the election then becomes your councillor, MP or MEP, depending on what type of election it is.



That person is your representative even if you did not vote for them.

## ● **Postal vote**



If you do not want to go to the polling station to vote in person, you can ask to make a postal vote.



A postal vote means that you are sent a ballot paper to fill in at home.

You choose who you want to vote for, put a cross next to their name on the ballot paper and then send the ballot paper back to the council by post.



You have to ask for a postal vote before an election takes place.

You can ask your council to send you postal votes for all elections you can vote in.

## ● Proxy vote



A proxy vote means that you can let someone else vote for you.



You can ask the council for a proxy vote if you cannot go to the polling station yourself. This might be because you are in hospital or at work.



If the council agree you can ask someone to vote for you.

You have to trust the person to vote for who **you** choose.



The person you choose to vote for you is given a proxy polling card.

They go to the polling station and vote for you.

## ● Referendum



A referendum is also a vote.

In a referendum you are asked to give an answer to a question rather than to vote for a person.



A referendum is held sometimes to help the government make a very important decision. They ask you to vote yes or no to a question.

The last referendum was in 1975. People were asked if they wanted the UK to remain in the European Community. More people voted 'Yes'.



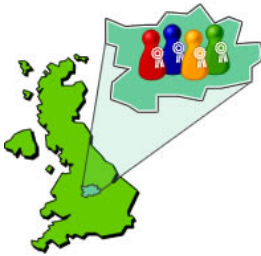
A referendum is carried out in the same way as an election except on the ballot paper you put a cross by the answer you agree with.

## ● Your politicians



Everybody should know which politicians represent them. It is important to know the names and contact details of all of these people. Once you know who represents you and what they are responsible for, you can contact them about things that are important to you.

## ● Your councillors - what they do



Your councillors are responsible for local services. This means that they are responsible for most things that affect your local area.



The things you may want to contact them about include social services, housing, your streets and roads, town planning, recycling, libraries, leisure centres, local police and fire services.



If you live in London you will also have politicians called Members of the London Assembly and one called the Mayor of London. They are responsible for things that affect the whole of the London area.





You may have more than one councillor and you can find out who they are by visiting [www.councillor.gov.uk](http://www.councillor.gov.uk) or by phoning or visiting your local council.

## ● Your MP - what they do



MPs are responsible for things that affect the whole country. They represent your area when decisions are made.



The things that you may want to contact them about include the environment, health, benefits and education. It could be about changing the law. It could also be things like terrorism and war.



You can find out who your MP is by visiting [www.findyourmp.parliament.uk](http://www.findyourmp.parliament.uk) or by phoning the House of Commons.

## ● Your MEP - what they do



MEPs are responsible for things that affect the European Union.

They represent your area when decisions are made.



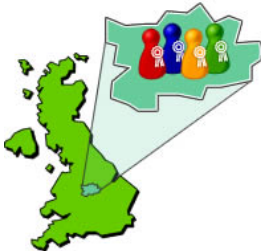




You may want to contact them about things like the environment, human rights, work, farming, fishing and trade.

You can find out who your MEPs are by visiting [www.europarl.org.uk](http://www.europarl.org.uk)

## ● Your local politicians - what you can do



You can vote to choose your councillors at a local election.



If you live in London you can also vote for the Mayor of London and some Members of the London Assembly (MLAs)



You can ask to meet your local councillor, or write or email them about issues that affect you.

They usually publish a plan telling you what they want to do about services in your area. You can ask to get a copy of this plan.



You have the right to go to some council meetings to find out how decisions are made.

You can ask questions at some council meetings.



As a local person you can tell the council what you think about services. This might be about council housing, social services, or rubbish collection.

## ● Your MP - what you can do



Your MP represents you when it comes to making decisions about things that affect the whole country.

You can vote to choose your MP at a General Election.



You can ask to meet your MP to tell them about issues that affect you.

You can write to them or email them about things that are important to you.



You can apply for tickets to sit in the public gallery at the House of Commons to find out how decisions are made.



You could ask your MP to give their support to a campaign you are involved in.

It is up to them if they agree to support you or not.

## ● Your MEPs - what you can do



Your MEPs represent you when it comes to making decisions about the European Union.

You can ask to meet your MEPs to tell them about issues that affect you, although they spend a lot of time in other countries and cover a much larger area than a MP, so this might be difficult.



You can write to them or email them about things that are important to you that are discussed in the European Parliament.



You can join up with groups who campaign about things like human rights, trade and fishing.

## ● Political parties - what you can do



You can find out about what some political parties think about things by looking at their website. You can find out about how to contact these and other political parties by visiting

[www.parliament.uk/useful/politicalparties.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/useful/politicalparties.cfm)



You can find out if they have an office or a club in your area.

You may be able to go along and talk to someone from that political party about their ideas.



Most political parties have a manifesto.

A manifesto is often written down and tells people what the political parties main ideas are.

You can ask for a copy of this.



You can find out what people in some political parties are saying by reading the papers, listening to the radio, or watching the news and political programmes on the television.

## ● Elections - Local, General and European

An election is when you can vote for someone to become a politician and represent you when decisions are made.



A local election is when you can vote for your local politicians, called councillors. They make decisions about your local area and local services. In London you also have a Mayor and Members of the London Assembly



A general election is when you can vote for who you want to become your Member of Parliament (MP). MPs work in Parliament and make decisions that can affect the whole country.



A European election is when you can vote for who you want to become your Member of the European Parliament (MEPs), who work in the European Union.

## ● Elections – What you need to know

If you are going to vote in an election it will help you to find out about the different people, or candidates, you can vote for.



Each candidate, is different and they may have very different ideas about things.



It is important for **you** to choose who **you** want to vote for.



Knowing what a candidate plans to do can help you decide if you want to vote for them or not.

## ● Elections - what you can do



You can find out about all the candidates who are in the election by contacting the council.

You can look at the leaflets that candidates send out when there is an election coming up



You can find out if candidates have a website and use this to see what they, or their political party, say about the election.



You might be able to listen to candidates before the election by going to meetings called 'hustings'.

You can get a group together and invite candidates along to tell you about their ideas.



You can find out what candidates are saying by reading the papers, listening to the radio, or watching the news and television for special election programmes.



## ● Political parties - what they are



Political parties are groups of ordinary people who join together because they have similar ideas about things like running the country. Anyone can set up a political party.



Each political party is different and they may have very different ideas about how to do things.



It is important to find out about political parties and what they will do about different things, that can affect you, such as health, education, transport, the environment, or rights.



Knowing what a political party thinks can help you decide if you want to join them, support them or vote for them at an election.



## These are some of the ways you can get **campaigning**

### ● Tell people



One way to get involved is to tell people what you think. This could mean contacting politicians about things that are important to you.



It is not just politicians you can contact. You can contact businesses, charities, celebrities, or anyone you think could help you with the things that are important to you.



You could contact the local, or the national, newspapers as well as local, or national, radio and television stations.



You could set up a page on a social network website, for example, MySpace, Bebo or Facebook, or you could set up your own website to tell people about the things that are important to you.

## ● Petitions



A petition is about a lot of people asking someone important, like the Prime Minister, to do something.

For example it might be a petition asking the Prime Minister to change a law.



The person who starts the petition then tries to get other people to sign it, if they agree.

If enough people sign, then this can make the people in charge listen to what you are saying.



You can start your own petition or sign someone else's petition if you agree with what they are saying.



For example you can start a petition, or see other petitions you might want to sign on the Prime Minister's office website.

## ● Join a group



There will probably be other people who are interested in the same things you are.

Find out if there are any local groups that you could join.



You could search your local library for information about groups.

You could search online to find out about groups near you.

You could look in the local paper for information.



There are large groups you could join.

For example if you are interested in rights then you could join self advocacy groups like People First who have groups all around the world.



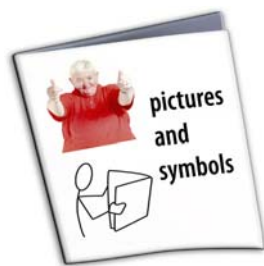
You could join a group on the internet. These are sometimes called 'forums' and they are a good way of contacting people from all over the country or the world.

## ● Set up a group



If there are no groups near you then find out if anyone else would be interested in setting one up.

You could put up a notice in a local shop or community centre.



If there is something that affects where you live you could make a leaflet about it to put through peoples doors.

Ask them to contact you if they are interested.



You could organise a meeting at your community centre and invite a guest speaker.

You could send out invites to local people or advertise the meeting in the paper.



You could set up a group on the internet.

There are lots of different ways of doing this.

Some people do this through social network sites like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo.

## ● Organise an event



You could organise an event about things that are important to you.

For example you could organise a jumble sale to raise money for a group or charity.



You could organise a meeting to bring people together who care about the same things.



You could organise a public meeting and invite your MP along to answer questions people might want to ask.



You could put on a play with a drama group that tells people about things that are important, for example, about bullying or the right to have relationships.