

This Code only applies to campaigning at elections that are due to take place on or after 2 May 2024. Please refer to the earlier version of the Code to guide campaign activities at elections due to take place before 2 May 2024.

Electoral registration, postal voting, proxy voting, voter authority certificate and polling stations

Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, and their right to put their arguments to voters should be supported and protected. It is equally important, however, to ensure that the activities of campaigners do not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.

This Code provides a guide for campaigners, electoral administrators and police forces to what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community during the lead-up to polling day.

The code also provides information relating to the offence of the handling of postal voting documents by political campaigners and the requirement of secrecy for postal voters.

More detailed guidance about electoral offences can be found in the guidance for candidates and agents, which is available at:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent>.

The Code has been sent to all registered political parties in Great Britain, and Returning Officers will draw it to the attention of all candidates and parties contesting elections.

Some Returning Officers may identify the need to develop and seek agreement to specific local provisions which supplement the terms of this Code, in order to address identified local risks. Returning Officers should consult with local campaigners and the relevant national Nominating Officers as well as police forces to secure appropriate local agreement to such provisions, and should ensure that they are communicated and well-understood by campaigners locally.

Scope of this code

This code covers all those actively involved in campaigning at these reserved elections:

- Elections to the UK Parliament (in England, Scotland and Wales)
- Local authority elections in England
- Parish council elections in England
- Local mayoral elections in England
- Combined authority mayoral elections in England
- Greater London Authority (GLA) elections in England
- Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections (and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCC elections) in England and Wales
- Local authority referendums in England
- Neighbourhood planning and business referendums in England

Other elections and referendums in Great Britain

This code does **NOT** apply to any other polls. The code of conduct for campaigners at devolved elections in Scotland and Wales, can be found [here](#), and covers:

- Elections to the Scottish Parliament
- Scottish council elections
- Referendums held under Scottish Parliament legislation
- Elections to Senedd Cymru
- Welsh local elections
- Referendums held under Senedd Cymru legislation

Terminology

Some of the points in this code are criminal offences. In this code of conduct, we use 'must' when we refer to criminal offences. We use 'should' for the parts which are not offences.

Meaning of the term "campaigner"

All references to campaigners in this code include:

- Candidates standing at an election, their agents and their staff and supporters
- Political party officers, staff, members and supporters campaigning at an election
- Other people and organisations campaigning for or against a candidate, a group of candidates or a party at an election where they are employed or engaged by the candidate or political party

Campaigners not employed or engaged by a candidate or party

We strongly advise all people and organisations campaigning for or against a candidate, a group of candidates or a party at an election to comply with this Code, even where they are not employed or engaged by a candidate or political party.

Compliance with this code

Any concerns that criminal offences referred to in the code have been breached should be raised with the local police force.

Any concerns that other parts of the code have been breached should be raised first with the candidate, political party or campaigner in question.

Any further concerns should be drawn to the attention of the Electoral Commission. The Commission will raise them with the relevant party or campaigner if appropriate, and will agree appropriate actions to remedy or prevent a reoccurrence of any breach.

Electoral registration and absent vote applications

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD BE FREE TO ENCOURAGE VOTERS TO REGISTER TO VOTE AND APPLY TO VOTE BY POST OR APPOINT A PROXY TO VOTE ON THEIR BEHALF IF THAT IS THE MOST CONVENIENT WAY FOR THEM TO VOTE.

Campaigners can help to inform voters about how to participate in elections. They should encourage voters in the first instance to use the [online electoral registration service](#) and the [online postal vote](#) or [online proxy vote](#) application services (where available) ^[1], or they can provide voters with paper application forms. Electoral Registration Officers must support you by providing you with a reasonable number of registration and absent vote application forms on request.

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD ENSURE THAT ANY ELECTORAL REGISTRATION FORMS AND POSTAL OR PROXY VOTING APPLICATION FORMS CONFORM FULLY TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF ELECTORAL LAW, INCLUDING ALL THE NECESSARY QUESTIONS AND THE OPTIONS OPEN TO ELECTORS.

You can download electoral registration forms from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-youre-living-in-the-uk> and absent vote application forms from [Apply to vote by post | Electoral Commission](#) and [Apply to vote by proxy | Electoral Commission](#).

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE LOCAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER'S ADDRESS IS CLEARLY PROVIDED AS THE RETURN ADDRESS FOR REGISTRATION AND ABSENT VOTE APPLICATION FORMS.

To ensure voters can make their own choice about how to return registration or absent vote application forms, you should always clearly provide the relevant Electoral Registration Officer's address as the return address. This will also minimise the risk of suspicion that completed applications could be altered or inadvertently lost or destroyed.

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD SEND ANY SEALED COMPLETED REGISTRATION OR ABSENT VOTE APPLICATIONS WHICH VOTERS GIVE THEM ON THE DOORSTEP TO THE RELEVANT ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER'S ADDRESS WITHIN TWO WORKING DAYS OF RECEIPT AND BEFORE THE STATUTORY DEADLINE.

If a voter asks you to take their completed application form and return it to the Electoral Registration Officer, you should ensure that the voter has sealed the form in an envelope before taking it. You should return forms to the Electoral Registration Officer directly to minimise the risk of absent vote applications being refused because completed forms arrive after the statutory deadline before a poll (5pm on the 11th working day before the poll).

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD ALWAYS EXPLAIN TO ELECTORS THE IMPLICATIONS OF APPLYING TO VOTE BY POST OR APPOINTING A PROXY.

It is important that electors understand that they will not be able to vote in person on polling day if they or their proxy apply for and are granted a postal vote, and will not be able to vote in person if their appointed proxy has already voted on their behalf. To avoid duplication and unnecessary administrative pressures for Electoral Registration Officers, campaigners should try to ensure that electors who are included in current postal or proxy voter lists, or have already applied for a postal or proxy vote for a particular poll, do not submit an additional application.

Postal vote applications

WHEN ELECTORS FILL OUT THEIR POSTAL VOTE APPLICATION FORMS, CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD NEVER ENCOURAGE THEM TO CHOOSE TO HAVE THEIR POSTAL BALLOT PACK REDIRECTED TO ANYWHERE OTHER THAN THE ADDRESS WHERE THEY ARE REGISTERED TO VOTE.

Electors should take care to protect their ballot paper and postal ballot pack, and they will be best able to do so at their home address unless there are compelling reasons why receiving the postal ballot pack at the address where they are registered to vote would be

impractical. Electors must state on the application form the reason why they need their postal ballot pack sent to another address.

Proxy vote applications

ELECTORS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO EXPLORE OTHER OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE TO ACT AS A PROXY – INCLUDING RELATIVES OR NEIGHBOURS, FOR EXAMPLE – BEFORE A CAMPAIGNER AGREES TO BE APPOINTED AS A PROXY.

To minimise the risk of suspicion that campaigners may be seeking to place undue pressure on electors, electors should not be encouraged to appoint a campaigner as their proxy.

There is now a limit to the amount of people someone can be a proxy for. You can act as a proxy for two people. If you vote on behalf of UK voters who live overseas, you can act as a proxy for up to four people (but only two of those can live in the UK).

Voter authority certificates

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD BE FREE TO INFORM VOTERS THAT THEY NEED PHOTOGRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION TO VOTE AT CERTAIN ELECTIONS AND HOW TO APPLY FOR A **VOTER AUTHORITY CERTIFICATE**.

Campaigners can help to inform voters that they must produce a suitable form of photographic identification to vote in person at a polling station for the elections covered by this code (see scope section above). Campaigners can also encourage voters who lack a suitable form of photographic identification to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate which they can use to vote at their local polling station. Campaigners should encourage voters to check whether they have a suitable photo ID before making an application for a Voter Authority Certificate. [The full list of accepted ID can be found here](#). Campaigners should encourage voters to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate online as this is the quickest and easiest way to apply. Voters can [apply online by clicking here](#). However, it's also possible for voters to [apply using a paper form by clicking here](#).

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD NOT HANDLE PAPER-BASED **VOTER AUTHORITY CERTIFICATE** APPLICATIONS OR ASSIST VOTERS WITH ONLINE APPLICATIONS.

Voters will have to supply sensitive personal information when they apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, including photographs. Campaigners do not need to have access to this information.

TELLERS MUST NOT ASK TO SEE OR TO CHECK ANY VOTER'S PHOTO **ID** THEMSELVES.

Tellers have no legal status and voters have the right to refuse to give them any information. Tellers may remind voters as they approach the polling station that they will need to provide photo ID to be issued with a ballot paper. But tellers must not ask to see or to check any voter's photo ID (including voter authority certificates). The legal requirement to perform an ID check is for polling station staff only, as part of the voting process. For more information on the role of tellers and what they can and cannot do outside polling stations, please refer to our [Guidance for Tellers](#) and [Dos and Don'ts for Tellers](#).

1. The online service is not currently available at reserved elections for applications for proxy votes due to disability, employment, occupation, service or attendance on a course, emergency proxies or postal proxies, and applications requiring an attestation. It is also not available for devolved Scottish and Welsh elections.

Last updated: 3 April 2024

Postal voting documents

CAMPAIGNERS MUST NEVER HANDLE ANYONE ELSE'S POSTAL VOTING DOCUMENTS

The term “postal voting document” covers a postal ballot paper, a postal voting statement, a declaration of identity, envelopes for returning postal voting documents, and an envelope containing a postal ballot pack.

It is a criminal offence for a campaigner to handle another voter's postal voting documents. The offence applies to candidates and political parties, and those connected with, employed or engaged by candidates and parties – please see the terminology section. It carries a maximum penalty of up to two years in prison, a fine, or both; and prohibition from standing for electoral office and from voting for a period of 5 years.

Exemptions

There are two exemptions to this offence:

- Campaigners are permitted to handle the postal voting documents of a spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild, someone they are cohabiting with, or someone they provide care for.
- Campaigners are permitted to handle postal voting documents if that is included in the duties of a job or role they hold, and the handling is consistent with those duties. These are postal workers, people involved in running elections, and people who hold roles in organisations or communal buildings where collecting postal votes is part of the role. Examples would be volunteering for a community organisation that assists disabled voters or working in a care home.

If you are asked for assistance in completing a ballot paper, you should always refer the voter to the Returning Officer's staff at the elections office who may be able to arrange a home visit if necessary. Assistance will also be available for electors at polling stations.

CAMPAIGNERS MUST NEVER OBSERVE VOTERS COMPLETING THEIR BALLOT PAPER. IF YOU ARE WITH A VOTER WHEN THEY COMPLETE THEIR BALLOT PAPER, REMEMBER THEY MUST ALWAYS COMPLETE IT IN SECRET.

It is a criminal offence to attempt to obtain, or to communicate, the number, official mark or other unique identifying mark from a voter's postal ballot, or which candidate the voter has voted for. The maximum penalty for this offence is a 6-month prison sentence or a fine. (This offence applies to everyone whether they are a campaigner or not.)

You should ensure that the voter seals both envelopes personally and immediately after completing their ballot paper and postal voting statement. If you are asked to give advice, it is acceptable and often helpful to explain the voting process, but do not offer to help anyone to complete their ballot paper. Wherever practical, you should encourage voters to post or deliver the completed postal ballot pack themselves. If you are approached or asked for help by a voter who is unable to post their completed postal ballot pack or make any other arrangements for it to be returned in time, you should contact the Returning Officer to ask them to arrange for it to be collected.

Last updated: 18 April 2024

Campaigning outside polling places

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO PUT THEIR MESSAGES TO VOTERS ON POLLING DAY, INCLUDING IN PUBLIC SPACES OUTSIDE POLLING PLACES.

Polling station staff and police officers should not seek to discourage or remove campaigners who are otherwise peacefully communicating with voters, as long as they are not within or impeding access to the grounds of the polling place. You should be careful, however, to ensure that your approach is proportionate and should recognise that groups of supporters may be perceived as intimidating by voters.

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD KEEP ACCESS TO POLLING PLACES AND THE PAVEMENTS AROUND POLLING PLACES CLEAR TO ALLOW VOTERS TO ENTER.

The Presiding Officer is responsible for maintaining order in the polling place, and you may be asked to move by polling station staff or police officers if you are impeding access by voters to a polling place.

Last updated: 21 December 2023

Complaints and allegations about electoral fraud

CAMPAIGNERS SHOULD BE PREPARED TO GIVE THE POLICE A STATEMENT AND SUBSTANTIATE ANY ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTORAL FRAUD THEY MAKE.

The police will investigate allegations where someone is prepared to provide evidence or a statement in support of the complaint, but unsubstantiated claims about electoral fraud have the potential to damage confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. You should ensure you are confident that evidence can be provided to the police before considering whether it is appropriate to publicise any specific allegation.

CAMPAIGNERS WHO ARE CONCERNED OR THINK THAT ELECTORAL FRAUD MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE SHOULD RAISE THE MATTER WITH THEIR ELECTION AGENT OR LOCAL PARTY, OR WITH THE RELEVANT ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER OR RETURNING OFFICER FOR THE AREA.

They may be able to explain whether or not an election-related crime has been committed, and refer it to the police if appropriate or provide details of the police contact for the relevant area so that campaigners can report their allegation. Concerns about breaches of the political finance rules should be raised directly with the Electoral Commission.

ANY CAMPAIGNER WHO HAS ACTUAL EVIDENCE THAT AN ELECTORAL OFFENCE HAS BEEN COMMITTED SHOULD REPORT IT DIRECTLY AND WITHOUT DELAY TO THE POLICE.

If appropriate, the police will investigate the matter. Every police force has designated a Single Point of Contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election matters and who will deal directly with the matter or give advice to local police officers. The Electoral Commission can help provide contact details for local police force SPOCs.

Last updated: 21 December 2023