

R N I B

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



The
Electoral
Commission

See differently

Thursday 6 May 2021

Your pocket guide to voting



**Police and Crime Commissioner,
Combined Authority Mayoral,
Local Government and Local
Authority Mayoral elections**

This handy pocket guide provides you with information to help you to vote with confidence at this year's elections. It covers what elections are taking place, the different voting options available and what support and adjustments you are entitled to.

This year's elections will be different to previous years. Additional safety measures will be in place at polling stations to ensure they are safe places to vote during COVID-19. This pocket guide covers what you can expect at the polling station to help you make an informed decision on the best way to vote for you.

RNIB has worked with the Electoral Commission to provide guidance to polling station staff to improve their understanding of sight loss and to help them make voting as safe and accessible for blind and partially sighted voters as possible. This guide outlines that guidance and support.

Please feel free to take this guide with you on polling day as a reference, if that would be helpful.

This pocket guide is available in a range of alternative formats, including large print, digital, audio and braille. Please call our **Helpline on 0303 123 9999** for a copy in your preferred format.

What elections are taking place?

On **Thursday 6 May 2021**, there will be Police and Crime Commissioner, Combined Authority Mayor, Local Government and Local Authority Mayor Elections in England. A separate guide has been developed for the London Mayoral and London Assembly elections, taking place on the same day.

A Police and Crime Commissioner oversees your local police force and ensures they are prioritising what matters to you. Combined Authority Mayors are elected to represent several neighbouring councils. They are responsible for services such as transport, planning and skills provision.

In local government elections, voters elect councillors, who make decisions on services in the local area. Local Authority Mayors are elected in some areas, and are responsible for running the council.

Where you live will determine which of these elections you have. You can use the Electoral Commission's postcode look-up tool to check what elections are taking place in your area:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information>

Voting in Local Government elections

The voting system used for Local Government elections is first-past-the-post so the candidate with the most votes is elected.

In some areas there may be two or more seats to fill on the council, in this instance the candidate with the most votes is elected first, then if required the candidate with the second highest number of votes is elected, then the third placed candidate.

You can vote for as many candidates as there are seats available. The instructions on the ballot paper will tell you how many candidates you can vote for or you can ask polling station staff.

To vote, mark a cross in the box opposite the name of the candidate(s) of your choice.

Voting in Police and Crime Commissioner elections

A Supplementary Vote system is used in Police and Crime Commissioner Elections.

You will receive one ballot paper and you can vote for a first and second choice candidate. Vote for your first choice candidate by marking a cross in the first choice column and for your second choice candidate by marking a cross in the second choice column.

As long as you mark one cross in the first choice column, your vote will be counted. You can choose whether or not to mark a second choice.

Voting in Combined Authority and Local Mayoral elections

The Supplementary Vote system is used in Mayoral Elections.

You can vote for a first and second choice candidate. Vote for your first choice candidate by marking a cross in the first choice column and for your second choice candidate by marking a cross in the second choice column.

As long as you mark one cross in the first choice column, your vote will be counted. You can choose whether or not to mark a second choice.

Ensuring everyone has support to vote

You can use your phone or other assistive technologies

Under the Equality Act, you are entitled to reasonable adjustments to help you to cast your vote independently.

This means you are allowed to take a phone or other form of assistive technology into the polling booth to help you to vote. For instance, to use magnifier or text-to-speech apps, or the phone torch to improve lighting.

There is also support available at the polling station which we've detailed below. You can ask the Presiding Officer – the independent person who is in charge of the polling station – for help too.



You can use the tactile voting device

Your polling station will have a device that can be attached to the ballot paper. It has a window that can be lifted for each party or independent candidate. To use the device you should:

- lift the window for the party or independent candidate you want to vote for
- mark an X
- close the window
- separate the template from the ballot paper
- fold and place the ballot paper in the ballot box

The polling station staff can explain how to use the device and read out the party and candidate names in the order that they appear on the ballot paper.

You can use the large print resources

Your polling station will have a large-print version of the ballot paper on display. A handheld copy of the ballot paper will also be available in large print for you to take into the polling booth to help you to mark your ballot paper independently.

You can ask the Presiding Officer for help

The Presiding Officer is an independent person who is in charge of the polling station. You can ask them for help.

You can ask the Presiding Officer to read out the instructions on the ballot paper and the names of the parties and candidates in the order that they appear on the ballot paper.

You can tell the Presiding Officer, in the privacy of the polling booth, how to mark the ballot paper on your behalf.

You can ask someone to come to the polling station with you

You can also bring someone with you who is over 18, and eligible to vote in that election, to help you cast your vote. You should notify the Presiding Officer that you will be assisted by your companion.

Your companion is required by law to complete a simple declaration. The Presiding Officer must record your name

and elector number, as well as your companion's name and address. This is just a security measure and will not mean your vote can be identified in any way.

You can vote by post

If you are unable to visit your polling station on the day of the election, or would prefer not to, you can apply to vote by post. Download an application form via the Electoral Commission's website or contact your local electoral registrations office.

You can request your postal vote application in an accessible format such as braille or large print.

Postal vote applications must usually include the elector's signature. If you are unable to provide a signature, or a consistent signature, you can request that the requirement for a signature is waived. Your application must include the reason for the waiver request and the name and address of any person who has assisted you with completing the application.

The deadline to apply to vote by post is **5pm on Tuesday 20 April 2021**.

You will receive your ballot papers by post. Complete and return your ballot papers, ensuring you leave enough time for them to arrive by **10pm on Thursday 6 May 2021**.

You can vote by proxy

A proxy vote is where you appoint someone you trust to vote on your behalf.

To apply to vote by proxy, complete an application form and send it to your local electoral registration office to arrive by 5pm on Tuesday 27 April 2021. Download an application form via the Electoral Commission's website or contact your local electoral registrations office.

In an emergency where you cannot go to the polling station in person, including self-isolating due to Covid-19, you can apply for an emergency proxy up to **5pm on Thursday 6 May 2021.**



What to expect at the polling station

Polling stations will be safe places to vote. A number of measures will be put in place to help you stay safe when

voting at the polling station. We know that some of the Covid-19 response measures that have been introduced in recent months have been really challenging for some people.

RNIB has worked with the Electoral Commission to provide guidance to polling station staff to improve their understanding of sight loss and to help them make voting as safe and accessible for blind and partially sighted voters as possible. This includes:

- tips on how to provide sighted and verbal guiding,
- information on assistive technologies, apps, magnifiers, personal lighting and other reasonable adjustments people are entitled to use to help them vote independently,
- how to set up the polling station to make it easier to navigate,
- clear print and signage guidelines,
- awareness of face covering exemptions and social distancing wearables.

Here's what you can expect on polling day.

Hand sanitising stations and hygiene precautions

All voters will be expected to use the hand sanitisers provided when entering and exiting the polling station. RNIB have asked that all stations are clearly detectable, in a prominent position and appropriately colour contrasted.

Any materials used during the voting process, such as tactile voting devices, will be cleaned thoroughly after each use.

The Electoral Commission encourages all voters to bring their own pen or pencil, but there will be a supply of clean pen or pencils available at the polling station.

Social distancing measures

Measures like one-way systems and markers may be in place at the polling station to help with social distancing. There will also be a limit on the number of people allowed in the building at any one time.

If you would like any help, staff will be on hand to provide assistance.

Face coverings, exemptions and social distancing wearables

All voters will be required to wear a face covering inside the polling station unless they are exempt. Blind and partially sighted people are exempt from wearing a face covering as these can impair their remaining useful vision. You may wish to carry a card or badge to show your exemption, but this is a personal choice and not required by law.

There are a number of wearable products available that you may wish to use to indicate to others that you want to maintain your distance but may find it difficult. These include lanyards, badges, masks and other resources.

Please Give Me Space: <https://pleasegivemespace.uk>

Distance Aware:

<https://www.bevancommission.org/distance-aware>

Hidden Disabilities sunflower:
<https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com>

Lighting, magnifiers, and other support

You are entitled to use assistive devices to help you to cast your vote independently and in private. If you wish to make use of any of the tactile voting device, large print ballot paper or a magnifying glass, please ask a member of staff. They are there to help you.

If you have your own assistive device, like a phone, video magnifier or pocket light then please feel free to use this.

Alternatively, you can also have the support of a friend, family member or a member of staff.



© RNIB registered charity in England and Wales (226227),
Scotland (SCO39316), Isle of Man (1226).
Also operating in Northern Ireland.