

## Mayoral elections in England

# Guidance for candidates and agents

## Overview document

September 2018 (updated January 2020)

This document applies to mayoral elections in England (excluding combined authority mayoral elections and elections for the Mayor of London). It does not apply to district, borough, county, county borough or unitary authority elections, parish and community council elections or elections to the Greater London Authority. Our guidance and resources for other elections in the UK can be accessed from our website at:

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

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## Purpose of our guidance for candidates and agents

1.1 Our guidance aims to provide practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate or be an agent at a mayoral election in England. It covers the main steps towards standing as a candidate, the campaign and election periods, the declaration of the result and election spending. 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 that candidates and agents need to go through when standing at a mayoral election in England.

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 can be found on our [dedicated webpage for candidates and agents](#) at a mayoral election in England.

1.4 The following parts make up our full guidance for mayoral elections in England:

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

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

This document does not cover [combined authority mayoral elections](#) or [elections for the Mayor of London](#).

You can access guidance for those elections through our website.

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

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

1.7 Candidates and agents at mayoral elections must follow certain rules about how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election. Failure to follow these rules could lead to you committing an offence and losing your seat, if elected. [Part 3](#) of our guidance explains the rules.

1.8 [Part 4](#) covers the rules on publication and display of campaign literature and what you need to bear in mind when campaigning. Each candidate at a local authority mayoral election may provide an election address to the Returning Officer for inclusion in a booklet which will be delivered to all registered electors, and this part explains what you need to do.

1.9 Candidates and agents also have a right to attend key electoral events. These are: the opening of postal votes, the poll and the count. Others can also be appointed to attend these electoral events. 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 and agents 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

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to some. You will be directed to the 'Supplementary information' section at relevant points throughout the 'Essential information' section.

## The electoral system

1.12 If there are only two candidates standing at the election, the mayor is elected under the first-past-the-post electoral system, whereby the candidate with the most votes is elected.

1.13 If there are more than two candidates, the mayor is elected under the supplementary vote system. Voters can vote for a first and second choice candidate they want to elect. The ballot paper will list all the candidates and voters will vote for their first choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the first choice column and for their second choice candidate by marking an 'X' in the second choice column. If a candidate obtains more than 50% of the first choice votes, they will be declared elected. If no candidate obtains more than 50% of the first choice votes, all candidates except for those in first and second place are eliminated. The ballot papers showing a first preference for one of the eliminated candidates are checked for their second preference. Any second preference votes for the remaining two candidates are then added to their first preference votes and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

## Who does what at a mayoral election in England and how to contact them?

### The Returning Officer

1.14 Mayoral elections in England are run by the Returning Officer, who is normally a senior officer of the local authority and independent of the authority in respect of their electoral functions. 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 can

be found on our website

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>

1.15 The Returning Officer will offer briefings ahead of an election and we strongly encourage you or your agent to attend one, even if you have been an agent or 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 for their local authority area. In England, the Electoral Registration Officer is normally a senior officer in the local authority and may also be the Returning Officer. Contact details for your Electoral Registration Officer can be found at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter>.

## The Electoral Commission

1.17 We are an independent statutory body established in November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We are currently 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 registering political parties and non-party campaigners, the monitoring and publication of significant donations to registered political parties and the regulation of party and non-party campaigner spending at certain elections. We also have a role in promoting voter awareness. We are required to report on the administration of certain electoral events, to keep electoral matters under review and, if requested, must review and report on any 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

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those involved in elections, including Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, political parties and candidates.

1.20 We are here to help, so please get in touch if you have any questions.

## Contacting us

1.21 If your question is about your **spending and donations**, please contact us at:

Email: [pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)  
Tel: 0333 103 1928

1.22 For **any other questions**, please contact us at:

Email: [infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk)  
Tel: 0333 103 1928