

Voter ID: Guide for staff and volunteers

Supporting blind and partially sighted people to vote in the 2023 English local elections

The UK Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station at some elections.

This new requirement will apply for the first time in England at the local elections on Thursday 4 May 2023.

We know that blind and partially sighted people are more likely to experience barriers in preparing for this change and may need support to access photo ID.

Anyone who does not have an existing form of accepted photo ID will be able to apply for a free voter ID document, which is known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

This guide is for staff and volunteers at local authorities and charities in England who want to support those they work with to understand the change. It includes information on:

- [Registering to vote](#)
- [Which forms of photo ID will be accepted](#)
- [Applying for a Voter Authority Certificate](#)
- [What voters can expect at the polling station](#)

- [Other ways to vote](#)

You can also download bespoke resources to support other groups who are likely to need support to prepare for the new voter ID requirement, including:

- [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#)
- [Older people](#)
- [People experiencing homelessness](#)
- [People who are registered to vote anonymously](#)
- [Trans and non-binary people](#)

You can call the Electoral Commission helpline on **0800 328 0280**, or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/voter, for more information on:

- Accessible ways to register to vote and apply for a Voter Authority Certificate
- How to contact the voter's local council, who can help them register to vote and apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, should they need one
- What support is available face-to-face, or by phone, from your local council to help you:
 - Complete the forms required to register to vote, and apply for a Voter Authority Certificate
 - Take a photograph of yourself that meets the requirements for applying for a Voter Authority Certificate

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) can be found in [Appendix 3](#) at the end of this Guide.

The May 2023 local elections

Local elections are taking place across 230 areas in England on Thursday 4 May 2023, including local council, mayoral and parish elections.

Find out if elections are taking place in your area by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** at or visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID.

Registering to vote

The deadline to register to vote in the local elections on 4 May 2023 is **11:59pm on Monday 17 April 2023**.

In order to vote in any election, the person must first be registered to vote. If they have registered before, they only need to register again if they have moved house or changed their name.

To be eligible to register to vote in England, a person must be aged 16 or over (but they can't vote until they're 18). They must also be one of the following:

- A UK or Irish citizen
- A qualifying Commonwealth citizen living in the UK
- An EU citizen living in the UK

You can support people you work with to register online now at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote), or download a paper application form at [gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms).

If you need any help when supporting someone to register to vote, you can contact their local council.

You can find contact details by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or by visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Accepted forms of photo ID

Voters will only need to show one form of photo ID, but it needs to be the original, hard copy version and not a photocopy or digital version.

There are several accepted forms of photo ID you can use to vote at a polling station, including:

- **Passport**
- **Blue badge** parking permit
- **Certain concessionary travel cards:**
 - An Older Person's Bus Pass
 - A Disabled Person's Bus Pass
 - An Oyster 60+ card
 - A Freedom Pass

- The National Entitlement Card
- A 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- A Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- A Senior SmartPass
- A Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person's SmartPass
- A War Disablement SmartPass
- A 60+ SmartPass
- A Half Fare SmartPass
- **Driving license** (including provisional license)

A complete list of the forms of photo ID that will be accepted when voting at a polling station can be found in the [Accepted forms of ID](#) section of this booklet.

If someone is not sure whether their ID would be accepted or not, they can call our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID.

Expired photo ID will be accepted if the photo remains a good enough likeness for the polling station staff to be able to identify the voter.

Anyone who doesn't currently have an accepted form of photo ID, or isn't sure whether they still look like the photo on their ID, can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

Applying for a Voter Authority Certificate

The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for use at the elections on 4 May 2023 is **5pm on Tuesday 25 April 2023**.

Voters need to be registered to vote, or have applied to be registered, before they apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. When someone registers to vote, they will be asked whether they have photo ID or if they want to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

Apply online

Applications can be completed online at gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate.

Apply by post

Voters can also apply for a Voter Authority Certificate by completing a paper form and sending it to their local council.

They can request a form from their local council or download the form at gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-voter-authority-certificate-by-post-if-youre-living-in-the-uk.

Apply in person or by phone

Voters may also be able to apply in person at their local council office.

In some areas, where a voter has a specific need because of a disability, the council may be able to take their application over the phone.

The decision on whether or not applications can be accepted in person or by phone is the responsibility of the council.

Supporting people you work with to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate

If the people you work with need support, you can help them complete their application.

Call our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or enter the voter's postcode at electoralcommission.org.uk/voter to get contact details for their local council, who can:

- Help them complete their online application for a Voter Authority Certificate
- Send them the paper application form and help them complete it, if they prefer to apply that way
- Tell you whether they can accept the voter's application in person or over the phone, and support them to apply in this way
- Tell you what face-to-face support is available, should the voter need it

The application process

When applying for a Voter Authority Certificate, the voter will need to provide their:

- Name
- Address
- Date of birth
- National Insurance number

If the voter doesn't know their National Insurance number, they can look for it on their payslips or on official letters about tax, pensions or benefits.

If they are unable to find it, they can still complete their application, but they will need to provide alternative forms of proof of identity, which could include a birth certificate, bank statement or utility bill. Their council will contact them to arrange this.

They can also ask someone who knows them to provide an attestation to the council to verify their identity if they don't have any other accepted proof of identity. The person providing the attestation must be a person 'of good standing'. Your local council can provide more information about the requirements of an attestation.

Providing a photograph

Applicants will also need to provide a photograph. Requirements for the photograph are similar to those for passport photos and must show the voter's head and shoulders with nothing covering the head, unless a head covering is worn for religious or medical reasons. The face must not be covered for any reason.

If someone needs help taking their photo, their local council should be able to do this for them. If the voter you're supporting needs assistance with providing a photo with their application, they should contact their local council. The council may provide an area at their office to take photos of applicants. Additional support may be available, however this will vary between councils so you or the voter should contact their council to find out what support they can provide.

For more information on the requirements for the photograph, see [Appendix 2](#) or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID.

What happens next?

The local council will process the application and send the Voter Authority Certificate to the voter by post, along with instructions explaining how to use it.

The Voter Authority Certificate includes a raised tactile marking in the top left-hand corner, to help the voter identify it. This marking consists of four small dots repeated three times.

When completing the application form, voters will be asked whether they would like to receive the instructions in large print, braille or easy read.

Voter Authority Certificates do not have an expiration date, but voters are encouraged to renew their Voter Authority Certificate after 10 years.

All data voters provide when applying for a Voter Authority Certificate will be stored securely by local councils in line with data protection regulations.

What to expect at a polling station

When someone goes to vote at a polling station, a member of staff will:

1. Ask them for their name and address so they can find them on the register
2. Ask for their photo ID, and check if it is acceptable

3. If their ID is acceptable, they will give them their ballot paper and direct them to complete it in a polling booth as usual.

A private area will be available at the polling station, so the voter can choose to have their photo ID viewed in private if they like. This might be a separate room, or an area separated by a privacy screen, depending on the polling station.

If someone you are supporting would like further information about what to expect at the polling station, they should contact their local council. You can find their contact details by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or by entering the voter's postcode at electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Support at the polling station

Assistive equipment

All voters have the right to vote independently and in secret. The UK Government recently introduced changes which mean that different assistive equipment may be available at the polling station to help disabled people, including blind and partially-sighted people, to do so.

Voters can contact their local council to find out what assistive equipment will be available at their polling station, and request the equipment they feel they need.

The council will decide whether or not the requested equipment can be provided.

You can find contact details for the local council by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or by entering the postcode of the voter you're supporting at electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Other forms of support

The Presiding Officer, who oversees the polling station, can also help the voter cast their vote if they would find this helpful. Polling station staff are there to help, and voters should be encouraged to ask a member of staff if they have any questions or need assistance.

Blind and partially-sighted voters can bring anyone they want along with them to help them at the polling station, as long as the person is 18 or over. The companion will not need to show ID.

Someone acting as a companion for the purposes of assisting a disabled voter will be permitted to enter the polling booth to help the blind or partially-sighted person to vote.

Other ways to vote

Voting by post

Photo ID is not required to vote by post.

If someone is already registered to vote by post, they do not need a Voter Authority Certificate.

If a voter would prefer to vote by post, or won't be able to make it to the polling station on polling day, they can apply to vote by post.

The deadline to apply to vote by post at the elections is **5pm on Tuesday 18 April 2023.**

When someone applies for a postal vote, they need to provide their date of birth and signature. They will need to provide their date of birth and signature again when they complete the postal ballot pack, so their identity can be verified.

The voter will receive their ballot paper by post. Your postal ballot pack will include instructions on how to obtain information in a variety of formats explaining how to complete your postal vote application. You can request these instructions in braille, graphical format (for example, using photos or illustrations), or another form (including audio).

They will need to complete and return their ballot paper, ensuring they leave enough time for it to arrive at their local council by 10pm on Thursday 4 May. If they can't post their postal vote pack in time, they can take it to their polling station or to their local council office on polling day.

Voting by proxy (allowing someone you trust to vote on your behalf)

If a voter won't be able to make it to the polling station on polling day, they may be able to apply to vote by proxy, where they choose someone they trust to go to their polling station on their behalf.

The deadline to apply to vote by proxy at the elections is **5pm on Tuesday 25 April 2023**.

The person they choose to vote on their behalf will need to go to the polling station of the person who chose them to be their proxy. They will need to show their own photo ID, not the photo ID of the person they are voting on behalf of.

In an emergency where a voter cannot go to the polling place in person, they can apply for an emergency proxy up to 5pm on polling day.

You can get more information on voting by post and by proxy by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Receiving a temporary Voter Authority Certificate

If someone has applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline, but their local council doesn't feel it will arrive in time, they will produce a temporary Voter Authority Certificate.

If a voter who plans to vote in an election in their area on Thursday 4 May 2023 applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the application deadline (5pm on Tuesday 25 April), but the Electoral Registration Officer at their local council doesn't think it will arrive in time for use at the election, they will produce a temporary Voter Authority Certificate. The temporary Voter Authority Certificate will only be valid for the relevant polling day.

The voter will need to collect their temporary Voter Authority Certificate in person, usually from their local council office. It may be possible to make alternative arrangements for collection of the certificate from a location which would need to be agreed with the local council.

You can find the council's contact details by calling our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or by entering the postcode of the voter you're supporting at electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

If a voter loses their permanent Voter Authority Certificate after the application deadline, they can apply for an emergency proxy vote. For more information on how to apply for an emergency proxy vote, call our helpline on **0800 328 0280** or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Appendix 1: Accepted forms of photo ID

The following forms of photo ID will be accepted when voting at a polling station:

- A passport issued by the UK, any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, a British Overseas Territory, a European Economic Area (EEA) state, or a Commonwealth country
- A Blue Badge parking permit
- A driving license (including provisional license) issued by the UK, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state
- An identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)
- Biometric Immigration document
- Defence Identity Card
- A national identity card issued by an EEA state
- The following concessionary travel cards:

Passes funded by the UK Government

- An Older Person's Bus Pass
- A Disabled Person's Bus Pass
- An Oyster 60+ card
- A Freedom Pass

Passes funded by the Scottish Government

- The National Entitlement Card

Passes funded by the Welsh Government

- A 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
- A Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card

Passes issued under the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme

- A Senior SmartPass
- A Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person's SmartPass
- A War Disablement SmartPass
- A 60+ SmartPass
- A Half Fare SmartPass

Appendix 2: Photograph requirements for the Voter Authority Certificate application

Photo style

The photo must be of the applicant:

- Facing forward and looking straight at the camera
- Showing a close up of their head and shoulders, without any head covering, unless they wear one for religious beliefs or medical reasons. The face should not be covered for any reason
- Without any other person visible
- With a plain facial expression and with their eyes open and clearly visible (for example, without sunglasses and not obscured with hair). Please note this does not apply where the applicant is unable to provide a photograph which complies with either or both of those requirements due to any disability

Photo quality

The photo of the applicant must:

- Be a true likeness
- Be in colour
- Be taken against a plain, light background
- Be in sharp focus and clear

- Be free from 'redeye', shadows which obscure the face, or reflection
- Not be damaged

Photo size

Where the applicant applies online, the photograph they provide must be:

- At least 750 pixels in height and 600 pixels in width
- Contained in an electronic file which is no more than 20MB in size

Where the applicant applies using a paper form the photograph must be:

- At least 45 millimetres in height and 35 millimetres in width
- No larger than 297 millimetres in height or 210 millimetres in width

Appendix 3: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General

Question: Are there elections taking place in my area in May 2023?

Answer: You can call our helpline on **0800 328 0280** to find out if elections are taking place in your area. A full list of areas holding elections in May 2023 can also be found at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/local-elections-england-may-2023.

Question: How do I contact my local council?

Answer: You can find contact details for your local council, including phone numbers and email addresses, by calling the Electoral Commission helpline on **0800 328 0280** or by visiting electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Registering to vote

Question: I have voted in elections in my area in the past. Do I need to register again?

Answer: If you've registered before, you only need to register again if you have moved house, or changed your name.

Question: Can I apply for free voter ID at the same time as registering to vote?

Answer: Yes. When you register to vote, you'll be asked whether you have photo ID or if you want to apply for a free voter ID document, known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

Question: Do I need to show more than one form of photo ID?

Answer: No, so long as your ID is one of the forms listed included in the list provided in this document.

Question: Can I use photo ID that's out of date?

Answer: Yes, as long as you still look as you appear in the photo.

Question: I have photo ID in an app on my phone. Can I use this to vote?

Answer: No – only hard copy versions of your ID will be accepted.

Question: I don't have any photo ID. Can I still vote in person at a polling station?

Answer: Yes. If you don't have one of the accepted forms of photo ID, you can apply for a free voter ID document known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

Question: There aren't any elections taking place in my area in May. Can I still apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for use at future elections?

Answer: Yes. Voter Authority Certificates do not have an expiration date, but voters are encouraged to renew their Voter Authority Certificate after 10 years.

Other ways of voting

Question: Are there other ways to vote that don't require photo ID?

Answer: Yes. You can vote by post, or by proxy which is when you ask someone you trust to vote on your behalf. You'll have to apply for a postal or a proxy vote before you can do so.

Question: What are the accessibility options for postal voting?

Answer: Your local council is legally required to include instructions with your postal vote pack on how to obtain a translation of directions or guidance on how to complete your postal vote application. Contact your local council for more information. You can get their contact details by entering your post code at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

Question: I'd like someone to vote on my behalf at a polling station. Will they need to show my photo ID?

Answer: No. However, they will have to show their own ID. As long as you have registered for a proxy vote, polling station staff will know that this person is voting on your behalf.

Applying for a Voter Authority Certificate (free voter ID)

Question: Can I get the application form for a Voter Authority Certificate in an accessible format?

Answer: Yes. You can request the application form in large print or Easy Read from your local council. You can get their contact details by entering your post code at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

Question: I can't find my National Insurance number. Can I still apply for free voter ID?

Answer: Yes. Your local council will contact you to ask for a different proof of identity. This could be a birth certificate, utility bill or bank statement.

Question: I'm not sure how to take a photograph that will meet the requirements. How can I get help to do this?

Answer: You can contact your local council for help you with this. They can take the photograph for you. You can find contact details for your council by calling **0800 328 0280** or by entering your post code at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

Question: I can't get to my local council office, can I get support at home, or somewhere else?

Answer: It is up to individual councils to determine what, if any, support they can offer away from their office. Such requests from voters would be considered on a case-by-case basis and would depend, among other factors, on what facilities were available and where.

Question: How will I be able to identify my Voter Authority Certificate when it is sent to me?

Answer: The Voter Authority Certificate includes a raised tactile marking in the top left-hand corner, to help you identify it. This marking consists of four small dots repeated three times.

Question: Can I get instructions on how to use my Voter Authority Certificate in an accessible format?

Answer: Yes. When you complete the application form, you'll be asked whether you would like to receive the instructions in large print, braille or easy read. Your local council will send these instructions to you.

At the polling station

Question: What are the accessibility options at the polling station?

Answer: The equipment and accessibility provisions at a polling station will be unique to each location, so visit your local council's website for more information. You can find their website by entering your post code at electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

Question: I don't want other people watching while I have my photo ID checked. Will it be possible to have it checked in private?

Answer: Yes. When you get to the polling station, you can ask to have your ID checked in private. This might be done in a separate room, or an area separated by a privacy screen, depending on the polling station.