

VOTING IN UK ELECTIONS:

Britain is a democracy. And most people here vote to elect leaders. We operate a first-past-the-post system. This means that the person with the majority, even if it is just a 1-vote majority, is the person who is elected. This can lead to a situation where, on a national basis, a political party has many votes but very few representatives. But that's the system!

Importantly, in Britain you can vote in private, without fear and in perfect safety. For more information and all kinds of forms visit the Electoral Commission website www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

WHAT CAN YOU VOTE FOR?

There are 3 possibilities:

- Local elections. These elections are to decide who the local councillors (the decision-makers) are.
- General elections. These elections are to send one person to sit in the House of Commons, in Parliament.
- Referenda. These are very rare in the UK. But they are to resolve arguments over issues like using the Euro.

CAN YOU VOTE?

You can register to vote if you are:

- 16 or over (but you cannot actually vote until you are 18)
- a citizen of the UK, the Republic of Ireland or the Commonwealth
- a citizen of the EU living in the UK
- a citizen of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or British Overseas Territory living in the UK

HOW DO YOU REGISTER?

Every autumn the local council will send a form to you in the post. There will be one for each home. This is to find out if you are entitled to be added to the Electoral Register (the list of people who can vote). Every time you move you must go through this process again. Usually you will have to do this by post. Sometimes it is possible by telephone. Attempts to do it online have not been a success and this may stop.

PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY:

The Electoral Roll (the list of voters) is available for anyone to read. If you can vote but there is a reason why you do not want anyone to see where you live (you may be a woman at risk, for example) then you still must return the form but tick the box that stops your name being put on the public lists.

WHY YOU MUST RETURN THE REGISTRATION FORM:

You must complete the form. If you do not complete the form, or send it back with incorrect details of who is in your property, you may have to pay a fine of £1,000. If you do not return the form then your credit rating may also be damaged.

HOW TO VOTE:

You have 3 possibilities, usually, if you are entitled to vote:

- You can go to a 'polling station' on voting days, where you will be given any help you need
- You can vote by post. Ask the council's Electoral Registration Office for a form when you are invited to vote. You can also get the right form from the website at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk but it helps to have your postcode!
- You can vote by proxy (somebody goes, with your permission, to vote for you). Again, ask your council's Electoral Registration Office when you are invited to vote. You can also get the right form from the website at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk but it helps to have your postcode!

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE POLLING STATION:

- Go between 7am and 10pm. If you are disabled contact the Electoral Registration Office and ask for help to travel. You can travel with a companion.
- Tell the staff at the polling station who you are and where you live. They will check to see if you can vote.
- They will give you a voting paper for each election. There may be one for a local election, and another for a general (national) election. They will carry the names of candidates and the parties they represent.
- Be sure that you understand the system. Usually it means adding one cross, and nothing else, to each paper. But ask if this is not clear to you. Write nothing but what you are asked for on any paper.
- Vote in private. Fold the paper in half and put it into the box. If there are 2 papers then there will be 2 boxes.