

Parish and community council elections in England and Wales

Guidance for candidates

Overview document

This document provides an overview of our guidance for parish and community council elections. It does not apply to district, borough, county, county borough or 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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Purpose of our guidance for candidates

1.1 Our guidance aims to provide practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate at a parish or community council election in England and Wales. It covers the whole election process, including the main steps towards standing as a candidate, the campaign and the declaration of the result. It includes relevant factual material as well as a guide to sources of further information. Standing for election can be complicated, but we hope that our guidance will make it as straightforward as possible.

How to use our guidance

1.2 Our guidance is made up of six parts, setting out the different stages candidates need to go through when standing at a parish or community council election in England and Wales.

1.3 Each part is accompanied by a number of forms and resources, which can be directly accessed via links in the individual parts. Alternatively, all of the relevant guidance, forms and resources will be available on our dedicated webpage for candidates and agents at parish and community elections:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents/parish-community-elections-england-wales.

1.4 The following parts make up our full guidance for parish and community council elections:

- [Part 1 – Can you stand for election?](#)
- [Part 2a – Standing as an independent candidate](#)
- [Part 2b – Standing as a party candidate](#)
- [Part 3 – Spending forms and notices](#)
- [Part 4 – The campaign](#)
- [Part 5 – Your right to attend key electoral events](#)
- [Part 6 – After the declaration of result](#)

1.5 Before starting the process of standing for election potential candidates need to be confident that they meet all of the requirements for standing for election. You should therefore first read [Part 1](#) of our guidance, which covers all of the qualifications and disqualifications.

1.6 Once satisfied that you can stand, you should read [Part 2a](#) (if you are an independent) or [Part 2b](#) of our guidance (if you are a party candidate), which deal with the nominations process and guide you through which forms you need to submit and by when.

1.7 You must follow certain rules about how much you can spend and what you must report after the election. [Part 3](#) of our guidance explains these rules and provides the necessary forms.

1.8 [Part 4](#) covers what you need to bear in mind when campaigning, including rules on the publication and display of campaign literature.

1.9 Candidates also have a right to attend key electoral events. These are: the opening of postal votes; the poll; and the count. Additionally, candidates can appoint representatives to attend these electoral events on their behalf. Details on your rights and what to expect at these events are provided in [Part 5](#).

1.10 Finally, there are a number of things candidates will need to do once the result has been declared, including submitting their spending returns to the Returning Officer. This is covered in [Part 6](#).

1.11 To keep the guidance as relevant to the reader as possible, we have split most guidance parts into an 'Essential information' section, which all candidates and agents should read as it contains information that is relevant to all, and a 'Supplementary information' section, that will be relevant only to some. You will be directed to the 'Supplementary information' section at relevant points throughout the 'Essential information' section.

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Terminology used in the guidance

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

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

Who does what at these elections and how to contact them

The Returning Officer

1.14 Parish and community elections in England and Wales are run by the Returning Officer, who is normally a senior officer of the local authority. 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 in England and Wales are provided on our About my vote website at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

1.15 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

1.16 The Electoral Registration Officer is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists. In England and Wales, the Electoral Registration Officer is normally a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Returning Officer. You can contact the Electoral Registration Officer through your local elections office. Again, contact details can be found at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

The Electoral Commission's role

1.17 We are an independent statutory body established in November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We are 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.

1.18 We are responsible for overseeing a number of aspects of electoral law – the registration of political parties and third parties, the monitoring and publication of significant donations to registered political parties, and the regulation of national party and local candidate spending on election campaigns. We also have a role in promoting voter awareness and are required to report on the administration of every national election and, if requested, on any other electoral matter. We also accredit observers to be present at election proceedings.

1.19 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.

Contacting us

1.20 We are here to help, so please get in touch if you have any questions. Our contact details can be found on the next page.

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Contacting us

1.21 If your question is about your election finances, please contact us at:

Wales

Tel: 029 2034 6800

Email: infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

England

Tel: 020 7271 0616

Email: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk

1.22 If you have any questions about the non-financial aspects of our guidance, please contact your local Commission team as detailed below:

Midlands Team

Tel: 0300 068 3394

Email: midlands@electoralcommission.org.uk

Eastern and South East Team

Tel: 020 7271 0600

Email: eastandsoutheast@electoralcommission.org.uk

London Team

Tel: 020 7271 0564

Email: london@electoralcommission.org.uk

North of England Team

Tel: 0300 068 3393

Email: north@electoralcommission.org.uk

South West Team

Tel: 0300 068 3395

Email: southwest@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales Office

Tel: 029 2034 6800

Email: infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk